Recently I was speaking with Kapindra Swami from the Prabhupada Sankirtana Center in lower Manhattan. When told that I was ready to publish the summarized *Mahabharata*, he immediately asked, "Who wrote it?", and he then lectured me about how we should only publish books by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, being the ultra conservative Hare Krishna devotee that he is. His point was that Srila Prabhupada was (and is) the foremost modern representative and personification of the ancient Vedic literatures, and had already translated into English all of the most important scriptures of India.

So why publish the *Mahabharata*, and why one summarized by Purnaprajna dasa?

Although Prabhupada said that everything was in his books, it was his hope that other important Vaisnava literatures would be translated by his disciples and presented to the world. He did not even have time to complete the translation and commentary of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, the most valuable piece of the Vedic literatures. As his followers, it is our duty to continue the work that he began, namely the publication and distribution of transcendental literatures as far and wide as possible. The *Mahabharata* is an extremely valuable Vaisnava scripture and will be an indispensable addition to any library. This becomes increasingly clear to the reader page by page.

Written five thousand years ago by Srila Vyasa, a great sage and the literary incarnation of the Godhead, the *Mahabharata* is a lengthy history of great devotees of the Supreme Lord Sri Krsna. Innumerable lessons can be derived from its *parvas* by persons from any walk of life, as it reveals the highest knowledge of the self and its relationship of eternal loving service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Furthermore, the *Mahabharata* provides a thorough study of Vedic culture, the absence of which has left the world in confusion, disarray and suffering. The author of this summary, Purnaprajna dasa, was initiated by Srila Prabhupada about 1969 in Boston, and soon moved to India, where he served with his wife in the Bombay and Calcutta ISKCON temples as head pujari, or temple priest, for many years. I met him in Calcutta in 1976, and he was immersed in caring for the temple deities. I received a letter from his wife Narayani dasi in 1994, encouraging me to publish the
book, and since then I have heard that Pūrṇaprajña dāsa has become somewhat removed from ISKCON, the organization founded by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Thousands of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples, including myself, have been distanced from the troubled Hare Kṛṣṇa institution in the years after Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure from this mortal world in 1977.

Pūrṇaprajña dāsa worked from the English Gānguli edition and cross referenced with Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, especially the First Canto of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, which contains voluminous references to the characters and stories of the Mahābhārata. He produced a first version which was then polished into a second one. He completed the Mahābhārata in Bombay in 1984, and then produced a summary of the Rāmāyaṇa, whereabouts now unknown. All indications are that Pūrṇaprajña dāsa was of a sound and pure spiritual consciousness when he produced this summary of the Mahābhārata. Pūrṇaprajña dāsa had memorized the Bhagavad-gītā by heart, was quite scholarly and always absorbed in the study of the Vedic texts. He wrote it for the children in the Vṛndāvana Gurukula, and there it was approved of and used by school teachers Yaśodānandana dāsa, Rūpa-vilāsa dāsa and Karṇāmṛta dāsa, all three of whom I have since become good friends with.

What is particularly appreciated by myself, and others I have shown the manuscript to, is the style and mood in which Pūrṇaprajña dāsa wrote his work. This rendition of the Mahābhārata has the devotional mood and style of His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda. Even if Śrīla Prabhupāda did not Himself translate the Mahābhārata, at least we now have a summary which is, and feels, faithful to Śrīla Prabhupāda's style.

For those of us who are concerned about the purity and potency of the spiritual literature we study, as the works of Śrīla Prabhupāda are to the superlative, we will be comfortable with this edition. The Mahābhārata is an invaluable scripture that was intended to enlighten the common person. The device of historical narration, or stories, was Vyāsadeva's method for attracting the minds of worldly people. It definitely worked on me. The Mahābhārata had a profound influence on myself, connecting so many bits of transcendental philosophy into a comprehensive network and filling in gaps that had been missing since I began on the spiritual path. The pages are full of
common sense, and show us how a transcendentalist can practically deal with even the most extreme material circumstances. Constantly, I was seeing parallels in my paltry life to the challenges faced by the heroes of the Mahābhārata, the Pāṇḍavas. Their trials and tribulations and their responses accordingly give us the perfect examples by which to mold our own life into an uplifting, meaningful and spiritual journey.

Producing this book has been a great inspiration to me, and I hope the readers will also find substantial benefit in terms of assisting with their advancement on the spiritual path of Bhaktiyoga. The well-known Bhagavad-gītā, about 700 out 100,000 verses, is a small part of the Mahābhārata, contained at the beginning of the Bhīṣma-parva. The Bhagavad-gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa’s instructions to Arjuna just prior to the battle at Kurukṣetra, has been only briefly summarized herein. This is not meant to minimize the importance of the Bhagavad-gītā, but only to honor the unsurpassable edition already produced by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, to which the reader should refer in any event that the philosophy therein is desired for study.

In 1988 I was involved in a "rtvik community" called New Jaipur, near Natchez, Mississippi, and my good friend Rūpa-vilāsa dāsa joined us as the gurukula headmaster. He gave me a copy (several times over) of the manuscript, produced on an old manual typewriter, being a stack of paper about twelve inches thick. After reading late into many nights, I decided that I would publish the book. Madirā dāsi, my gifted and studious teenage stepdaughter, spent hundreds of hours typing the book into the computer. No sooner was this stage completed than the U.S. government seized the computer, along with all the properties and assets of the New Jaipur community. Regretfully, I had made some grave misjudgements in business that enabled materialistic authorities to justify confiscation of properties, vehicles and merchandise, including supposed contraband such as scales, plastic bags and incense.

New Jaipur disbanded and the Mahābhārata sat in a Customs office, on an aging computer hard drive, for two years before being returned in 1993. Vaiṣṇava dāsa of the Kṛṣṇa Yoga Society in Chicago assisted me in the editing process, but my life was in turmoil at the time and progress was slow. After several proofreadings, my wonderful and intelligent daughter, Śuddha-sattva dāsi, did a final proofreading and the layout.
Some of the illustrations were done by her mother Kanyā-kumārī dāsī in 1990.
A full, verse by verse translation and rendition has been underway by the ISKCON guru and scholar Hṛdayānanda Swami for many years. Knowing this, I nevertheless decided to proceed with the Pūrṇaprajñā dāsa edition, for the simple reason that it would be good for an inexpensive choice to be available to those who may not be able to afford a deluxe, multivolume set. My intention was to market an affordable softcover book under twenty dollars so that as many poor (materially as well as spiritually) souls as possible may avail themselves of lessons in the Mahābhārata. Recently I have heard that Hṛdayānanda Swami’s Mahābhārata project had been put on an indefinite hold, and so there is all the more reason to bring this version to press now.
Pūrṇaprajñā dāsa wrote for the children in the Vṛndāvana Gurukula, being a simple brāhmaṇa, unambitious and unpolitical. Thus we may be comfortable and trust his rendition quite easily, not worrying that there may be some subtle and alien message intertwined in these pages. I personally find this edition presented herewith to be potent and enthralling. I want to apologize to my old telephone friend, Satyarāja dāsa (Stephen Rosen), who very much wanted to do the final proofreading. I chose my daughter instead for financial reasons, and I also wanted to employ her in the study of this wonderful text so that it might touch her heart as well. It has very much changed my life, and hopefully it will add positively to the spiritual transformation of the lives of many others as well.
But, above all other considerations, my desire is that this book will be pleasing to my spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda. I will always remember the days when I was a temple president in New Orleans, receiving those wonderful and encouraging letters from Śrīla Prabhupāda to push on our distribution of transcendental literatures. Now, twenty five years later, if I could only see even a small nod or half smile from His Divine Grace, it would be the perfection of my sad and sorry life. Hare Kṛṣṇa.
Nityānanda dāsa
Vedavyāsa, the literary incarnation of Godhead, out of his deep compassion, was eager to establish a great philosophical net that could
capture all materially conditioned souls, no matter the degree to which they were implicated in and conditioned by the three modes of material nature. Whether a man or woman was spiritually elevated or degraded, Śrīla Vyāsadeva had a scheme for them which would gradually draw them closer to Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore, he prepared convoluted, intellectual works like the Vedānta-sūtra for those who were very philosophically inclined, and he prepared eighteen Purāṇas (histories combined with philosophy) in different modes (goodness, passion and ignorance) to capture the minds and hearts of other souls. He even emphasized the special divinity and prominence of different spiritual personalities in the Purāṇas according to the predilections of the readers under different modes of nature.

Śrī Madhvācārya, who was personally instructed by Vyāsa at Badarikāśrama, Vyāsa’s Himalayan retreat, called the Mahābhārata the "fifth Veda". The four Vedas are considered to be the authoritative foundation of all other Vedic literature (śruti). Yet, Mahābhārata was considered by Vyāsa and Madhva to be of the same stature as the four Vedas and their corollary Upaniṣads. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the Kali-yuga avatāra, considered two works to be supremely important amongst all Vedic literature: Bhagavad-gītā (a small portion of Mahābhārata) and Bhāgavata Purāṇa (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam), known as the spotless crown jewel of all Vedic literature. Bhagavad-gītā’s special authority stems from the fact that it was spoken about God by God (Kṛṣṇa), and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam was the definitive work by Vyāsa about Kṛṣṇa. Although Bhagavad-gītā is simply a portion of Mahābhārata, it is not the only section that is philosophically and devotionally significant. For example, Bhīṣma recites the Viṣṇu-sahasra-nāma (Thousand Names of Viṣṇu), and it also contains the deep discussions between Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja and Yamarāja, the lord of death. Many great sages from that era instruct the great kings in the science of self-realization; therefore truly, the Mahābhārata is the greatest epic in the history of mankind, and the most philosophical also. It is important reading as confirmed by Śrīla Prabhupāda:

"The four Vedas with their supplementary Purāṇas, the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyaṇa, and their corollaries which are
known as *smritis* are all authorized sources of knowledge. If we are at all to gather knowledge, we must gather it from these without hesitation." (C C. Adi līlā, Ch. 5, Text 14)

In the purport to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.15.41 Śrīla Prabhupāda comments on Mahābhārata and other Vedic literatures: "One should take lessons from these Vedic literatures and learn how to practice *nivṛtti-mārga*.

Nevertheless, readers are sometimes baffled by all the tales of romance, greed, lust and revenge found in the pages of Mahābhārata. It may appear, at first perusal, to be merely a work about fierce warriors and their bloodthirsty and romantic exploits. However, this conception is superficial. At the heart of Mahābhārata is dharma, the path of religious life. With stories of souls tormented by material attachment, the path of *nivṛtti-mārga* (renunciation) is illuminated by the instructions of liberated sages throughout its pages. The stories serve as the illustrations by which the sages are able to make their profound philosophical message clear. The readers, being initially attracted by the stories, nevertheless derive the benefit, in the end, of *sādhu-saṅga* (association with saints). Although ordinary piety is often proffered, the supreme authority, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, has the final word in the Bhagavad-gītā, with His completely transcendental prescription for entering the spiritual kingdom and giving up all other dharmas.

Other doubts raised about the Mahābhārata are that some of the stories seem to differ with the renditions of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, the topmost, spotless Purāṇa. Again, we must remember Vyāsa’s plan. He tells the same stories in a variety of ways to capture souls at different stages of spiritual advancement. The details of the stories are not the focus so much as the *siddhānta*, the philosophical conclusion. Therefore, one must look to the message more than the details of the stories, which, after all, are devices by which the spiritual philosophy is revealed. This is not to say that the stories are false. No. But stories may be told from different angles of vision by the sages for different purposes. The aim, nevertheless, is one: to draw everyone to Kṛṣṇa and fix them as His eternal servitors.

There are a number of English translations of Mahābhārata, some are cursory abridgements and some are elaborate verse-by-verse renditions.
However, to date, there is a paucity of genuine Vaiṣṇava editions, and this rendition is a valuable contribution to the Vaiṣṇava library. The editor of this abridged version, Pūrṇaprajña Prabhu, composed this edition while living in Bombay in the late 1980's at Hare Kṛṣṇa Land (Juhu Beach), where he served as Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Rāsabihārī’s pūjārī. As a scholarly and intellectual devotee, he composed it originally out of his own intense interest and eagerness to know more about Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes. He later offered it to a gurukula teacher for use in the Vṛndāvana Gurukula. It was utilized in a number of courses, and judging from the enlivenment of the students, it can only be surmised that he was successful in presenting the essence – bhāgavata-dharma.

Rūpa-vilāsa dāsa

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsadeva conceived of the Mahābhārata after executing a great deal of austerity and meditation. Although Vyāsadeva had compiled numerous other Vedic literatures for the benefit of persons in the dark age of Kali, the Mahābhārata was specifically intended to give women, laborers and degraded members of the higher classes a chance to understand Vedic wisdom. While containing extensive explanations of dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa, the Mahābhārata essentially teaches through the medium of historical narrations which deal with the lives of great personalities. Because of this, the Mahābhārata quickly and ever-increasingly captures the interest of the reader, in spite of its epic dimensions. When Śrīla Vyāsadeva saw that his composition had expanded to 100,000 verses, however, he became anxious upon considering how the work could be passed on to future generations through his disciples. Lord Brahmā could understand Vyāsadeva's deep concern and so he personally appeared before the compiler of Vedic wisdom in order to bestow upon him his benediction. Along with numerous other great rṣis, the wonder-struck Vyāsadeva stood up and welcomed Lord Brahmā with folded hands and then presented him with a very nice seat. Finally, after circumambulating Lord Brahmā and then seating himself with the permission of the universal grandsire, Vyāsadeva spoke unto him as follows: "O Lord, I have composed a great work that centers around the lives of the Pāṇḍavas and their role in serving the Supreme Personality
of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who descended upon the earth just to relieve her burden. Although this epic literature is ultimately meant to draw one's attention to Lord Kṛṣṇa's instructions known as the Bhagavad-gītā, the all-encompassing work deals with every aspect of human existence in the course of its historical narrations. By the mercy of the Supreme Lord, I have been able to conceive of this sublime literature but the difficulty is that I cannot think of anyone capable of writing it down so that it can be passed on to future generations."

Lord Brahmā then smilingly replied, "O foremost of rṣis, you should absorb your mind in meditation upon Śrī Gaṇeṣa, the son of Lord Śiva and Pārvatī. Being pleased, he will surely take up the task which you required."

After saying this, Lord Brahmā disappeared from that place, and without wasting time, Vyāsadeva sat down in order to execute the instruction which had been given to him. Indeed, it so happened that as soon as Gaṇeṣa was meditated upon, the celestial scribe appeared before Vyāsadeva. Vyāsadeva was overjoyed and after offering Gaṇeṣa proper respect he said, "I have conceived a wonderful historical narration within my mind that is intended for the welfare of all human society. I request you to write down all 100,000 verses that comprise this epic literature as I dictate them. Only then will my composition become fruitful."

Gaṇeṣa replied, "I agree to perform this laborious task, but only under the condition that once I begin to write, my pen should not have to stop for even a moment."

Vyāsadeva then said, "Let it be so. I shall never inconvenience you with even the slightest delay, but in turn, you must agree not to continue writing until you have actually comprehended that which has already been dictated."

Gaṇeṣa smilingly consented by vibrating the sacred syllable "Oṁ," and then he sat down in order to commence work at once. After concentrating his mind, Vyāsadeva began to narrate the Mahābhārata, and he composed it in such a way as to present many deep and grave meanings in concise statements. Because of this, again and again Gaṇeṣa had to pause momentarily in order to contemplate the purport of Vyāsadeva's verses. In this way, Śrila Vyāsadeva was very cleverly
able to provide himself with ample time for dictation without making Ganeśa lose patience.

The Mahābhārata was recited for the first time by Śrīla Vyāsadeva's disciple, Vaiśampāyana, at the snake-sacrifice of King Janamejaya. Vyāsadeva himself was present there and so was Sūta Gosvāmī, the son of Romaharśana, who was also known as Ugraśravā. After hearing the Mahābhārata, Sūta Gosvāmī went to Naimiśāraṇya, where sages headed by Śaunaka Rṣi were engaged in performing a 1,000-year sacrifice to counteract the effects of the forthcoming age of Kali. The ṛṣis at Naimiśāraṇya were very eager to hear this great composition from Sūta Gosvāmī and so they welcomed him with great respect. After taking his seat upon the vyāsāsana, Sūta Gosvāmī first of all described the contents of the Mahābhārata summarily. Then, before beginning the recitation of the Mahābhārata proper, Sūta Gosvāmī first-of-all related the following incident:

While King Janamejaya was performing a great sacrifice along with his younger brothers Śrutasena, Ugrasena and Bhīmasena, the son of a female celestial dog Saramā happened to come there. When the dog tried to enter the sacrificial arena, it was beaten by the king and his brothers. Therefore, when her son came home crying, Saramā inquired about the cause and so the dog replied, "When I went to the sacrificial arena of Mahārāja Janamejaya, I was beaten without reason. I did not commit any offense, such as glancing at the sacrificial offerings or touching them with my tongue, and yet the king and his brothers drove me away."

Becoming enraged on account of this injustice, Saramā went to the sacrificial arena and began to denounce King Janamejaya and his brothers for having beaten her son. Then, when no one uttered a reply but simply hung their heads down in shame, Saramā cursed the sons of Parikṣit by saying, "Misfortune will overcome you at the time when you least suspect it, for that is the result obtained by people who are unnecessarily cruel and violent."

After hearing these words, Mahārāja Janamejaya became very fearful at heart. Then, at the conclusion of the sacrificial performance, he returned to Hastināpur. However, the remembrance of Saramā's curse
continued to haunt him and so he began to search for a sacrificial priest who could neutralize its effects.

Then, once upon a time, while hunting in the forest, King Janamejaya happened to arrive at the āśrama of the rṣi Śrutasravā, who was engaged in performing austerities along with his son, Somaśravā. The king wanted Somaśravā to become his sacrificial priest, and when he made his desire known, Śrutasravā replied, "My son is fully endowed with the power of ascetic merit, and thus, he is capable of absolving you from all kinds of offenses, except those committed against Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva. This boy was born from a female snake that had drunk my semen, and you should know that he unstintingly gives unto the brāhmaṇas whatever they ask of him. If you are able to tolerate this, then I shall be happy to give Somaśravā as your priest."

Mahārāja Janamejaya agreed to accept Somaśravā under these circumstances and thereafter, he returned to his capital along with the rṣi’s son. The king introduced Somaśravā to his brothers and ordered them to implicitly follow him as their family priest. Having made this arrangement, Mahārāja Janamejaya then assembled his army and left Hastināpura in order to conquer over the country known as Takṣaśilā.

At this time, there was a rṣi named Ayoda-Dhaumya who had three disciples: Upamanyu, Aruni and Veda. One day, Ayoda-Dhaumya asked Aruni, "My dear boy, please go to the agricultural field, for there is a break in the irrigation ditch which is allowing all of the water to flow out. Somehow or other, you must repair the breach so that our crops will not be spoiled."

Aruni went to the fields but then he became very anxious because he could not think of any way to execute his guru's order. Finally, however, he decided to lay down in the ditch, and in this way he was able to stop the water from flowing out of the breach. Then, when evening arrived, the rṣi Ayoda-Dhaumya found Aruni to be absent, so he inquired about him from his other disciples. When Ayoda-Dhaumya was reminded of his order, he hurriedly went to the agricultural fields along with Upamanyu and Veda. Then, when the Rṣi called for Aruni, the boy got up out of the irrigation ditch and appeared before his preceptor. When Ayoda-Dhaumya saw the way in which his disciple had executed his
order by undergoing so much personal inconvenience, he became very pleased and blessed him by saying, "May all of the Vedic knowledge shine brightly within you."

After this incident, Aruni took permission from his guru and then returned to his home in order to enter into family life. Next, Ayoda-Dhaumya ordered his disciple Upamanyu, to take up the task of looking after the cows in the pasturing ground. Upamanyu cheerfully left in order to execute his guru's order. Then, after having tended to the cows all day, when Upamanyu returned to the āśrama in the evening, Ayoda-Dhaumya saw that his disciple's body was in a very healthy condition and so he inquired, "What is it that you are eating that makes you so fat?"

Upamanyu replied, "I maintain myself by begging, and whatever I received as alms I eat."

The ṛṣi then instructed, "Whatever you receive by begging must first of all be offered to your spiritual master. You cannot simply take for yourself the things that you get."

The next time that Upamanyu went begging, he brought all that he received back to the āśrama. However, Ayoda-Dhaumya took everything and left his disciple nothing. Upamanyu then went to tend to the cows, and in the evening he returned to his preceptor.

Upon seeing that his disciple's body was still strong and healthy, Ayoda-Dhaumya inquired, "I took away all of the alms that you had received by begging. How do you manage to maintain yourself now?"

Upamanyu replied, "Because you had taken away all of my alms, I went begging for a second time so that I could eat."

At this, Ayoda-Dhaumya angrily declared, "You are a greedy and unfit disciple, because you have knowingly disobeyed my order for the sake of bodily comfort."

Upamanyu humbly accepted his guru's chastisement and then, the next day, he went to tend to the cows as usual. When he returned that evening, Ayoda-Dhaumya saw that his disciple was still fat and healthy and so he asked, "By what means are you able to support yourself so nicely now?"

Upamanyu replied, "I do not go begging anymore. I live simply by
drinking the milk from the cows."

Ayoda-Dhaumya was very displeased to hear this, however, and so he replied, "You are drinking the cows' milk without first offering it to your guru. In this way, you are still committing the same offense."

Upamanyu accepted this chastisement and then, the next morning, he went to the fields in order to tend to the cows as usual. When Upamanyu returned to the āśrama that evening, however, Ayoda-Dhaumya saw that he still looked very healthy. Thus, he inquired, "What means have you adopted now to keep your body and soul together?"

Upamanyu replied, "When the calves drink the milk from the udders of their mothers, there is some froth that is left over and so I eat that."

At this, the ātśi retorted, "It is obvious that the calves are very kind and so they are generously leaving you a large quantity of froth. However, in this way, you are selfishly depriving them of their full nourishment. For this reason, I forbid you to drink any more froth, for you are living at the expense of others."

Upamanyu faithfully obeyed the order of his guru and thus at last, he became very hungry. Finally, out of desperation, he ate some of the pungent leaves from an arka tree, and this caused him to go blind.

Famished and aggrieved, Upamanyu began crawling about on his hands and knees, and while doing so, he fell into a dark well.

When Upamanyu did not return that evening, Ayoda-Dhaumya and his disciples went to the forest in order to search for him. Upamanyu could hear his name being called out and so he shouted, "I am here in the bottom of this well."

Ayoda-Dhaumya quickly came to that spot, and when he saw what had happened, he advised Upamanyu, "My dear disciple, you should recite prayers that glorify the Aśvinī-kumāras. They are heavenly physicians and so, by their mercy, your sight may be restored."

After saying this, Ayoda-Dhaumya returned home and Upamanyu began to recite mantras from the Ṛg Veda in glorification of the twin Aśvins. Thus being invoked, the Aśvinī-kumāras actually appeared before Ayoda-Dhaumya's distressed disciple and they offered him a piece of celestial cake as a benediction. However, the faithful disciple then said, "I dare not eat this without first offering it to my preceptor."
The Aśvinī-kumāras replied, "My dear boy, once, long ago, your guru had also invoked us. When we gave him a similar cake, he ate it without offering it first to his preceptor. Therefore, you can do just as your guru had done without having to fear."

Upamanyu remained adamant, however, and would not agree to accept the cake. Because of this, the Aśvinī-kumāras became very pleased with Upamanyu's devotion and so they immediately restored his sight and also bestowed him with good fortune. After the Aśvinī-kumāras departed, Upamanyu went to Ayoda-Dhaumya and explained what had happened. Being very pleased, the ṛṣi then said, "My dear boy, you have passed the test of your spiritual master. Therefore, I shall give you the blessing that all Vedic knowledge will shine brightly within you."

Thereafter, Upamanyu departed for home, and Ayoda-Dhaumya next called for his disciple Veda and ordered him to remain at the āśrama as his personal servant. Like his two godbrothers, Veda underwent great hardship in the service of his spiritual master. Because of this, Ayoda-Dhaumya became very pleased, and so he blessed Veda with good fortune and revealed knowledge of the Vedas.

After receiving permission from his preceptor, Veda returned home in order to enter into household life. As a grhaṇastra, he also came to have three disciples. However, since Veda had experienced so much trouble while engaging in his guru's service, now that he himself was a spiritual master, he did not order his disciples to do any work, nor did he insist that they follow his instructions very carefully. Some time passed in this way. Then, it so happened that King Janamejaya and another kṣatriya named Paushya came to Veda and appointed him as their sacrificial priest. Later on, when it became necessary for Veda to leave home in order to perform some work in relation to a sacrificial performance, he requested his disciple named Utaṅka, "For as long as I am away, I want you to take care of my household affairs, performing all duties very carefully, without neglect."

After receiving this order, Utaṅka took up residence in his guru's home and began to manage things very responsibly. Then, one day, some of the household ladies approached him and said, "The time for conception has arrived for the wife of your spiritual master. Therefore, in the
absence of Veda you should take his place and do the needful."
Utaṇka declined, however, saying, "My preceptor never instructed me to
do such a thing."
Later on, when Veda returned home he was very pleased to hear about
the behavior of his disciple. He then told Utaṇka, "My dear boy, because
of the faithful service which you have rendered, you may now ask for a
benediction and then return home."
Utaṇka replied, "O Master, there is a popular saying to the effect that if
one bestows instructions but does not himself act accordingly; or, if one
receives instructions without fulfilling the order of the teacher; then, as
a result, one of the two will soon die or at least enmity will spring up
between them. My dear spiritual master, before departing, I would like
to do something according to your desire in order to repay you for the
knowledge which I have received."
Veda then said, "I am very pleased with your sincere gratitude. Please
wait for some time and then I shall order you as to what is to be done."
Time passed without his having received any command from Veda, so
Utaṇka once again approached his guru and requested him to give him
some order. This time, Veda replied, "You may go to my wife and
whatever she orders you to do, you can execute."
Utaṇka then went to his guru's wife and expressed his desire to render
her some service. In reply, she said, "In four days all of the brāhmaṇas
will be invited to come and dine over at our house. I would like you to
go to King Paushya and beg for his queen's earrings so that I can wear
them on that sacred occasion."
After receiving this order, Utaṇka departed without delay. Then, while
traveling along the road, he happened to meet a huge man seated upon a
gigantic bull. The man ordered Utaṇka, "You should eat the stool of this
bull."
At first, Utaṇka refused but then the man informed him, "Your guru,
Veda, had previously eaten this bull's dung." When he heard this,
Utaṇka complied and after eating the bull's stool and drinking its urine,
he washed his hands and mouth and then continued on his journey.
When Utaṇka arrived at Mahārāja Paushya's palace, he went inside and
approached the king, who was seated upon the royal throne. Utaṇka
offered his blessings to the king, and then asked, "If you are pleased with
me, may I be allowed to submit one request?"
Mahārāja Paushya agreed and so Utañka explained, "I have come here at
the behest of my guru's wife in order to beg from you the earrings which
are worn by your queen."
The king replied, "If that is your request, then you should approach the
queen directly and ask her to fulfill your wish."
Utañka then went into the palace's inner apartments and but he was
unable to find the queen anywhere. Thus, he returned to Mahārāja
Paushya and said, "You have treated me deceitfully, for your queen is
nowhere to be found."
The king then thought over the matter for a moment and then replied,
"The chaste queen does not appear within the vision of an impure
person who has touched the remnants of someone else's meal."
Utañka then carefully considered these words and thought to himself:
"After eating the dung of the bull, I had washed my hands and feet
hurriedly in a standing position. Especially when traveling, such
behavior is improper according to the injunctions of śāstra."
Having come to this conclusion, Utañka sat down facing east in order to
purify himself. First of all, he carefully washed his face and feet. Then
after taking in his palm some water that was without foam, he noiselessly
sipped just enough to reach his stomach. After this, Utañka wiped his
face twice and then touched water to all the holes of his body. Finally,
after completing this ritual, Utañka entered the inner apartments of the
palace, and this time the queen welcomed him and then awaited his
command. When Utañka explained the desire of his preceptor's wife
and asked her to give him her earrings, she immediately took them off
and cheerfully presented them to him. However, she warned, "You must
be very careful, for these are greatly sought after by the king of serpents,
Takṣaka."
Utañka replied, "O Queen, do not worry. Due to the purity of my
purpose, Takṣaka will never be able to overpower me and take away
these earrings."
Utañka then took leave of the queen and then went to express his
gratitude to Mahārāja Paushya. At this time, the king requested, "O
brāhmaṇa, please remain here for a little while just to accept the
remnants of my śraddhā ceremony."
Utañka consented, but when the food was brought before him it was cold and there was a hair in it as well. Under the sway of anger, Utañka cursed the king by saying, "O foolish monarch, because you have offered impure food to a brāhmaṇa, you shall become blind."

In retaliation, Paushya counter-cursed Utañka: "Because you have cursed me, even though I am faultless, I hereby declare that you shall never be blessed with children."

At this, Utañka said, "If you wrongly consider yourself to be faultless, then why don't you examine the food that you have offered me."

Thereafter, when the king actually looked at the food, he indeed found that it was impure.

Mahārāja Paushya then begged Utañka for forgiveness and asked him to nullify his impending blindness. However, Utañka replied, "My curse cannot fail to act, but as a concession I can assure you that you will regain your sight within a short period of time. O King, since I was not at fault when I became angry on account of your impure offering, I also request you to withdraw your curse." Mahārāja Paushya also claimed, "My words cannot prove false," but Utañka did not mind, for he was confident that the king's curse could not affect a faultless person.

Utañka then took leave of the king and departed, satisfied that his mission had been accomplished. Carefully carrying the queen's earrings, he hurried along the road, eager to return to his guru's āśrama. Then, while traversing the path as it wound along the riverbank, he saw a naked beggar approaching in the distance, sometimes visible and sometimes not.

Then, being very thirsty, Utañka put the earrings upon the ground and then climbed down to the river's edge in order to fetch some water. Instantly, the beggar came to that spot, and after snatching up the earrings, he hurriedly began to run away.

Utañka quickly bathed himself for purification, and then, after offering obeisances unto his spiritual master and the Supreme Lord, he began to pursue the thief. Utañka managed to catch hold of the fleeing beggar, but as soon as he did so, that mysterious person assumed his real form as Taksaka and then quickly entered into a hole in the earth that led down to Nāgaloka.
Upon seeing the serpent king, Utaṅka immediately remembered the queen's warning. Then, being determined to retrieve the earrings at all cost, he began to dig with a stick in order to enlarge the hole so that he could pursue the culprit. King Indra could see how Utaṅka was making very slow progress in this way, and so he compassionately dispatched his thunderbolt to go and help the distressed brāhmaṇa. When the thunderbolt entered into the hole, Utaṅka followed close behind, and thus he proceeded downward for some time until he came to the expansive kingdom of the serpents, which contained innumerable elegant palaces and spacious parks.

First of all, Utaṅka began to loudly recite praises to the serpents, hoping that they would voluntarily return the earrings. After some time, however, when he found that there was no response, he gave up the attempt and began considering what to do next. Utaṅka then beheld two woman who were engaged in weaving cloth with black and white threads. He also saw six boys who were turning a wheel having twelve spokes, and a man with a horse. Utaṅka could understand that the man was some kind of divine being, and so he began to offer prayers. Being pleased, the man said, "O brāhmaṇa, if you are in need of assistance, then ask me for a benediction."

Utaṅka replied, "On the order of my preceptor's wife, I procured the earrings of Mahārāja Paushya's queen. The evil serpent Takṣaka has stolen the earrings, however, and so in order to recover them I wish to subjugate all the Nāgas."

Upon hearing this, the man then commanded, "Just blow onto this horse and your object will be achieved."

Utaṅka obediently blew on the horse and at once, raging fire and billowing smoke began to emanate from every opening of its body. As the Nāgas' entire kingdom became engulfed in flames, a great uproar and commotion ensued. Finally, the terrified Takṣaka approached Utaṅka with folded hands and returned to him the earrings while begging forgiveness. Then, after Takṣaka had departed, Utaṅka addressed the man with the horse, "My dear sir, I am forever grateful to you for what you have so kindly done. However, today is the sacred day on which my guru's wife desired to wear these earrings. I am such a long way from my āśrama and if I do not arrive there this very day, all of my endeavors will
prove to be futile."
The man then replied, "You may take my horse, for it is so swift that you can reach your guru's house in just a moment."
Without delay, the anxious Utanika mounted upon the horse, and in an instant, he was transported to the residence of his spiritual master.
However, upon arriving at the ashrama, the preceptor's wife had already bathed and was engaged in combing her hair while mulling over the idea of cursing him for his failure. When Utanika presented the earings to her, however, she became very pleased. Veda was astonished at his disciple's last minute arrival and so he asked, "What took you so long? Was there some cause for delay?"
In reply, Utanika explained how the queen's earrings had been stolen by Takṣaka and then he requested his spiritual master to reveal the identities of the various mysterious personalities whom he had seen. Veda then said, "The two women who you saw weaving cloth are named Dhātā and Vidhātā, and the black and white threads represent day and night. The wheel with twelve spokes represents the year, and the six boys who turn it are the six seasons. The man that so kindly helped you was Lord Indra himself and his horse was the god of fire, Agni. The man whom you met first was also King Indra and the bull was his carrier, Airāvata whose dung is actually nectar. Because Indra is my friend, he took compassion upon you and offered his assistance."

After thus satisfying Veda and repaying him for the knowledge he had received, Utanika took his leave and then returned home. The brahmaṇa still remembered his hatred and anger toward Takṣaka, however, and so, desiring to gain revenge against the Nāga king, he went to Hastināpura in order to meet with Mahārāja Janamejaya. The king had just returned home after conquering Takṣaśilā, and while he was seated at ease, Utanika was ushered in by his attendants. The brahmaṇa first of all offered proper glorification unto the emperor and then asked. "How can you simply dally like this when there is such an urgent matter which demands your attention?"
Being prodded by these unexpected words, Mahārāja Janamejaya inquired, "O brahmaṇa, exactly what is it that you mean to say?"
Utanika then explained, "The time is at hand for you to avenge the
killing of your father by the wicked serpent Takåśaka. If you perform a snake-sacrifice without delay, then you will certainly be able to burn the cruel Någa king in the blazing sacrificial fire." After hearing Utañka's words, Janamejaya also became agitated and incited to anger against Takåśaka. Thus, he at once began to make preparations for a great sacrifice that would annihilate the entire race of serpents. At this point, Śaunaka Ṛṣi requested Sūta Gosvāmī to describe the Bhrågu dynasty in which he had appeared. Then, in response, the son of Romaharśaṇa continued his narrations as follows: Bhrågu Muni was created by Lord Brahmå from the sacrificial fire during the performance of a Varuṇa yajñā. Later on, Bhrågu begot a son named Cyavana, and through his wife Sukanyā, he begot Pramati. Pramati begot Ruru through the Apsarā Ghṛtacī, and Ruru's son was Śunaka, the ancestor of Śaunaka Ṛṣi.

Bhrågu's wife was named Pulomā. It so happened that her father had first of all promised her to a Råkṣasa who was also named Pulomā. Thus, later on, when she was given to Bhrågu Muni instead, the Råkṣasa became very aggrieved and angry. Once, after Bhrågu had left his cottage in order to take a bath, the Råkṣasa took the opportunity to enter the ṛṣi's āśrama. Although Pulomā was pregnant, when she came to receive her unexpected guest, the Råkṣasa became overwhelmed by lust just by seeing her. Actually, the Råkṣasa thought that Pulomā rightfully belonged to him. Thus, taking advantage of Bhrigti's absence, he suddenly seized the helpless woman and began dragging her away. Then, while departing, the Råkṣasa happened to see the sacrificial fire that was burning in Bhrågu's āśrama. It seemed that the Råkṣasa was unsure whether he was abducting the same girl who had formerly been promised to him. Thus, he petitioned Agni by saying, "You are the witness of all universal affairs, O god of fire. Therefore, tell me truthfully whose wifem this is, Bhrågu's or mine?"

Although the Råkṣasa repeatedly insisted on an answer to his question, Agni remained silent, for he was afraid of lying and at the same time fearful of Bhrågu's curse. The Råkṣasa was determined to elicit Agni's testimony that the girl had actually been promised to him before being
given to Bhṛgu Muni, however. Thus, at last, the god of fire replied, "O Pulomā, although the father of this girl first of all considered you as a suitable son-in-law, she has been duly married to the great ṛṣi, Bhṛgu." After hearing this, the Rākṣasa took the form of a boar and then continued to carry Pulomā away. Bhṛgu's unborn child became outraged on account of this violent act, however, and so he made himself drop from out of his mother's womb. Upon seeing the shining baby that had fallen onto the ground, the Rākṣasa released Pulomā and as soon as this was done, he was suddenly burnt to ashes by the flames created from the child's anger.

Then, with tears in her eyes, Pulomā picked up her baby and walked back to her cottage. The tears which fell from Pulomā's eyes immediately created a river that followed her, and when Lord Brahmā saw how aggrieved she was, he personally came there to console her. Lord Brahmā named that river Vadhūśara, and it still flows by the āśrama of Pulomā's son, who received the name Cyavana.

When Pulomā returned home, she found her husband to be in a very angry mood. Bhṛgu knew that the Rākṣasa could not have known who Pulomā was without being told and so he demanded, "Who is it that informed the man-eater that you are my wife?"

Trembling with fear, Pulomā disclosed to her husband how Agni had identified her, and then she narrated all that had happened. After flaring up like a ghee-fed fire, Bhṛgu responded by angrily cursing the god of fire, saying, "Because you helped the wicked Rākṣasa by identifying my wife, from now on you shall have to eat all things, even those which are abominable."

At this, Agni also became enraged and replied, "Why have you dared to curse me since that which I had said was entirely truthful? I am considered to be the mouth of all the demigods. How do you expect me to eat those things which are unclean?"

Bhṛgu was adamant, however, and would not relent. Thus, Agni finally decided to withdraw himself from all sacrificial arenas in order to retaliate against the brāhmaṇas. Thus, when there was no more sacrificial fire, all of the ṛṣis became filled with anxiety. At last, they approached the demigods and explained how they could no longer perform sacrifices on account of Agni's obstinacy. The demigods and
\textit{r\textbar{}s\textbar{}is} then went to see Lord Brahm\textbar{}a. When the universal grandsire heard the story of how Agni had caused the disruptions of all sacrificial performances after being cursed by Bh\textbar{}rgu Muni, he summoned the fire-god. Then, in order to pacify Agni, Lord Brahm\textbar{}a made the following proclamation, "Do not hinder the sacrificial process any longer. In return, I will give you the benediction that only the fire that exists in abominable places shall have to eat things which are unclean."

Being satisfied, Agni agreed to this settlement and then departed. Thus, it was arranged that only the fire that exists within the bellies of carnivorous animals, R\textbar{}\textbar{}k\textbar{}\textbar{}\textbar{}s\textbar{}as, and other low beings, would have to contact abominable things.

Once upon a time, the Gandharva king, Vi\textbar{}\textbar{}v\textbar{}\textbar{}vasu, had sexual relations with the Apsar\textbar{}\textbar{} Menak\textbar{}a. Thereafter, when she gave birth to a baby girl near the \textit{\textbar{}\textbar{}s\textbar{}rama} of Sth\textbar{}\textbar{}l\textbar{}\textbar{}ke\textbar{}a R\textbar{}\textbar{}\textbar{}si, the shameless Menak\textbar{}a abandoned the child on the banks of the river there. It so happened, however, that soon after her departure, the \textit{\textbar{}\textbar{}s\textbar{}i} found Menak\textbar{}a's baby. The child looked as brilliant as a demigoddess and so Sth\textbar{}\textbar{}l\textbar{}\textbar{}ke\textbar{}a decided to adopt the baby girl. The \textit{\textbar{}\textbar{}s\textbar{}i} named her Pramadvara and began to raise her as his very own child. Then, in due course of time, as Pramadvara grew up, she came to surpass all other girls in terms of beauty and good qualities.

Thereafter, one day, a descendent in the line of Bh\textbar{}rgu named Ruru happened to come to Sth\textbar{}\textbar{}l\textbar{}\textbar{}ke\textbar{}a's \textit{\textbar{}\textbar{}s\textbar{}rama} and when he saw the \textit{\textbar{}\textbar{}s\textbar{}i}'s beautiful daughter, he immediately fell in love with her. Through some friends, Ruru informed his father, Pramati, of his ardent desire. Pramati then approached Sth\textbar{}\textbar{}l\textbar{}\textbar{}ke\textbar{}a and requested that his daughter be given in marriage to his son.

The \textit{\textbar{}\textbar{}s\textbar{}i} readily agreed to this proposal and thus a date was fixed for the marriage. Then, just a few days before the appointed wedding day, Pramadvara stepped on a poisonous snake while playing with her friends. Under the supreme control of destiny, Pramadvara was bitten, and soon after falling down unconscious, she died. Thus, by nature's mysterious way, that which had formerly been so beautiful to behold now became painful to look at. Soon, Pramadvara's aggrieved father came there and then many great \textit{\textbar{}\textbar{}s\textbar{}is} who were living in the vicinity also arrived. Out of grief and compassion, they all cried piteously while
surrounding the dead girl and then Ruru also came there after having received the tragic news. More than the others, Ruru was mortified beyond measure and so he left that spot and began to weep in a solitary place. Ruru bitterly lamented his misfortune and prayed that his beloved might somehow return to life. A celestial messenger then appeared before the heart-broken Ruru and said, "Ordinarily, it could not be expected that your prayer would have any effect, for no mortal can be brought back to life. However, in this case, the restoration of Pramadvara's life has been made possible by a special arrangement of the demigods. My dear Ruru, if you are willing to give up one-half of your life, then Pramadvara will rise up and live once again."

The enamored Ruru very happily agreed to the arrangement and so the celestial messenger, along with Viśvāvasu, went to Yamarāja in order to obtain his sanction. Thereafter, as soon as the lord of death gave his approval, the lovely Pramadvara miraculously got up, as if awakening from a deep sleep. Being endowed with one half of Ruru's life span, she appeared to be even more lustrous and beautiful than before. Then, on an auspicious day, Ruru and Pramadvara were united in marriage and thus they began to live very happily together as husband and wife. However, Ruru could not forget the near-tragedy that had befallen him and thus he made a vow to destroy the entire race of serpents. Indeed, from that time onward, whenever he happened to see a snake, Ruru would become overwhelmed with rage and kill it. Then, once, while wandering in the forest, Ruru came upon a very old serpent lying upon the ground. When Ruru angrily lifted up his staff in order to smash the snake, however, it addressed him as follows: "O brāhmaṇa, I have not done you any harm. Why then have you become so enraged that you are prepared to kill me?"

Ruru replied, "After my wife-to-be had been bitten by a snake for no reason, I made a vow to destroy all of the serpents without discrimination."

The elderly serpent then said, "I am a member of the Dundubha species of snakes and we do not bite men. Therefore, O brāhmaṇa, you should not commit the sin of killing an innocent living being."

Upon hearing these words and seeing how the old serpent trembled with fear, Ruru's compassion became aroused and so he put down his stick.
Indeed, Ruru was very surprised that the serpent was speaking to him and so he inquired, "Who are you? I can understand that you are not an ordinary reptile."

The serpent then explained, "O brāhmaṇa, I was formerly a ṛṣi named Sahasrapāt. However, I was cursed by a brāhmaṇa and it is for this reason that I have become a serpent."

Ruru requested Sahasrapāt to narrate the entire story of his misfortune and so the former ṛṣi related the incident as follows: "Formerly, a ṛṣi named Khagāma was my very good friend. Once, as Khagāma was engaged in performing a sacrifice, I made an imitation snake out of grass just to scare him as a joke. However, when I put the grass-snake next to him, upon seeing it, the ṛṣi became so afraid that he immediately fainted. Then, when he regained consciousness and realized how I had tricked him, Khagāma angrily cursed me to become a snake. Being mortified, I begged the ṛṣi for forgiveness and as a result, he became compassionate toward me and said, "Although my curse cannot be nullified, you will be delivered from its effects as soon as you meet a brāhmaṇa named Ruru."

After saying this, Sahasrapāt immediately gave up his snake body and assumed his original form as a ṛṣi. He then said, "My dear Ruru, you should know that the highest virtue is to practice non-violence toward other living creatures. brāhmaṇas in particular should possess this quality and they should be very mild and well versed in the śāstra. They should engage themselves in the good work of instilling a sense of God-consciousness in others and thus act as the best well-wishers of people in general. My dear brāhmaṇa, in this regard I request you to hear the story of how the entire race of serpents had been threatened with destruction at the snake-sacrifice of King Janamejaya, but then were delivered by the great sage, Āstika."

Ruru then said, "I would like very much to hear this narration from you."

However, in reply Sahasrapāt advised, "You should hear this story from another brāhmaṇa", and then, after saying this, he mysteriously vanished from that spot. Ruru was struck with wonder and he attempted to search for the ṛṣi here and there. Finally, however, when he failed to find Sahasrapāt, Ruru returned home and requested his father to narrate the history of Janamejaya's snake-sacrifice. Pramati then related the story to Ruru as follows:
There was a powerful ṛṣi named Jaratkāru who used to travel to all of the holy places while living only on air and refraining entirely from sleep. Once, while wandering about in this way, Jaratkāru happened to come upon some brāhmaṇas who were hanging head downwards within a big hole. Out of concern and curiosity, Jaratkāru inquired about their identities. In that precarious position, these brāhmaṇas were suspended only by a single rope and that also was gradually being eaten away by a hungry rat. With distressed voices, the brāhmaṇas then replied, "We are ṛṣis known as Yāyāvaras, and we are sinking down into the earth because of a lack of offspring. We have only one descendent and his name is Jaratkāru. However, he is a rascal for he has entered the renounced order of life without having first raised children in household life. It is for this reason alone that we are going downward and suffering. My dear sir, for some reason you seem to be taking an interest in our plight. Who are you and how is it that you have happened to come here?"

Jaratkāru replied, "I can now understand that it is I who am your last remaining descendent and you are my worshipable forefathers. If it is on my account that you are suffering, then please order me. Of what service can I be to you?

The ṛṣis then said, "My dear boy, we request you to beget a son and thus extend our dynasty. You should know that one can achieve more merit by begetting a good son than by simply performing austerities."

Jaratkāru replied, "For your sake I agree to marry, but let there be one condition that must be fulfilled. The only girl who can become my wife must have the same name as myself."

After taking leave of his forefathers, Jaratkāru began to wander all over the earth in search of a suitable bride. When he failed to find any girl having the name Jaratkāru, however, he became very disappointed. Finally, he sat down within a dense forest, overwhelmed by despondency and began helplessly praying in a faint voice, "If only I could find a wife. If only I could find a wife."

Upon hearing this appeal, the serpent king, Vāsuki, immediately rose up from underneath the ground and presented his sister to Jaratkāru. Vāsuki then said, "O brāhmaṇa, please give up your unhappiness and accept this chaste girl as your wife."
Jaratkāru hesitated, however, for he doubted that the girl's name could also be Jaratkāru. Understanding this, Vāsuki assured him by saying, "This is my sister and her name happens to be Jaratkāru." Thus, it came to be that the brāhmaṇa and the serpent princess were united as man and wife. Actually, Vāsuki had offered his sister to Jaratkāru in order to neutralize Kadru's curse upon her son. Later on, Jaratkāru begot a great ṛṣi named Āstika and it was he who had been ordained to deliver the serpents from a fiery death at the snake-sacrifice of King Janamejaya. Having thus fulfilled his obligations to produce a son as ordered by his forefathers, Jaratkāru finally attained a heavenly destination after giving up his mortal body. By the practice of brahmacarya, a person is relieved of his debt to the great ṛṣis. By the performance of sacrifice, one is relieved of his debt to the demigods, and by begetting children one is relieved of his debt to his ancestors.

In the Satya-yuga, Dakṣa gave thirteen of his daughters in marriage to the great sage, Kaśyapa, and among them were Kadru and Vinatā. Kaśyapa soon became very pleased with both of these wives and so he decided to offer them benedictions. Kadru expressed her desire to have 1,000 splendidous snakes as offspring and so Vinatā responded by asking for two sons who would surpass her co-wife's children in terms of size and prowess. Kaśyapa gave his consent and then impregnated his two wives according to their desires. Having done this he immediately departed for the forest in order to continue his life of austerity after warning the two sisters to carefully protect their embryos.

Finally, after quite a long time, Kadru delivered 1,000 eggs and Vinatā, two eggs. All of the eggs were then put into warm vessels and, after 500 years, those which belonged to Kadru hatched and out came 1,000 baby snakes. Nothing seemed to be happening with Vinatā's eggs, however, and so she became very impatient and jealous of her co-wife. At last, the aggrieved Vinatā broke open one of her eggs out of curiosity and inside she found an embryo having its upper part developed but its lower part a mere lump of undeveloped flesh.

The child within the egg was very angry at having been prematurely brought into the light of day and so he cursed his mother, saying, "O foolish woman, in the future you shall have to become a slave as a reaction for disturbing me like this. However, if you are patient enough
to wait for another 500 years without breaking the other egg, then the illustrious child who comes out of it will deliver you from your plight." After saying this, Vinatā's son, who became known as Aruna, rose up into the sky and then later on became the charioteer of Sūrya. Then, after 500 more years had passed, Garuḍa suddenly burst out of Vinatā's second egg. As soon as he was born, the gigantic bird left home and flew away in order to search for food.

Then once upon a time, the two sisters, Kadru and Vinatā, happened to see the celestial horse, Uccaiḥśravā, wandering at will in the distance. This magnificent steed had been produced from the churning of the ocean of milk and it was worshipped by the demigods as a representative of Lord Kṛṣṇa's beauty and opulence. While gazing at Uccaiḥśravā, Kadru asked, "What color do you ascertain this wonderful horse to be?" Vinatā confidently replied, "My dear sister, it is completely white. What color do you think the horse is?"

Then, as Kadru hesitated while thinking over what to reply, under the influence of her destiny, Vinatā added, "If you do not believe that I am correct, then would you make a wager?"

Kadru then said, "The horse is certainly white, just as you say, but its tail is black. If you disagree with me, then let us indeed make a bet. May the loser become the slave of whichever of us has spoken correctly."

Vinatā agreed and then, the two sisters returned home after deciding to examine the horse more closely the next morning. That night, however, Kadru became terrified by the thought that she might have been mistaken about Uccaiḥśravā's tail being black. Her mind having thus become polluted, she devised a plan in order to cheat her innocent sister. After calling for her 1,000 sons, Kadru ordered them, "Early tomorrow morning you must transform yourselves into black hair and then completely cover the tail of Uccaiḥśravā. In this way I shall not have to become my co-wife's slave."

The serpents refused to perform this devious task, however, and so, as a result, Kadru cursed them by saying, "As punishment for your disobedience all of you will be burnt to ashes by Agni when King Janamejaya performs a great snake-sacrifice."

It is the universal system that all curses have to be sanctioned by Lord Brahmā before they can take effect. In this case, Kadru's curse was
sanctioned because Lord Brahmā could see how the population of large and poisonous snakes had multiplied exceedingly. The universal grandsire then summoned Kaśyapa Muni and advised, "Do not be aggrieved on account of the cursing of your sons. Serpents are always inclined to bite others, even without cause, and so Kadru's curse is actually meant for the welfare of all creatures. Besides, the destruction of your sons at Janamejaya's snake-sacrifice had already been predestined long ago and thus your wife's curse is only an instrumental cause. O brāhmaṇa, please do not be disturbed. As a benediction, you may learn from me the full knowledge of how to neutralize poison."

Meanwhile, morning arrived and so with great impatience Kadru and Vinatā went to get a close-up view of Uccaiḥśravā. Soon, they came to the Garbhodaka Ocean, which is the abode of Varuṇa, the Nāgas, and the subterranean fire. It is the resort of the asuras as well, and it is inhabited by Timingila fish which are so large that they can swallow big whales in a single gulp. It is this ocean which serves as the resting place of Garbhodaśāyī Viṣṇu, and the Lord in His boar incarnation, Varāha, had entered deep within its waters in order to retrieve the earth. Kadru and Vinatā soared into the sky to cross over the Garbhodaka ocean. Meanwhile, after deliberating over the matter, the 1,000 sons of Kadru decided that they had better do their mother's bidding in the hopes of winning her favor so that she would retract her curse. Thus, the snakes became black hair and covered the tail of Uccaiḥśravā and when Kadru and Vinatā came to the far shore of the Garbhodaka ocean, they approached the celestial horse in order to get a good view. The two co-wives could thus clearly see that Uccaiḥśravā was completely white, except for its tail, which was black. As a result, Aruna's words came true and Vinatā henceforward had to act as Kadru's slave.

It was just at this time that Garuḍa burst out of his egg. He appeared to be as effulgent as fire and he was able to assume any form at will and travel anywhere throughout the three worlds without restriction. Immediately upon being born, Garuḍa flew up into the sky. Because of his glaring effulgence, he appeared to be just like an all-devouring fire and so the demigods fearfully began to offer prayers in order to pacify Agni. The god of fire then assured the demigods, "This splendidous being
is Garuḍa, the son of Vinatā and Kaśyapa, and he has been begotten for your welfare. O residents of heaven, there is no reason for you to be afraid."
Agni then took the demigods to Garuḍa and when the son of Vinatā saw how they fearfully stood before him, offering prayers, he reduced his size and energy, just to reassure them. Garuḍa then placed his brother Aruna upon his back and after flying to the Eastern mountains, he left him there just at the time when Sūrya had resolved to rise for the destruction of the three worlds.
After the churning of the milk ocean, when Sūrya and Soma had discovered Rāhu in their midst, drinking nectar, that dark planet became their bitter enemy. From that time onward, Rāhu always looked for an opportunity to devour Sūrya and Soma. Sūrya had certainly acted for the benefit of all of the demigods when he had pointed out how the demon was drinking nectar. However, it so happened that later on, when the sun god was attacked by Rāhu, none of the celestials came to his aid. Sūrya thus became enraged at the demigods' ingratitude and in retaliation, he resolved to burn up the entire three worlds. After going to the Western mountains, the sun god began to radiate an excessive amount of heat that night. When conditions started to get unbearable, all of the great ṛṣis fearfully approached the demigods in order to complain about the situation. Together, the demigods and ṛṣis then went to Lord Brahmā and after offering their obeisances, they inquired, "O Lord, please tell us what is causing this unnatural heat-wave. All living beings have been put into great anxiety."
Lord Brahmā then replied, "My dear demigods and ṛṣis, because you remained indifferent when Rāhu attacked him, Sūrya now intends to destroy the entire universe in retaliation. Indeed, if something is not done soon, then there is no doubt that he will burn everything to ashes as soon as he rises the next morning. Fortunately, however, a remedy for on avoiding this calamity has already been devised beforehand. Kaśyapa Muni has a huge and splendid son named Aruna. If Aruna stays in front of Sūrya, by acting as his charioteer, then he will absorb the sun-god's excess energy and the universe will thus be saved. Therefore, my dear demigods, you should all go on my behalf and convey my request to Aruna that he become the driver of Sūrya's chariot."
The demigods then quickly went and approached Aruna, and when he heard of Lord Brahmā’s request, the son of Vinatā agreed to become Sūrya's charioteer. Thus, when the sun arose the next morning, the universe was saved from being burnt to ashes. After delivering the Aruna to Sūrya, Garuḍa went to where his mother was living in great affliction as the slave of her co-wife.

Then, one day, Kadru ordered Vinatā to take her to a delightful region in the middle of the ocean that belonged to the Nägas. Thus, Vinatā was forced to carry her co-wife upon her back while Garuḍa had to carry Kadru's 1,000 sons. Garuḍa felt great indignation at having to perform such demeaning service, however, and so he soared upward toward the sun so that the snakes became scorched. When Kadru saw that her sons were fainting on account of the intense heat, she prayed to King Indra for their protection. Indra became pleased by Kadru's words of glorification and so out of compassion for her, he covered the entire sky with huge masses of dark clouds. Thus, soon there were torrents of rain, accompanied by thunder, lightning and violent winds, making the sky appear to be dancing in madness. In this way, the son's of Kadru gained relief from their distress, although, at the same time, the entire earth became so deluged that the water seeped all the way down to the nether regions.

Finally, Kadru and her sons reached the islands known as Ramaniyaka, which are situated within the great salt-ocean. There, they saw a beautiful forest and within were elegant palaces, celestial gardens, and crystal-clear lakes that served as a playground for the Gandharvas. After enjoying themselves at that place for awhile, the sons of Kadru requested Garuḍa, "Please take us to some other beautiful islands which you might have seen during your extensive travels."

Considering the position in which he found himself to be most unpalatable, Garuḍa then asked his mother, "Why do we have to do the bidding of these snakes, as if we were their menial servants?"

Vinatā replied, "Not long ago I made a wager with my sister, Kadru. Due to the deception of her sons, however, I lost the bet and as a result, I had to become her slave."

Garuḍa felt very depressed upon hearing this, and then, after considering the matter carefully, he approached the sons of Kadru and
said, "My dear cousins, if there is anything which I can do in order to free my mother from your bondage, then please tell me and I shall execute it."

After briefly consulting among themselves, the snakes replied, "If, by force, you can bring us some nectar from heaven, then we agree to let you and your mother go free."

Garuḍa immediately became highly enlivened upon gaining this opportunity and he was determined to accomplish the required task. With great eagerness he approached Vinatā and said, "My dear mother, the sons of Kadru have promised to grant us our freedom in exchange for a pot of heavenly nectar. Please tell me what food I can eat that will enhance my strength so that I can conquer over the demigods and thus succeed in my mission."

Vinatā replied, "My dear son, in the middle of this ocean there is a kingdom where thousands of niṣādas live. You may eat them, but I must warn you to never attempt to eat a brāhmaṇa. The brāhmaṇas are considered to be the masters of all other creatures, and their anger is the most deadly of all poisons."

Garuḍa then asked, "How shall I be able to recognize if someone is a brāhmaṇa?" Vinatā replied, "If, while swallowing someone, he feels to you to be just like a fish hook or a burning coal within your throat; or if he proves to be indigestible, then that person is the best of brāhmaṇas."

Thereafter, with the blessings of his mother, Garuḍa departed and within moments he came to the city of the niṣādas in the ocean. Swooping down, Garuḍa hungrily began to devour these fishermen and then, by obstructing the streets with his expanded gaping mouth, he swallowed many more. It so happened, however, that one brāhmaṇa entered Garuḍa's mouth with the niṣādas and began to burn like a flaming charcoal. Garuḍa immediately opened his mouth and requested, "O best of the brāhmaṇas, please come out. I did not intentionally try to swallow you."

The brāhmaṇa then replied, "I shall come out only if my niṣāda wife may also be spared."

Garuḍa gave his consent and after the couple emerged from his mouth unscathed, he departed for heaven. Kaśyapa then happened to see
Garuḍa soaring through the sky and so he called his son over and inquired whether he was getting sufficient food. Garuḍa explained, "I am on my way to heaven in order to take a pot of nectar by force. In this way I shall be able to release my mother from the bonds of slavery. Unfortunately, however, in spite of eating thousands of niśādas, my hunger is not appeased. Therefore, my dear father, please assign me a food that will be sufficient."

Kaśyapa replied, "Nearby there is a sacred lake where you will find a gigantic elephant and a similarly large tortoise that are continually engaged in hostility. I shall tell you how this terrible enmity came to be: There was once a rṣi named Vibhāvasu, who was exceedingly wrathful. He had a younger brother named Supritika. However, Supritika did not want to keep his wealth jointly with his elder brother. Thus, one day, he approached Vibhāvasu and said, "With your permission, I would like to keep my money separately from now on."

Vibhāvasu replied, "My dear younger brother, this is not a good idea, for by doing so your wealth will become a cause of enmity between us."

Supritika ignored his elder brother's advice, however. Then, when Vibhāvasu saw his younger brother's disobedience, he became very angry and cursed him by saying, "May you become an elephant at once for this foolish display of ignorance!"

After hearing these words, Supritika also became enraged and counter-cursed Vibhāvasu: "For unnecessarily becoming angry, you shall have to become a tortoise in the water!"

"Thus, due to enmity created by wealth, Supritika became a giant elephant, twelve yojanas in circumference, and Vibhāvasu became a huge tortoise, ten yojanas across. In this condition, the foolish brothers continued their hostilities within a great lake that is nearby. My dear son, may you be blessed. Go now at once and kill these two gigantic animals for they will give you sufficient strength to accomplish your mission."

Garuḍa then departed and when he came to the lake which had been described by his father, he swooped down and seized the two beasts, one in each of his gigantic claws. Then after soaring high into the sky, Garuḍa went to a place called Ālambha, desiring to alight somewhere in order to enjoy his meal. There Garuḍa saw many celestial trees with
golden branches. However, as he approached them, it appeared as if their branches would break simply by the force of the wind created by his powerful wings. Indeed, Garuḍa could see that the trees were exceedingly fearful and so he continued on, looking for a place to land. Soon, he came to a place where there were wonderful trees that had branches made of gems and fruits that were made of gold and silver. Among them was a large banyan tree who said to Garuḍa, "You may sit upon this large branch of mine which extends for a hundred yojanas. Rest awhile and peacefully enjoy eating your prey."

However, as soon as Garuḍa alighted upon the banyan tree, the branch broke off and began to fall down to the ground. Garuḍa then saw that the 60,000 tiny Vālakhilya rṣis were hanging head downward from this branch in order to perform austerities. Being afraid for their lives, Garuḍa quickly grabbed onto the branch with his beak, and out of appreciation for this heroic feat, the rṣis gave Garuḍa his name which means, "the bearer of heavy weight." Garuḍa continued to soar through the air with the branch in his beak but he could not find any resting place so that he could put it down.

Finally, Garuḍa returned to Gandhamādana, where his father was engaged in performing austerities. Kaśyapa then addressed the Vālakhilyas with very sweet words in order to pacify them and then he requested the sages to act in such a way as to benefit his son. In order to honor Kaśyapa, the Vālakhilyas immediately abandoned the branch upon which they had been hanging and then departed for the Himālayas in order to continue their execution of austerities. Garuḍa then inquired, "My dear father, where should I dispose of this enormous branch so as not to harm anyone?"

In response, Kaśyapa pointed to a barren mountain peak in the distance and said, "There is a suitable place for where no damage will be caused." Racing at the speed of mind, Garuḍa instantly reached that place, and after letting go the tree branch, he sat on the mountain peak in order to enjoy his feast. By eating the elephant and the tortoise, Garuḍa became very satisfied, and with renewed strength, he quickly departed in order to accomplish his formidable mission.

Meanwhile, the demigods in the heavenly planets began to observe some
inauspicious omens. Indra's thunderbolt blazed up in fright and meteors were seen streaking across the sky. Celestial weapons began to fight with one another and there was a thundering sound although no clouds could be seen. Dust storms then arose, accompanied by showers of blood, and the prowess of the demigods began to fade along with their celestial garlands.

Thereafter, when Indra fearfully approached Brhaspati in order to find out the cause of these ominous signs, the spiritual master of the demigods replied, "Due to your own fault, Garuṇa is now approaching heaven and he is enhanced with the prowess of the Vālakhilya ṛṣis. Garuṇa wants to take away the nectar which had been produced from the churning of the milk ocean and because of his unparalleled strength, he will surely be able to do so."

After hearing this, Indra quickly went and ordered the guards of the nectar to take all precautions. Then, he personally took up his weapons along with the other demigods and surrounded the nectar in expectation of Garuṇa's imminent attack.

Once, long ago, Kaśyapa had engaged himself in the execution of severe austerities with the desire to beget offspring. Then, when he commenced the performance of a great sacrifice, all of the demigods and ṛṣis came to assist him. Indeed, even King Indra accepted the menial task of procuring wood to be used for fuel for the sacrificial fire. While carrying the huge load, however, Indra happened to see the Vālakhilyas, who were engaged in the same service under the direction of Kaśyapa. Since they were only the size of a thumb, however, these ṛṣis had only been carrying just one stalk of a palāśa leaf. Nonetheless, since they had become very weak and emaciated due to fasting in the course of their austerities, even this was a great burden for the Vālakhilyas. When Indra came upon the ṛṣis, he saw that they had sunk into the water contained in a cow's hoof print, and thus they appeared to be in great distress.

The king of heaven was very proud of his superior strength and so, when he saw the Vālakhilyas' plight, he laughed derisively and then insultingly stepped over their heads. Upon seeing Indra's impudent behavior, the Vālakhilyas became highly aggrieved and offended. In an angry mood, they vowed to create a second king of heaven possessing immeasurable
prowess who would strike fear into the heart of the present, puffed-up Indra. Then, when he found out that the Vālakhilyas were preparing to utilize the upcoming sacrificial performance for this purpose, Indra became terrified and so he approached Kaśyapa and begged him to intercede. Kaśyapa then went to the Vālakhilyas and requested, "My dear great sages, please do not contradict the appointment that was made by Lord Brahmā. The grandsire has appointed Indra as the lord of the three worlds, and so you should not try to overthrow the king of heaven. I know that your endeavors can never go entirely in vain. Therefore, I suggest that you utilize the sacrifice to create a king of birds instead of a duplicate of Indra."
The Vālakhilyas became pacified by Kaśyapa and so they replied, "Since this sacrificial performance is actually meant for enabling you to generate offspring, we shall leave the matter in your hands."
Sometime later, after the conclusion of Kaśyapa's sacrifice, when Vinatā completed her vows of austerity, she approached him and said, "My dear husband, my time for conception has arrived and I have a strong urge to bear children. O Lord, if you feel that I am deserving, then please be merciful and grant my desire."
Kaśyapa then replied, "O slender-waisted one, by dint of the successful completion of my sacrifice and the power of the Vālakhilyas' austerities, you will soon give birth to two heroic sons. These exalted personalities shall come to be worshipped throughout the three worlds and thus your good name will also be enhanced." Kaśyapa then went and informed Indra, "My dear son, before long you will have two new brothers who will act as your powerful allies. Therefore, you may rest assured that there is no need to be afraid of them. However, let me give you a warning: Never dare to insult a brāhmaṇa again, for such offenses inevitably result in distress."
Thereafter, in due course of time, Vinatā gave birth to her two powerful and illustrious sons, Aruna and Garuḍa.
As the demigods were preparing themselves for battle, Garuḍa suddenly appeared overhead, and when they saw his excessively great powers, the celestial warriors began to panic. Indeed, while shaking with fear, the demigods became so bewildered that they began to strike each other with their weapons as if bereft of all reason. The dust which was raised
from the flapping of Garuḍa's wings caused a dense darkness, creating a very fearful situation. Then, after a brief but fierce fight, many of the demigod soldiers lay dead upon the battlefield, mangled by Garuḍa's wings and talons.

Indra then ordered Vāyu to disperse the dust by means of strong winds, and so, when the darkness lifted, the demigods attacked Garuḍa with renewed vigor. However, Garuḍa continued to smash the celestial army and at last, many of the soldiers began to flee in all directions in hopes of saving their lives.

Having successfully routed the enemy, Garuḍa quickly went to where the nectar was being stored. There, he saw that the *amṛtā* was protectively surrounded by a raging fire whose flames leapt to the sky due to being fed by the violent wind. After momentarily considering the situation, Garuḍa utilized his mystic power to assume a wonderful form having 8,100 mouths. Then, at the speed of mind, he went and collected water from numerous rivers and returned after only a moment. In this way, Garuḍa extinguished the blazing fire and then entered the structure in which the nectar was being stored by shrinking himself down to an effulgent, golden form.

After coming inside, Garuḍa saw a revolving wheel that surrounded the nectar.

Its edges were sharp as razors so that it could slash to pieces anyone trying to illegally enter there. Garuḍa then noticed that there were gaps between the wheel's numerous spokes. Thus, he further reduced his size and then darted in between two of the spokes so quickly that he gained entrance without even being scratched. Within the wheel Garuḍa next saw two gigantic hissing snakes that were vigilantly guarding the pot of nectar. These serpents were so powerful that just by simply seeing someone, they would burn that person to ashes. Because of this, Garuḍa deftly covered their eyes by rising a dust cloud and then he attacked the blinded snakes from all sides, slashing them with his sharp beak and talons. After thus surmounting this last obstacle, Garuḍa picked up the pot of nectar and then flew violently upward, smashing the protective wheel to pieces.

Thereafter, as Garuḍa was triumphantly returning home, he happened to meet the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Viṣṇu. Being very
pleased with the heroic bird, the Lord said, "O son of Kaśyapa and Vinatā, I wish to award you a benediction."

Taking advantage of this rare opportunity, Garuḍa replied, "My dear Lord, let me become immortal as You are, even without drinking the nectar. In addition, please find some way that I can always remain situated above You."

Lord Viṣṇu gave His consent and then Garuḍa expressed his desire to return the favor by offering the Lord his benediction. Being pleased, Lord Viṣṇu smilingly replied, "O Garuḍa since you desire to remain above Me, I request that you remain on My flagpole. And if you wish to give Me another benediction, then I request you become My personal carrier."

Garuḍa happily agreed to render this devotional service and then he continued on his way. Meanwhile, Lord Indra had been chasing Garuḍa, and in order to make one last desperate attempt to recover the nectar, he violently hurled his thunderbolt. Although struck by this foremost of weapons, Garuḍa simply laughed and then addressed Indra with sweet words: "O king of heaven, please know for certain, that I have not felt even the slightest pain. Still I shall do something as a token of respect for you, the thunderbolt, and the great sage Dadhīci, from whose bones this weapon had been made."

After saying this, Garuḍa cast off one of his splendidous feathers. As the beautiful plumage fell through the sky, illuminating all directions, those who saw it gave Garuḍa the name suparnā. Indra was exceedingly surprised that his thunderbolt proved to be ineffectual and he marveled at Garuḍa's inconceivable prowess. With great respect, the king of heaven then said, "O son of Kaśyapa, please accept my offer of friendship, for I have no desire to create enmity with one so powerful as yourself. My dear Garuḍa, your strength seems to be immeasurable. If you are able to do so, then kindly describe to me the extent of your vast energy."

Garuḍa replied, "O King, I accept your offer of friendship. Generally, virtuous persons never speak of their prowess. However, since as a friend, you are requesting me to do so, I beg to inform you that with a
single feather I am able to bear the burden of the entire earth. Indeed, what to speak of the earth, I can easily support the entire three worlds without becoming fatigued."

Indra then said, "O virtuous son of a brāhmaṇa, since you have agreed to ally yourself with the demigods, I beg you to kindly return the pot of nectar. Your intention to give it to those who always oppose us would certainly prove detrimental to our welfare."

Garuḍa then assured Indra by saying, "I promise that no one will be able to drink this nectar. After my purpose has been fulfilled, I shall place the pot upon the ground and at that time you may secretly come and retrieve it."

Indra was pleased by this arrangement and so he offered to reward Garuḍa by granting him a benediction. Garuḍa then said, "Although I am powerful enough to have dominion over all creatures, I agree to abide by your order since you have been posted as the ruler of the three worlds. Now, if you desire to grant me a boon, then please assign me the snakes as my allotted food."

Indra gave his consent and then, after taking leave of Garuḍa, he approached Lord Brahmā, who is the final authority for deciding upon such universal affairs. Indra received Lord Brahmā's sanction and meanwhile, Garuḍa returned home to his mother. The son of Vinatā then informed Kadru's sons, "I have brought the nectar from heaven and so you may all drink it to your full satisfaction after performing your noontime religious duties. Since I have successfully fulfilled my part of our agreement, I request you to immediately release my mother from the bondage of slavery."

The snakes happily agreed and then being overjoyed at the prospect of drinking the nectar of immortality, they quickly went to the river to bathe. As soon as the snakes departed, Indra hurriedly came there, took the nectar in his hands, and then returned to his heavenly abode. Thus, when the snakes eagerly returned, they saw that the place where the nectar had been kept was now vacant, due to Garuḍa's act of counter-deception. Still, because the serpents were so maddened with the hope of drinking nectar, they began to feverishly lick the kuśa-grass upon which the pot had been placed. It is for this reason that from this time onward, the tongues of snakes became bifurcated. In addition, because
the kuśa-grass was touched by the heavenly nectar, it thereafter was considered to be very sacred.

Having thus delivered his mother, Garuḍa began to live very happily with her, and he brought her great satisfaction by devouring numerous serpents.

The chief sons of Kadru were the first-born Śeṣa, Vāsuki, Takṣaka and Nāhuṣa. After having been cursed by his mother, Śeṣa left home and went to the Gandhamādana mountain to perform severe austerities while living only on air. When Lord Brahmā saw how Śeṣa's flesh and skin had become dried-up as a result of his rigid vows, he appeared before the eldest son of Kadru's 1,000 sons and said, "I wish to know for what reason you are executing such terrible penance. You should engage yourself in thinking about the welfare of others. Instead, however, your austerities are afflicting all the creatures within the universe."

Śeṣa replied, "My dear lord, ironically, I have been performing austerities in order to save my brothers from my mother's curse, even though I consider most of them to be very wicked. Now, however, I no longer wish to live with these serpents on account of their demoniac nature. Therefore, please give me permission to cast off my body so that I can obtain another form of life that has no connection with them."

Lord Brahmā then said, "The remedy for Kadru's curse was provided by me long ago and thus there is no need for you to grieve on that account. My dear Śeṣa, I am pleased by your performance of austerity. Do not give way to despondency. Accept from me any benediction which you like except sanction for your sinful desire to give up your body."

Śeṣa replied, "The only boon which I desire is that my heart may always take delight in virtue and the performance of austerities."

Lord Brahmā was very pleased to grant this benediction and then he made the following request: "O foremost of divine serpents, at present, earth, with all her seas, mountains and forests, is rather unsteady. Therefore, as an act of virtue, I would like you to accept the task of bearing her upon your head."

Śeṣa unhesitatingly replied, "I shall do as you wish. Just kindly place the earth upon my head."

Lord Brahmā then said, "The earth herself will provide a passageway so
that you can go directly underneath her."
Thereafter, Śeṣa passed through a hole which was provided for him by
the earth. He then began to support the earth upon his head with the
help of Garuḍa, whom Lord Brahmā had also assigned to this task.
Meanwhile, Vāsuki had also tried to think of a way to counteract his
mother's curse and then he summoned his brothers for consultation. At
this time, various plans were proposed by the serpents. Someone
suggested that Mahārāja Janamejaya's sacrificial priest should be killed.
Another said that the king himself should be slain by a serpent posing as
his trusted minister. The snakes who were a bit more virtuous
condemned these ideas, however. Some of them suggested that they
should become clouds in order to extinguish the king's sacrificial fire.
Others wanted to defile the offerings by passing stool on them, thus
rendering the sacrifice ineffectual. Some of the snakes then proposed
that King Janamejaya could be kidnapped or killed while going to the
river for a bath. Finally, after all these suggestions had been put
forward, the serpents looked questioningly toward Vāsuki, their leader.
Vāsuki then said, "I disapprove of all these plans, especially the idea of
killing Mahārāja Janamejaya. In my opinion, only if we receive the
mercy of our father, Kaśyapa, will the effects of Kadru's curse be
nullified."
Next, the wise snake, Elāpatra, spoke as follows: "My dear brothers, our
plight is the result of our destiny and thus I feel that there is nothing
that we can do to on our own to impede the king or his sacrifice. When
our mother cursed us, Lord Brahmā gave his sanction by saying, 'So be
it.' At this time, the demigods had expressed their surprise by asking the
universal grandsire, 'O Lord, how could Kadru be so cruel as to curse her
own sons? And, how can you agree to sanction such a ruthless act?'
Lord Brahmā then replied, 'The number of cruel and poisonous snakes
had greatly multiplied. Thus, you should know that it is for the welfare
of all creatures that I have sanctioned Kadru's curse. Later on, you will
see that only the sinful snakes who bite faultless persons will be
destroyed. The harmless ones will escape the calamity because the son
of Jaratkāru, named Āstika, will put a stop to King Janamejaya's snake-
sacrifice.'
"The demigods then inquired, 'Who will be the mother of Āstika Rṣi?'
Lord Brahmā replied, 'She will be the sister of Vāsuki, who is also named Jarakāru.'

Elapatra then concluded, "For this reason, Vāsuki should offer his sister in marriage to the ṛṣi Jarakāru. This is the means of our rescue which has been ordained by Lord Brahmā himself."

All of the serpents applauded Elāpatra's words and thereafter, Vāsuki began to bring up his young sister very carefully. Some time later on, Vāsuki was engaged as the churning rope when the demigods and demons produced nectar from the ocean of milk. After this pastime was completed, Vāsuki approached Lord Brahmā and inquired about what could be done to neutralize his mother's curse. In reply, Lord Brahmā confirmed that the serpents should do as Elāpatra had earlier suggested. Vāsuki then returned home and ordered his brother, "I want all of you to keep a close watch over the ṛṣi Jarakāru. As soon as you see that he desires to get married, you should relay this information to me for proper action."

Some time previous to this, Mahārāja Parikṣit had gone to the forest to hunt and in the course of his wanderings he became very hungry, tired and thirsty. In this condition, the king arrived at the āśrama of Śamīka Ṛṣi and so he entered the cottage, being anxious to gain relief from his fatigue. The brāhmaṇa happened to be deeply absorbed in a trance of meditation, however, and so he neglected to give the king a proper reception. Indeed, Śamīka Ṛṣi was completely unaware of Mahārāja Parikṣit's arrival. And yet, by the will of the Supreme, the king thought that the ṛṣi was only feigning meditation as an excuse to avoid him. Becoming very agitated on account of this supposed sight, Mahārāja Parikṣit stormed out of the ṛṣi's cottage and while departing, he happened to see a dead snake lying at the doorstep. Picking up the serpent with the end of his bow, Mahārāja Parikṣit angrily went and draped it around Śamīka Ṛṣi's neck. Having thus avenged the brāhmaṇa's neglect, the king thereafter returned to Hastināpura. Śamīka Ṛṣi had a son named Śrṅgi, and when a playmate of his named Kṛṣṇa tauntingly informed him of how Mahārāja Parikṣit had insulted his father, the boy blazed up with anger. Then, in order to display his brahminical prowess, the inexperienced Śrṅgi touched water and cursed.
Mahārāja Parīkṣit to die at the end of the seventh day by the bite of the serpent king, Taksaka. After pronouncing this curse, Śrīṅgi tearfully ran to his father and informed him of what he had done. Śamīka Ṛṣi then tried to pacify his son as follows:

“My dear boy, since we are living under the protection of the king, he should always be forgiven even if by chance he commits some mistake. Without a ruler, a kingdom and its citizens remain unprotected and thus they are easily exploited by all the rogues and thieves.”

Śrīṅgi then replied, "Whether I was right or wrong, my curse cannot go in vain. O father, I have never told a lie in my entire life, not even in jest."

Having thus failed to convince Śrīṅgi to retract his curse, Śamīka Ṛṣi dispatched a disciple of his named Gaurmukha to Hastināpura. When Mahārāja Parīkṣit thus heard about the brāhmaṇa boy's curse, he became very repentant, considering himself to be a great offender. Then, after dismissing Gaurmukha, the king summoned his ministers, and after consulting with them he erected a unique palace that was supported by just one tall pillar. Mahārāja Parīkṣit then called for numerous physicians and medicinal herbs as well as brāhmaṇas who were skilled in the art of chanting mantras. Then, after situating himself within his newly constructed palace, the king arranged for it to be so carefully guarded that even the air was prevented from gaining entrance.

On the seventh day after Śrīṅgi had pronounced his curse, Kaśyapa Muni set out, desiring to cure Mahārāja Parīkṣit when Taksaka would bite him. Taksaka knew of Kaśyapa's intention and so he took the form of an elderly brāhmaṇa and met him on the road. Upon being questioned by the old brāhmaṇa, Kaśyapa explained the purpose of his mission. Then, Taksaka revealed his true identity and told his father, "You will not be able to revive Mahārāja Parīkṣit after he has been bitten by me. Therefore, you had better turn back."

However, Kaśyapa was quite confident of his abilities and so he challenged Taksaka to exhibit his prowess by biting a nearby banyan tree. Accepting the challenge, Taksaka released his virulent poison and as a result, the banyan tree burst into flames and was immediately reduced to ashes. Kaśyapa then took those ashes, however, and by dint of the superior knowledge which he had received from Lord Brahmā, he
revived the tree to life. First, a small sprout appeared, and then two leaves. Thereafter, branches quickly developed and at last there was a full-grown banyan tree. 

Upon seeing the wonderful prowess of Kaśyapa, Takṣaka inquired, "What favor do you expect to receive in return for saving Mahārāja Parikṣit's life?"

Kaśyapa replied, "It is wealth that I desire." Takṣaka then offered, "I shall give you more wealth than the king could possibly supply, provided that you give up your intention to cure him."

After briefly considering the matter, Kaśyapa went into a trance of meditation, and by his mystic vision he was able to determine that Mahārāja Parikṣit's duration of life had indeed run out. Thus realizing the futility of his mission, Kaśyapa gave up his intention of meeting the king, and took whatever wealth he desired from Takṣaka.

After this incident, Takṣaka sent some serpents disguised as ṛṣis with an offering of fruit to be presented to Mahārāja Parikṣit. When these false brāhmaṇas arrived at the palace entrance, the guards went and informed the king of their arrival. Under the supreme control of destiny, Mahārāja Parikṣit agreed to meet the guests and he happily accepted offerings which they had brought as well.

Then, after the snakes-disguised-as-brāhmaṇas had departed, the king called for his ministers and invited them to partake of the delicious-looking fruit. There was one particular fruit in which Takṣaka had personally entered, and the ill-fated Parikṣit selected it before handing the rest out to his assistants. The king took a bite with great satisfaction but then he happened to see a small ugly insect with black eyes and coppery complexion, crawling on the piece of fruit. Being fully in the grips of his destiny, Mahārāja Parikṣit picked up the bug, and while holding it in his hand, he said to his ministers, "The sun in now setting and so I do not have to fear the curse of Śrīṅgi or Takṣaka's bite any longer. And yet, hear from me my real feelings. Let this insect become Takṣaka so that by receiving its poisonous bite the brāhmaṇa's words will not be falsified and I shall atone for all of my sins."

All of the ministers applauded the king's speech, for under the influence of destiny they had also lost their senses. Then, since his final hour had
arrived, Mahārāja Parīkṣit smilingly placed the ugly insect upon his neck, and as soon as he did so, Takṣaka assumed his real form. After coiling himself tightly around Mahārāja Parīkṣit's neck, Takṣaka let out a tumultuous roar and then angrily bit the astonished king. While all of the ministers panicked and fled, Takṣaka also departed, streaking through the sky, and due to the virulence of his poison the entire palace burst into flames. Thereafter, the ministers performed the funeral rites for Mahārāja Parīkṣit and then they installed his young son, Janamejaya upon the royal throne.

When Mahārāja Janamejaya came of age, his ministers went to Suvarnavarman, the ruler of Kāśī, and requested that his daughter, Vapūṣṭama, be given to him in marriage. Vapūṣṭama proved to be a very chaste and affectionate wife, and thus she earned the love of King Janamejaya, who thereafter never gave his heart to another woman.

During this period, the ṛṣi Jaratkāru happened to meet his ancestors who were hanging head downward in a hole by a single thread that was being eaten away by the rat of time. When he saw how the ṛṣis were suffering and emaciated for want of food, Jaratkāru compassionately said, "If you so desire, I will help you by donating half of my accumulated ascetic merit."

However, the pitṛs replied, "We are very moved by your concern for us, but unfortunately, your gift would be useless, for we already have a great stock of such merit. You see, the cause of our suffering is that we are without any heir. We are all descendants of the sage, Yāyāvara, and this one remaining thread represents our last descendent, Jaratkāru. It is our misfortune that he is performing austerities instead of continuing our family line and thus we are forced to suffer. My dear sir, if you happen to meet Jaratkāru, then please request him to marry and beget children. It is for want of offspring that we have been cast down from higher regions, and he also will sink down with us if our line does not continue. Since you seem to be taking a genuine interest in our plight, may we ask you who you are?"

Jaratkāru then tearfully disclosed, "It is I who am your last descendent. I did not realize that you were suffering on my account and so I will get married in order to rectify my fault."

The ṛṣis then inquired, "Why is it that you never got married?" Jaratkāru
replied, "I have always desired to draw my semen upward and thus carry my body to the heavenly kingdom. Now, however, for your sake, I agree to marry, but only a girl who has the same name as mine, who is offered to me of her own accord, and who is willing to remain with me despite my refusal to make any endeavor for family maintenance."

After this agreement was made, Jaratkāru continued to wander over the earth, but since he was very old, he was not able to obtain a wife. Finally, Jaratkāru became overwhelmed with despondency and as he sat weeping in the forest, he cried out, "If only I could find a wife." The serpents had been keeping watch over him and so as soon as they heard this they went and informed Vāsuki. Vāsuki then immediately brought his sister before Jaratkāru and thus the marriage was arranged.

However, Jaratkāru warned the serpent king that if his bride to be ever acted in a way that was displeasing to him, then he would leave her. The wedding took place at the house of Vāsuki and thereafter, the newly-wedded couple remained there in a room that had been prepared just for them. Then, in due course of time, the sister of Vāsuki became pregnant.

One day, thereafter, as Jaratkāru was resting with his head upon his wife's lap, the sun began to set. Being confronted with a dilemma, the girl thought, "If I do not awaken my husband then he will neglect the performance of his evening religious duties. On the other hand if I awaken him untimely, he may become angry and leave me."

Finally, after considering the matter very carefully, Jaratkāru's wife concluded that the risk of incurring her husband's anger was preferable to the destruction of his religious duties. Thus she softly said, "The sun is now setting. My dear husband, it is time for you to say your evening prayers."

Upon being awakened, however, Jaratkāru became angry and said, "You have insulted me by daring to instruct me in this way. Therefore, I shall leave you without delay. One who has been insulted should never remain at the place where he was offended."

While trembling with fear, Vāsuki's sister replied, "O Lord, I never intended to insult you. I only wanted to protect your virtue."

Jаратkāru could not be pacified, however, for at heart he strongly desired to leave home. Although his wife begged him again and again, he told
her, "I shall depart, for my words never prove false. There is nothing for you to lament over, though, for your son is destined to become one of the foremost of śis."

Jaratkāru's heart was fixed upon performing austeritys and so, after saying this, he departed for the forest. Jaratkāru's wife then went to her brother and informed him of what had happened. Instead of being aggrieved, however, Vāsuki was overjoyed to learn that his sister was pregnant, for it was her son who would deliver his family from Kadru's dreaded curse.

Then, in due course of time, Jaratkāru's wife gave birth to a son and he was given the name Āstika, which means, "there is". When Jaratkāru was leaving for the forest, his wife asked him whether she had conceived a child, Jaratkāru had replied, "there is," and it is for this reason that the child received the name Āstika.

When Takṣaka had intercepted Kaśyapa as he was on his way to meet Mahārāja Parīkṣit, it so happened that a brāhmaṇa's servant was present there. Unobserved by others, this servant had climbed into a banyan tree in order to gather some wood for a sacrifice. Thus, when Takṣaka had reduced the tree to ashes by his poisonous bite, the servant was also burnt. Then, when Kaśyapa miraculously revived the banyan tree, the brāhmaṇa's servant was also restored to life. Since he had witnessed the wonderful incident, the servant excitedly went and told everything to the ministers in King Janamejaya's royal court. Then, later on, when these ministers were requested by Mahārāja Janamejaya to relate the story of his father's death, they did so according to what they had heard from the brāhmaṇa's servant.

While listening to the narration, the king became overwhelmed with grief and so he wept very bitterly. Convinced that Takṣaka had been the real cause of his father's death, Mahārāja Janamejaya inquired from his family priests about the means whereby the serpent king could be burnt to ashes in the sacrificial fire. Then, after hearing from them about the snake sacrifice, the king touched water and angrily ordered that preparations be made for the great yajña which would destroy all the snakes in existence.

Soon thereafter, Mahārāja Janamejaya was ceremoniously installed for
the sacrificial performance. However, before the sacrifice began, an incident occurred which indicated that something would happen to obstruct its completion. As the sacrificial platform was being constructed, one of the professional engineers, a sūta by caste named Lohitākṣa, who was well-acquainted with the knowledge of the Purāṇas, suddenly stopped his work and declared, "The soil upon which this platform has been laid, as well as the time at which the measurements were taken, indicate that this sacrifice will not reach its completion. According to these signs, the cause of its obstruction will be a brāhmaṇa."

After hearing this prediction, King Janamejaya gave strict orders to the gate-keepers that no one should be admitted into the sacrificial arena without his permission. Thereafter, when the sacrifice commenced, all of the snakes in the universe began to tremble with fear. As the priests poured oblations of ghee into the sacrificial fire, they uttered the names of the various serpents. As a result, those snakes who were called upon began to helplessly fall into the blazing fire. While piteously crying out to each other for help, thousands of snakes were thus consumed in the sacrificial fire. Thus, as streams of fat and marrow began to flow from the sacrificial arena, the smoldering bodies created an intolerable stench in the air.

When Takṣaka found out about King Janamejaya's snake-sacrifice, he went to King Indra and said, "My entire race is being threatened with extinction as a result of my having killed the pious king, Parikṣit."

After hearing everything from Takṣaka, Indra replied, "I have already appealed to Lord Brahmā on your behalf and the universal grandsire assured me that you would be spared. Rest assured that there is no need for you to fear."

Takṣaka became pacified by the words of his friend, Indra, and thereafter, he remained with the heavenly king, enjoying life happily in his celestial abode.

Meanwhile, Vāsuki became very aggrieved to see how his family members were rapidly diminishing. He then called for his sister and said, "Now you must solicit the help of your son. Request him to go and stop the sacrifice of King Janamejaya, for even I am in danger of being burnt to ashes. Long ago Lord Brahmā had predicted that Āstika would
rescue those serpents that are pious and thus you can be confident that your son will agree to do this."

Jaratkāru then called for her son and said, "Now is the time for you to accomplish that purpose for which I was given to your father in marriage. You must go and somehow induce Mahārāja Janamejaya to stop his ghastly snake-sacrifice so that my family members may not be burned to death."

Āstika then inquired, "My dear mother, please tell me the circumstances surrounding your marriage and how it came to be that I was begotten for this particular purpose."

Jaratkāru then related the entire history, beginning with Kadru's curse, and after hearing the narration, Āstika agreed to do the needful. While preparing to depart, he assured his mother by saying, "Do not worry, for my speech can never prove to be false."

When Āstika arrived at the sacrificial arena of Mahārāja Janamejaya, the doorkeepers first of all refused to grant him entrance. Somehow, Āstika was able to gratify them, however, and after going inside, he directly approached the king. Then, after properly glorifying the priests, headed by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, and the sacrificial fire, Āstika flattered Mahārāja Janamejaya by saying, "O virtuous ruler, your sacrifice is so splendidly that it appears to equal the 10,000 sacrifices which were formerly performed by King Indra."

Being very pleased with Āstika, Janamejaya then turned to the brāhmaṇas present there and asked them for permission to bestow a benediction upon his unexpected guest. The priests agreed, but at the same time they insisted that the benediction could be awarded only after Takṣaka had been burnt in the sacrificial fire. Due to the force of destiny, however, inspite of having received this warning, Mahārāja Janamejaya went ahead and requested Āstika to immediately ask for a boon. Upon hearing this, the priest in charge of offering oblations became very upset and so he once again reminded the king that Takṣaka had not yet been summoned. Janamejaya then urged his priests to quickly finish the sacrifice, since he did not want to displease Āstika by unnecessarily delaying in the matter of keeping his word. The priests then informed Mahārāja Janamejaya, "O King, it appears that Takṣaka is now residing in heaven under the protection of Indra."
This news caused Janamejaya to become very disturbed and with great agitation he once again urged his priests to resume the sacrifice without delay. Meanwhile, Indra had mounted upon his chariot, and accompanied by all of the demigods he approached the place where Janamejaya was performing his sacrifice. The king could see how Takṣa was fearfully hiding behind Indra's upper garment. Thus, he angrily ordered the priests, "Cast Takṣa at once into the sacrificial fire along with the king of heaven."

Then, when the priests poured the next oblation into the sacrificial fire, while chanting Tatshaka's name, both Indra and the serpent king visibly appeared overhead. At this, Indra panicked and so he cast off Takṣa and then hurriedly returned to his heavenly abode. Tatshaka lost consciousness as he began falling head-long through the sky and upon seeing him approach the sacrificial fire, the priests told Mahārāja Janamejaya, "Now that we have succeeded, you can grant this brāhmaṇa whatever benediction he may desire."

When the king thus requested him to ask for some favor, Āstika then replied, "The boon which I seek from you is this: Let your sacrifice immediately be halted so that no more serpents are burnt."

Takṣa was still falling from heaven and had not yet entered the fire and thus Mahārāja Janamejaya became very sorry upon hearing these words. With folded hands he begged Āstika, "O brāhmaṇa, please take from me any amount of wealth, or whatever else you may desire. Just kindly allow this sacrifice to continue a little while longer."

Āstika was adamant, however, and so, even though Janamejaya pleaded with him again and again, he remained unmoved. Even though the king stalled for time in this way, Takṣa did not fall into the sacrificial fire. Indeed, he remained stationary in the space between heaven and earth because Āstika repeatedly uttered the words, "Stay, stay!"

Because of this, the priests finally advised Mahārāja Janamejaya to grant Āstika his requested benediction. Thus, the great sacrifice came to a halt, and so the lives of the remaining serpents were spared. Actually, everyone felt pleased, in spite of this unexpected turn of events, and Mahārāja Janamejaya gave up his anger as well. The king then rewarded all of the priests, including the sūta Lohitākṣa, who had predicted that the sacrifice would be interrupted.
His mission accomplished, Āstika prepared to depart. Mahārāja Janamejaya then requested the brāhmaṇa to return in the future in order to become his priest for the performance of an aśvamedha-yajña. Āstika gave his consent and then happily returned home, where he related all that had happened to his mother and uncle. All of the serpents were greatly relieved and so, out of a sense of profound gratitude, they offered Āstika a benediction. In reply, the rṣi then said, "May anyone who, with a cheerful heart, hears this story of how I obstructed King Janamejaya's sacrifice, no longer need to have any fear of snakes."

The serpents readily agreed to this and thereafter, Āstika departed for the forest in order to resume his austerities.

Sūta Gosvāmī then continued, "O Śaunaka, when Śrīla Vyāsa Deva had learned that King Janamejaya was preparing to perform a great snake-sacrifice, he went to Hastināpura along with his disciples. Mahārāja Janamejaya was overjoyed to see the arrival of his greatgrandfather, and after worshipping him with deep satisfaction, he seated the son of Parāśara upon a golden throne. Mahārāja Janamejaya was very eager to hear the history of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas and so when the king expressed his ardent desire, Śrīla Vyāsa Deva directed his disciple, Vaiśampāyana, to recite the Mahābhārata. Vaiśampāyana then began speaking as follows: "Let me first offer all my respectful obeisances unto Lord Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and unto Nara, the foremost of all human beings. Let me offer my respectful obeisances unto the goddess of learning, Sarasvatī, and unto Śrīla Vyāsa Deva, the author of this transcendental literature. "The recitation of the Mahābhārata is in itself a great sacrifice, and it took Śrīla Vyāsa Deva three years to compose. O respected members of this assembly, I shall first of all list the table of contents of this great work, and so everyone please give me your rapt attention."

Sūta Gosvāmī then said, "O Śaunaka, I shall now begin to recite this great epic history just as I heard it from the lips of Vaiśampāyana."

There was once a king of the Paurava dynasty named Vasu who was very virtuous, except that he was addicted to the sport of hunting. Under the order of King Indra, Vasu conquered the Cedi kingdom. Then, later on,
he renounced the use of weapons and retired to the forest in order to live a life of penance. However, Indra thought that Vasu was executing austerities in the hopes of one day occupying Indra's heavenly post. Thus, with the intention of deviating him from his ascetic life, Indra approached Vasu, followed by all of the demigods. Then, as the ruler of Cedi stood before him with folded hands, Indra said, "My dear friend Vasu, it would be better for you to execute your duty as a king and give protection to the citizens. Rest assured that by acting in this way, you shall attain an exalted destination after death, without fail."

Vasu agreed to resume his royal duties, and Indra was so pleased that he gave the king a crystal chariot that traveled through the sky. Thus, by Indra's mercy, Vasu enjoyed the privilege of being the only mortal with a physical body capable of riding in a celestial chariot.

In addition, the king of heaven presented Vasu with a garland of unfading lotus flowers which when worn, insured that he could not be injured in battle. Then, finally, Indra gave Vasu a bamboo pole for him to use to rule over the citizens.

Thereafter, when one year had passed, Vasu planted this pole into the ground and then used it for worshipping Indra in order to commemorate the benedictions which he had received from the king of heaven. Ever since then, people have followed the example of Vasu and thus they are seen to place a pole into the ground while worshipping King Indra.

Indra was very pleased with Vasu's worship and so he assumed the form of a swan and then personally came to accept the king's offerings. Thus, by the mercy of the heavenly king, Mahārāja Vasu became so powerful that he was able to rule over the entire earth from his capital city in the kingdom of Cedi. Later on, Vasu, who was known as Uparicara on account of his ability to fly in the sky, installed his five sons as subordinate rulers in different places. When Vasu would ride upon his crystal chariot through the higher regions of the universe, Gandharvas and Apsarās used to accompany him.

There was a river named Śuktimāti that flowed near to Vasu's capital. A mountain called Kolāhala once attacked Śuktimāti after having become overwhelmed with lusty desire upon seeing her. Vasu happened to witness this crime and he violently kicked the mountain, who then released Śuktimāti from his embrace and fled. Still, as a result of her
connection with Kolāhala, Śuktimāti gave birth to twins and out of gratitude she delivered them to King Vasu. Vasu accepted the children and later on, he made the boy his commander-in-chief, and then married the girl, who was named Girikā. Thereafter, once upon a time, when her opportunity for conception had arrived, Girikā eagerly presented herself before her husband. However, it so happened that King Vasu's forefathers also approached him and requested that he go to the forest in order to procure some deer to be offered in their śraddhā ceremony. Vasu had to obey the order of his pitṛs, but as he engaged himself in hunting, his mind was simply filled with thoughts of his beautiful wife. It was spring, and so the forest was filled with flowering fruit trees, making it appear just like a heavenly garden. The air carried fragrant breezes that gradually aroused in King Vasu an ardent desire for sensual enjoyment. In this condition, he sat down beneath a large Açoka tree and, being sexually excited, he thought longingly of his beloved wife, Girikā.

Vasu then happened to see a swift hawk resting nearby and so he requested the bird, “Will you please carry my semen to my wife, the Queen, for the time for her conception has arrived?” The hawk agreed to perform this service for the king. However, as it was flying through the sky, another hawk swooped down to attack, thinking it was carrying some meat in its claws. During the fighting that ensued, the semen of King Vasu fell down into the water of the Yamunā River and was immediately swallowed up by a female fish. This fish was actually the Apsarā named Adrikā, who had formerly been cursed by a brāhmaṇa.

Then after ten months has passed, this fish was caught by a fisherman and when her body was cut open, two human babies, a male and a female, came out from its stomach. As pre-ordained by the brāhmaṇa, the Apsarā was immediately released from her curse, and the surprised fisherman took the twins and presented them to the king. Mahārāja Vasu decided to keep the male, and this child later on became the pious King matsya. Vasu returned the female to the fisherman, who then decided to raise her as his own daughter. This girl was named Satyavatē, and when she grew up, she came to possess striking beauty and a highly virtuous character. However, due to contact with her father, the
fisherman, Satyavati's body always had a fishy odor.

Under the order of her father, Satyavatī used to ply a ferry-boat across the river. One day, as she was so engaged, the great sage Parāśara happened to arrive at the banks of the Yamunā. Because of her great beauty and her enchanting sweet smiles, upon seeing Satyavatī, the ṛṣi was overcome by a strong desire to enjoy union with her. Parāśara engaged Satyavatī in taking him across the river. Then, when they were mid-stream, he addressed her, saying, "My dear beautiful girl, I have become captivated by you and so please accept my loving embraces."

With great embarrassment, Satyavatī replied, "O foremost of the ṛṣis, there are many great sages who reside on the banks of this river. How can I dare to gratify your desire right within everyone's view?"

Upon hearing this, Parāśara immediately created a dense fog so that the whole area became enveloped in dense darkness. Then, when the ṛṣi once again petitioned her, Satyavatī replied, "My dear sir, I am an unmarried girl who is living under the protection of my father. If my virginity is spoiled by you, then how could I dare to return home?"

Parāśara then said, "O lovely one, even after contact with me you shall remain a virgin. I promise you this, and if you accept me, then you can ask for any other benediction as well." Being pleased at having gained this opportunity, Satyavatī requested, "From this time onward, let my body emit an enchantingly sweet smell instead of its present fishy odor."

Parāśara gladly granted this boon, and at the very moment he went to embrace Satyavatī, her time for conception arrived. Thereafter, when his desire was satisfied, Parāśara departed, and on that very day, on an island in the middle of the Yamunā, Satyavatī gave birth to a glorious son. That very day, the child grew up as well, and since his mind was already fixed upon living a life of austerity, he addressed Satyavatī, "My dear mother, please grant me permission to depart for the forest. Rest assured that I will return to you whenever you are in need of me."

Because the son of Parāśara was born on an island, he was given the name Dvaipāyana and because he later on became the compiler of the Vedas, he was also known as Vyāsadeva. After her contact with Parāśara, Satyavatī began to emanate a sweet scent, and thus she became known
as Gandhavatī. Because that scent could be perceived even eight miles away, she was also called Yojanagandha.

After Lord Parāśurāma had practically rid the earth of all kṣatriyas by killing them twenty-one times, he retired to Mount Mahendra in order to perform severe austerities. At this time, the kṣatriya ladies came out of hiding and approached the brāhmaṇas for the purpose of continuing their race. These virtuous ladies had sexual union with the brāhmaṇas but only at the time of conception and never out of lust. Thus, a new generation of kṣatriyas thrived and because these kings were righteous, the varṇāśrama system became properly reestablished. Being pleased, Indra supplied showers of rain at regular intervals and all auspicious conditions prevailed upon the earth.

Later on, however, when the Daityas repeatedly met with defeat at the hands of the demigods, and thus were deprived of their residence in heaven, they began to take birth within this world. Many of the Daityas were born as the sons of great kṣatriyas and because of their superior prowess they became very puffed-up and arrogant. Indeed, these demoniac kings not only oppressed their citizens, but, due to being intoxicated with pride, they did not hesitate to offend even the great rṣis.

Finally, the presiding deity of the earth, Bhūmi, went to Lord Brahmā and with tears in her eyes she described to him her pitiable condition. Lord Brahmā then took all of the demigods and went to the shore of the milk-ocean, wherein Lord Nārāyaṇa resides upon the island Śvetadvīpa. In answer to the demigods' prayers, Lord Viṣṇu then transmitted a message unto the heart of Lord Brahmā, assuring him that He would soon incarnate upon the earth in order to relieve her burden. The Lord further ordered His servants, the demigods, to also appear on the earth to assist Him in His mission. Thus, in order to counter the many Daityas who had taken birth as kṣatriyas, the demigods also began to assume human forms. Some of these incarnations are listed herein:

The Dānava Viprichitti was born as Jarāsandha.
Hiranyakaśipu took birth as Śiṣupāla.
Prahlāda's younger brother, Saāhlāda became Āleya.
Anuladda became Dhṛṣṭaketu.
The asura named Vaskala appeared as Bhagadatta.
The Dānava, Kālanemi became Kaṁsa.
A portion of Bṛhaspati took birth as Droṇācārya.
United portions of Lord Śiva, Yamarāja, Karṇa and Krodha became Āśvatthāmā.
Dvāpara-yuga appeared as Śakuni.
Sātyaki, Drupada and Kṛtavarmā were all portions of the Maruts.
Yamarāja took birth as Vidura.
Purity personified became Pāṇdu.
A portion of Kali appeared as Duryodhana.
All Duryodhana's brothers, headed by Duḥśāsana, were previously the Rākṣasa sons of Pulastya.
The Pāṇḍavas were portions of Dharma, Vāyu, Indra and the twin Aśvins.
A portion of Agni took birth as Dhṛṣṭadyumna.
Śikhaṇḍi was formerly a Rākṣasa.
The Viśvadevas took birth as the sons of Draupadi.
Sanat-kumāra appeared as Pradyumna.
16,000 Apsarās became the wives of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Lakṣmī herself incarnated as Rukmīṇī Devi.
A portion of Indra's wife, Śacī, appeared as Draupadi, and Varcas, the son of Soma took birth as Abhimanyu.

When the demigods had been discussing amongst themselves about the parts that they would play in serving the mission of the Lord, Soma had pleaded, "I cannot bear to part with my son. He is dearer to me than life itself and so I beg that he be exempted from incarnating upon the earth."
However, when it was impressed upon Soma that there was no question of avoiding participation in Lord Viṣṇu's plan to annihilate the asuras, the moon-god finally said, "All right, I will allow you to take my son, but not for long. Let Varcas appear as the son of Arjuna, the incarnation of Nara, and let him become a great chariot-warrior in his youth. Then, upon reaching the age of sixteen, he must return to me after performing
a heroic feat that shall earn him eternal fame. During the great war that will relieve the earth of her burden, let Varcas annihilate one-fourth of the opposing army in just half a day before laying down his life upon the battlefield. In addition, let him beget a heroic son who will continue the Bhārata line when it almost becomes extinct."

The demigods heartily approved of Soma's words and so they happily agreed to accept his proposals.

Long ago, there was a great king named Duṣmanta, who ruled over the entire earth, including the countries of the Mlecchas. At that time, no one needed to plow the fields because the land automatically yielded all kinds of grains and vegetables. Besides being highly virtuous, Mahārāja Duṣmanta was so powerful that he was capable of lifting up Mount Mandara and holding it in his arms if he so desired.

Once, Mahārāja Duṣmanta went to the forest, accompanied by his army, in order to engage in hunting. As the king proceeded to kill innumerable animals, those that were still alive panicked, and as the frightened elephants fled in all directions, they trampled many soldiers underfoot. On the other hand, since the rivers had become dry in that region, many of the animals died of fatigue while trying to escape, and so the soldiers were allowed to eat them. Finally, when the entire area became depleted of animals, Mahārāja Duṣmanta took one of his ministers with him and entered another forest. Gradually, the king became exhausted and thirsty, and then he came to a desert. Still, Duṣmanta proceeded on, and after crossing that barren land, he was delighted to find a forest of celestial beauty, full of soft grass and flowering trees. Indeed, each and every tree was filled with fruit, and a cool fragrant breeze made them sway gracefully. The sound of chirping birds and humming bees could be heard in all directions and the king became so enchanted that he forgot his hunger and thirst.

Mahārāja Duṣmanta soon came to an āśrama of rṣis on the banks of the River Mālinī. Understanding this to be the abode of the sage, Kanva, Duṣmanta gave up his royal dress and then entered the hermitage along with his minister with the desire of meeting the great rṣi. Within the āśrama the king saw numerous brāhmaṇas engaged in all types of Vedic study and chanting of mantras. In that Transcendentally surcharged
atmosphere, he completely forgot about his worldly existence and felt as if he had entered the spiritual world.

When Duṣmanta came to Kanva's cottage, he entered alone but found the place to be apparently vacant. Still, he called out, "Is anyone here?", and in response a beautiful girl dressed like a rshi's daughter came out to receive him. With great respect, the girl washed the king's feet and then she stood before her guest, awaiting his command. Mahārāja Duṣmanta then explained. "I have come here for the purpose of worshipping the great sage Kanva. Will you please inform him of my arrival?" The girl replied, "My father has gone out to gather some fruit but he will be returning here very shortly."

While looking at the girl, Duṣmanta became more and more captivated by her wonderful beauty and submissive, gentle behavior. Knowing that Kanva was a pure brahmācārī, however, the king doubted whether she could actually be his daughter. When Mahārāja Duṣmanta thus inquired about her real identity, the girl smiled and then replied, "I shall relate to you the story of my birth as I heard it when Kanva had narrated it to a visiting rṣi. Once upon a time, Indra became greatly alarmed on account of the severe austerities being performed by Viśvāmitra. Being afraid that he would be pushed down from his post as the king of heaven, Indra called for Menakā, the best of Apsaras, and ordered her as follows: 'I want you to lure Viśvāmitra away from his penances by employing your youthful beauty, agreeableness, artistic talents, sweet smiles, and nectarine speech.'

At first, Menakā fearfully declined to do Indra's bidding. Finally, however, when she saw that the king of heaven would not relent, Menakā said, 'Since even you are afraid of Viśvāmitra, why shouldn't I be? He is so powerful that he can uproot Mount Meru and throw it any distance he likes. O Indra, if you want me to approach Viśvāmitra, then you must devise some means whereby his anger may not be aroused. Perhaps if the god of wind, Vāyu, and the god of love, Kāma, accompany me, I shall be able to accomplish your purpose.'

"Indra liked this idea and so, soon thereafter, Menakā entered Viśvāmitra's āśrama where she saw him engaged in the performance of severe austerities. After offering her obeisances, Menakā began to sport playfully in front of the meditating Viśvāmitra. Vāyu then came there
and artfully blew away her fine white garments thus revealing her naked beauty. At this, Menakā appeared to become very shy and embarrassed and she began to chase after her clothing as if annoyed at the wind for stealing them. All the while, Viśvāmitra intently gazzed upon Menakā's heavenly body, which possessed every conceivable aspect of feminine attraction. Indeed, the ascetic greatly appreciated her beauty and thus his sexual desire soon became fully aroused. Viśvāmitra then signaled Menakā to come to him, and when she happily accepted his invitation, they began to enjoy each other's company in conjugal love for a long, long period.

"In due course of time, Menakā became pregnant, and when it was time for her to deliver the child, she went to the banks of the River Mālinī, which is located in the Himālayas. After giving birth to the female baby, however, Menakā simply left it there and went away. Soon thereafter, a flock of vultures happened to see the baby girl lying in that uninhabited forest. Out of compassion, they surrounded the little child in order to protect her from the attacks of wild animals. Then, sometime later, while taking his bath in the nearby river, Kanva happened to see the baby girl surrounded by vultures. The ṛṣi decided to adopt the abandoned child and so he took her back to his āśrama and began to raise her as his own daughter.

"My dear king, I am that very same girl, and because I was protected by vultures, I was given the name Śakuntalā. It is said that not only the giver of the body, but the protector of one's life and the provider of food are also considered to be fathers, in that order. Thus, I have always thought of the ṛṣi Kanva as my real father."

After hearing Śakuntalā's story, Duśmanta told her, "My dear lovely girl, I beg you to become my wife. I have already given my heart to you and so, in return, you can ask from me whatever you like. I am prepared to put my entire kingdom at your disposal."

In this way, Duśmanta hoped to marry Śakuntalā according to the Gandharva method, which depends only upon mutual agreement. However, she replied, "O King, please wait for my father to return so that I can obtain his permission. After all, a girl is never allowed to act independently."

Duśmanta was extremely eager to have Śakuntalā, however, and so he
argued, "The Gandharva way of marriage is quite suitable for kṣatriyas, and thus you are qualified to offer your own self."

When Duśmanta repeatedly encouraged Śakuntalā in this way to unite with him without waiting, she finally agreed by saying, "O King, I shall immediately accept you as my husband, provided that you promise that the son which you give me will become the heir apparent to the throne."

Without carefully considering the manner, Duśmanta gave his consent and then excitedly took Śakuntalā in his arms. Afterwards, as he was about to depart, Duśmanta assured Śakuntalā. "I shall return to my capital now. Then, very shortly, I will send my army here in order to escort you to my palace."

After saying this, Duśmanta left and then, Kanva returned home. Out of shame, ĪŚakuntalā hid herself and did not come to greet him as usual. As an omniscient rṣi, however, Kanva knew everything that had taken place and so he called for his daughter and said, "My dear child, do not be afraid, for I can assure you that your sexual act did not destroy your virtue. Your husband Duśmanta is a great soul and your son will one day come to rule over the entire earth."

Śakuntalā was very relieved to find out that her father was pleased and so, after washing his feet, she requested him to bless her husband. Kanva agreed to do so and in addition, he offered Śakuntalā a benediction. Desiring to benefit Duśmanta, Śakuntalā then requested, "May the future Kaurava kings who appear in my dynasty always remain virtuous and may they never become bereft of their sovereignty."

Thereafter, in due course of time, Śakuntalā gave birth to a male child of great prowess. Just like a demigod, the boy grew up very rapidly. In his childhood, the son of Śakuntalā would engage in play by tying up lions and tigers to the trees around the āśrama. Sometimes he would even kill a lion with his bare hands. When Kanva saw this precocious behavior, he informed Śakuntalā. "Now that your son is six years old, he should be installed as the heir apparent to the royal throne."

Kanva then ordered one of his disciples to escort Śakuntalā along with her son to Mahārāja Duśmanta’s palace at Hastināpura. The disciple performed his duty by bringing the mother and child before the king and after doing so, he departed for home. Duśmanta very well remembered Śakuntalā and the promise that he had made to her at the time of their
marriage. And yet, without displaying any emotion, he declared, “I have no idea who this woman and boy are, nor the reason why they have come here.”

Upon hearing these unexpected words, Śakuntalā felt highly shocked and grief-stricken. While struggling to control her mounting anger, she replied to Duṣmanta, "O King, you should consider the fact that the Supreme Lord is the witness of all acts, and so are His representatives: the sun, moon, air, earth, and many other presiding deities. Do not foolishly think that you can act irresponsibly and then escape punishment! If you refuse to recognize me, then I hereby pray that by the power of my austerity, your head shall crack into one hundred pieces!"

"I have worshipped you as my husband for the last six years and so you should accept your son and make him the heir-apparent to the throne as you promised. O King, when our child was born a celestial voice announced from the sky, 'This great personality shall one day perform one hundred horse-sacrifices!' It is the duty of a father to take care of his son, for it is the son who can deliver his ancestors from hell. Indeed, it is for that reason he is called putra. Even if you are so hard-hearted and shameless that you want to reject me, I am willing to return home to my father, provided that you do not disregard your son."

After hearing Śakuntalā’s plea, Duṣmanta callously replied, "Women are generally known to speak lies. I have no idea of what you are talking about!"

This retort made Śakuntalā highly enraged and so she chastised Duṣmanta for his wicked behavior, “O King. I think that you must be completely ignorant of religious principles. If one digs a pond, that is considered to be more virtuous than digging 100 wells. The performance of a sacrifice is more meritorious than the construction of a pond, and having a son is considered to be even more virtuous. Truthfulness, however, is said to be even more meritorious than producing 100 sons. Indeed, 100 horse sacrifices were once weighed against truth, and truth was found to be much heavier. Therefore, O pious king, one can just imagine how sinful it is for you to lie like this. Because truthfulness is the highest vow and the greatest virtue, you should not violate your pledge to install your son as heir apparent to the royal throne."
After saying this, Śakuntalā turned around and began to hurriedly walk away. Just then, however, a voice from the sky miraculously announced. "O Duśmanta, you should cherish your son. Do not insult the innocent Śakuntalā by neglecting her like this. You are the real father of this boy and all that Śakuntalā has said is true. Since it is because of this speech that the child will be accepted by you, his name should be Bhārata."

When Duśmanta heard these divine words his heart became filled with joy. He then told the ministers and brāhmaṇas who were present there, "If I had accepted my son simply on the strength of Śakuntalā's words, the citizens would have doubted the purity of his birth. Now, however, since his spotless origin has been confirmed by the celestial messenger, I can accept the boy without fear."

Mahārāja Duśmanta thus gave up all pretense and received his wife and son with great affection. He then told Śakuntalā, "I had neglected you at first just so that people would not think that we had united only out of lust and not as husband and wife." Soon thereafter, the child Bhārata was installed as Duśmanta's heir apparent. Then, later on, when Bhārata actually ascended the royal throne, he traveled all over the earth, subjugating the other kings, and thus he became the undisputed emperor of the world.

Ever since time immemorial, the demigods and demons have periodically fought for gaining the sovereignty of the three worlds. In the hopes of becoming victorious, the demigods had accepted Bṛhaspati as their spiritual master, and similarly, the demons took shelter of Uśanās, who was also known as Śukrācārya. Because of this arrangement, however, the two brāhmaṇas became arch rivals. Later on, when the demigods and demons again fought, the Dānavas who had been killed were revived by Śukrācārya, for he knew the art called sañjīvanī. Bṛhaspati lacked this knowledge, however, and so the slain demigod soldiers could not be brought back to life.

Being very aggrieved on this account, the demigods then went to Kaccha, the son of Bṛhaspati, and requested, "O brāhmaṇa, please go on our behalf and become a disciple of Śukrācārya. If you can receive the knowledge of sañjīvanī from him then we can once again hope to conquer over the demons. Somehow or other try to gain the favor of
Śukrācārya's daughter, Devayānī. Then, your object will surely be easy to achieve."
Kaccha agreed to help the demigods in this way, and without delay he went to the capital of the asuras and came before Śukrācārya. "O foremost of brahmanas, I wish to become your disciple," Kaccha said. "If you accept me, then I am prepared to live under your care as a brahmacāri for 1,000 years." Śukrācārya at once took a liking to Kaccha, and so he accepted him as a disciple without hesitation. From that time onward, as he remained in Śukrācārya's āśrama, Kaccha was very careful to gratify his guru in all respects by his perfect behavior. He also endeavored to please Śukrācārya's daughter with his youthful attractiveness as well as his talent for singing, dancing and playing upon musical instruments. Kaccha also gave Devayānī nice presents and treated her with great respect so that as a result, she soon became very attached to him.
In this way, everything went well for Kaccha, but then, after 500 years had passed, the Dānavas came to know of his real purpose. Once, while Kaccha was engaged in tending his guru's cows in a lonely forest, the Dānavas came there and killed him. The demons then cut Kaccha's body into small pieces and fed it to the wolves and jackals. That evening, when the cows returned home unattended, Devayānī became very disturbed on account of Kaccha's absence, and so she went to her father and said, "Your disciple has not returned home along with the cows, and so I am afraid that something has happened to him. If Kaccha does not come back, then I shall not be able to go on living."
Devayānī was very dear to her father and so, after hearing her anxious appeal, Śukrācārya employed his knowledge of sañjīvanī and then called for Kaccha. Immediately upon being summoned, Kaccha's bodily parts tore open the bellies of the animals that had eaten him. Then, in his original form, he appeared before his guru. When Śukrācārya inquired about what had happened, Kaccha explained how the Dānavas had killed him.
Then, sometime after this incident, Devayānī asked Kaccha to go to the forest in order to bring her some nice flowers. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Dānavas again killed Kaccha, and after pounding his body into paste, they threw it into the ocean. When, after a long time,
Kaccha did not return, Devayānī tearfully went to her father, who then once again revived his disciple by utilizing the art of sañjīvanī. Thereafter, when the Dānavas killed Kaccha for a third time, they burnt his body to ashes and then mixed the remains with wine which they gave to Śukrācārya to drink. Later that day, when Devayānī again found Kaccha to be missing, she once again approached her father and tearfully implored him to bring the son of Bṛhaspati back to life. However, this time Śukrācārya replied, "Kaccha has already gone to the region of the dead. Besides, every time I bring him back to life, he is once again killed by the Dānavas. Therefore what is the use of reviving him again and again? My dear daughter, please do not lament. You should not be so attached to one who is a mere mortal." Devayānī was very fond of Kaccha, however, and she considered him to be quite worthy of lamenting over. Finally, she told her father, "Without Kaccha, I could not bear to live, and thus I shall give up my life by fasting to death."

At this, Śukrācārya became very angry with the sinful asuras for the trouble that they gave him by repeatedly killing his brāhmaṇa disciple. Thus, at Devayānī's urging, he once again employed the art of sañjīvanī and then called for Kaccha. The son of Bṛhaspati then replied in a feeble voice that trembled with fear, "O Preceptor, please be merciful by somehow rescuing me from this awkward situation. Kindly make some arrangement so that you will not be killed when I come out of your stomach."

With great surprise, Śukrācārya inquired, "My dear boy, how did you get into my stomach?"

Kaccha then explained, "By your mercy, my consciousness has not been lost, in spite of the severe pain which I feel. Once again I was killed by the Dānavas, and this time they burnt my body to ashes and then mixed the remains in with your wine."

After hearing this, Śukrācārya exclaimed with great disgust, "I am going to leave the demons and join the side of the demigods!" Then, turning to Devayānī, he said, "Only by causing my own death will I be able to revive Kaccha. There is no other way for him to come out of my body except by ripping open my stomach."

Devayānī replied, "O Father, both your death and the death of Kaccha
would be equally painful for me. In either case, I could not bear to go on living,
Śukrācārya then thought to himself as follows: "Kaccha is so dear to my
daughter, and, after all, a brāhmaṇa should never be slain. Therefore, I
must save the boy's life, and there is only one way which this can be
done. If I teach Kaccha the art of sañjīvanī, then he can use it to revive
me after he comes out of my stomach."
Śukrācārya thus imparted the knowledge of sañjīvanī to Kaccha and
then called for him to come out of his stomach. In answer to the
summons, Kaccha ripped open Śukrācārya's body and then stood before
the remains of his guru, which were lying in a heap. Kaccha then
revived Śukrācārya with the use of sañjīvanī, and when his preceptor
rose up he worshipped him and adequately expressed the gratitude
which one must feel upon receiving knowledge from a superior person.
Śukrācārya then began to consider the matter in this way: "The Dānavas
had been able to deceive me only because I had been under the
influence of wine. Actually, it is not suitable for learned and sober
brāhmaṇas to indulge in the taking of intoxicants. Therefore, let me do
something to reform the behavior of those who are supposed to be first-
class men."
With this in his mind, Śukrācārya then angrily pronounced the
following curse: "Let it be understood that from this day onward, any
brāhmaṇa who cannot resist the temptation of drinking wine shall be
considered fallen from his brahminical status. He will be despised by
others, and the sin committed by him will have an effect which is equal
to that of killing a brāhmaṇa."
After saying this, Śukrācārya called for the Dānavas who had deceived
him and announced, "Kaccha had succeeded in obtaining the knowledge
of sañjīvanī from me. Still, he will continue to reside here for some time
under my protection. Therefore, I warn you: Do not try to create any
more mischief, or the consequences will be very grave."
Thereafter, when his 1,000-year-vow was completed, Kaccha took
permission from Śukrācārya and then prepared to depart for home.
Devayānī then anxiously came to him and said, "Now that your period of
brahmacārya is over, you should fix your heart upon me and accept me as
your wife."
However, Kaccha replied, "My dear Devayānī, I have always regarded you as being on a level with my spiritual master. Therefore, I dare not even consider your proposal."

Upon hearing this, Devayānī became a little agitated and said, "O Kaccha, you should remember how many times I saved your life, and you should be grateful. I am genuinely devoted to you and have thought of you alone for all these years. Therefore, it is not right for you to reject me like this."

Kaccha replied. "We have always lived together just like a brother and sister. Please do not act in such a way as to disturb our friendly relationship now. Give me your blessings so that I can return to my father's abode in the heavenly planets."

At last, Devayānī flared up with rage when she realized that Kaccha was determined to depart. Under the sway of the anger which is born of frustration, she cursed him as follows: "If you refuse to accept me as your wife, then the knowledge of sañjīvanī, which you have so laboriously acquired, will prove to be ineffectual when you employ it!"

Upon hearing this, Kaccha also became enraged, and so he retaliated against Devayānī by saying, "Although I am a faultless brāhmaṇa, you have angrily cursed me. As a consequence, may your desire to marry a ṛṣi's son "never be fulfilled! Although it is true that the art of sañjīvanī will no longer act when employed by me, it will certainly work for those to whom I impart it."

After saying this, Kaccha quickly departed for the abode of Lord Indra. When the demigods learned of his arrival in heaven, they came and welcomed Kaccha and praised him highly for the wonderful feat that he had accomplished on their behalf. Indeed, the demigods were so pleased that in order to reward Kaccha, they allowed him to be a sharer in the sacrificial offerings.

After Kaccha delivered the knowledge of sañjīvanī unto them, the demigods eagerly approached Indra and suggested that the time was ripe for them to display their prowess. The king of heaven agreed, and so the demigods confidently set out to conquer over the demons. Then, while passing through the sky, Indra happened to see a group of young girls playing in a lake within a garden that belonged to the Gandharva king,
Citraratha. By his mystic power, Indra transformed himself into the wind and then mischievously mixed up the garments which the girls had deposited on the shore. Thus, later on, when the girls got out of the water, Śarmiśṭhā, the daughter of King Vṛṣaparvaṇ, mistakenly put on the clothes that belonged to Devayāṇī. Because of this, an argument ensued between the two girls, and Śarmiśṭhā ended up throwing Devayāṇī into a dry well.

Then, after the other girls had departed, it so happened that Mahārāja Yayāti, the son of Nāhuṣa, came to that well in search of water. The king had become very thirsty while engaged in hunting, and when he peered into the well, he was very surprised to see a beautiful young girl instead of water. Mahārāja Yayāti extended his hand and lifted Devayāṇī out of the well. The daughter of Āukrācārya greatly appreciated the king's chivalrous behavior as well as his powerful and youthful appearance. Being enamored, Devayāṇī frankly said, "My dear handsome hero, since I have been touched by you, I cannot think of accepting anyone else as my husband."

Being a virtuous kṣatriya, however, Mahārāja Yayāti at first refused on the grounds of Devayāṇī being the daughter of a brāhmaṇa. Finally, after hearing about Kaccha's curse, he agreed, provided that she could obtain Āukrācārya's permission.

Thereafter, Devayāṇī returned home and tearfully complained to her father, "Śarmiśṭhā has insulted us, saying, 'Your father is no better than a beggar who earns his keep by flattering the king.'"

After hearing from his daughter all that had happened, Āukrācārya angrily departed for the palace of Vṛṣaparvaṇ. When the king understood that his preceptor was approaching in a fit of rage, he went out of his palace to receive him. The outcome was that, in order to pacify Āukrācārya, Vṛṣaparvaṇ had to give his daughter and her 2,000 attendants for becoming Devayāṇī's maidservants. Āukrācārya then took his daughter and presented her to Mahārāja Yayāti. At the time of marriage, however, Āukrācārya warned the king, "If you want to live happily, then you should remain satisfied with Devayāṇī and never even think of sleeping with Śarmiśṭhā."

The newlywed couple then began living together, and after some time, Devayāṇī gave birth to a fine son. Meanwhile, Śarmiśṭhā had attained
to the age of puberty, and when her time for conception arrived, she anxiously wondered, "Who will satisfy my desire?" At last, being afraid that her youth might pass away, Šarmištā decided to approach Mahārāja Yayāti. Soon thereafter, she got the opportunity of meeting him as he was seated in a secluded garden. Šarmištā thus came before the king and with folded hands she said, "O Lord, by good fortune, Devayānī has given birth to a son. Now, kindly bestow your mercy upon me by giving me the same opportunity."

At first, Mahārāja Yayāti refused to accept her, and he informed her of Śukrācārya's warning. However, Šarmištā argued, "O righteous king, according to religious principles, it is not sinful to lie on four occasions: for the purpose of joking, in order to negotiate a marriage, while seeking the enjoyment of women, and when threatened with the loss of one's wealth or life. Therefore, when you promised Śukrācārya that you would have sexual relations only with Devayānī, it was a harmless lie which you had to tell in order to achieve your purpose. I have approached you in distress, and so, according to kṣatriya codes it is your duty to accept me."

Yayāti then replied, "What you say is correct. However, it is more important for a king to always display an ideal example for people in general. Therefore, please return to the palace and remain satisfied in the company of your friends."

Still, Šarmištā persisted, "O Ruler, I am your wife's slave and thus you are also my master. You are free to do with me as you like. Who can check you?"

Finally, Mahārāja Yayāti gave in, and in order to justify his action, he said, "It has always been my vow to grant whatever is asked of me. Therefore, I shall not refuse to satisfy your desire." Thus, in that solitary garden, Yayāti and Šarmištā lay together under the sway of passionate desire. Then, after gratifying their lust, they bid each other an affectionate farewell and then departed. In due course of time, Šarmištā gave birth to a male child. When Devayānī received the news, she angrily approached Šarmištā and inquired, "From whom did you get this abominable son?"

Šarmištā replied, "One day a ṛṣi came here, and at my request, he virtuously satisfied my desire." Devayānī accepted this story, and so the
two girls parted on friendly terms. Then, some time later, Devayānī gave birth to another son, and thus she had two; Yadu and Turvasu. Śarmiṣṭhā then gave birth to two more sons, however, and thus she came to have three; Drahuyu, Anu and Pūru. Then, one day it so happened that Yayāti and Devayānī were walking in a solitary garden where the three sons of Śarmiṣṭhā were playing. When Devayānī innocently asked the children, "Who is your father?", they all pointed their fingers at the king. The little boys then ran to Mahārāja Yayāti, but the king was afraid to embrace them in the presence of Devayānī. Since they were thus neglected, the three boys started to cry and they ran to where their mother was staying.

The next day, Devayānī met privately with Śarmiṣṭhā and forced her to confirm her suspicion. When the truth thus came out, Devayānī became so angry and upset that she declared, "I shall no longer stay here! I am going back to my father!", and then stormed out of her husband's palace. Mahārāja Yayāti repentantly followed his dear wife and tried his best to pacify her. The king's attempts failed, however, and when he reached Śukrācārya's house, the preceptor angrily cursed him as follows: "O King, it appears that you have become too lusty. Therefore, I will take away your youth so that you will immediately become old and invalid."

Mahārāja Yayāti was thus instantly transformed into a decrepit old man, much to his utter dismay. Although he begged Śukrācārya to withdraw the curse, the brahmaṇa was unwilling to falsify his speech. However, as a concession, Śukrācārya finally added, "After all, you are my son-in-law and so I should give you another chance. If one of your sons is agreeable, then you can transfer your old age to him in exchange for your promise that he will become the next king."

Thereafter, Mahārāja Yayāti's youngest son, Pūru, agreed to accept his father's old age, provided that it would be returned to him after 1,000 years. Yayāti consented and thus, after regaining his youth, he continued to rule over the kingdom virtuously, reunited with Devayānī. Then, after enjoying himself to the fullest possible extent for the allotted 1,000 years, Mahārāja Yayāti finally came to the realization that there is no satiation of material desires, and thus he decided to give them up once and for all. After returning Pūru's youth and installing him upon the throne, Yayāti returned to the forest in order to execute a
life of austerities. In this way, Mahārāja Yayāti purified his existence and after death, he attained to the planet of King Indra.

Then, once upon a time, while Yayāti and Indra were conversing together, the king of heaven asked, "In order to describe the austerities which you had performed while on earth, with what other personality would you compare yourself?" Yayāti replied, "I do not find anyone who is my equal in terms of austerities performed, even amongst the great demigods and rṣis."

After hearing this impudent remark, Indra informed Yayāti, "O foolish king, you are so proud that you consider even your superiors to be your equal or inferior. As a result, the merit which you had acquired has already been destroyed, and thus you will fall down from heaven at once."

When he heard this, Yayāti became very repentant and begged Indra, "When I fall to the earth, please arrange that I may live among those who are virtuous and wise."

Indra gave his consent but then warned, "Because of this experience, you should be very careful from now on and never again consider your superiors to be on an equal level with yourself."

Thereafter, as Yayāti proceeded to fall from heaven, a rājarṣi named Añöaka happened to see him and so inquired, "Please tell me who you are if you do not mind. I am curious to know why you are falling down from heaven."

Yayāti replied, "I am your grandfather, the son of Nähuña. Due to my excessive pride, I was considered unfit for residing in heaven. Then, when I began to fall down toward the earth, the demigods asked me where I would like to reside and so I pointed out your residence since you are the son of my daughter."

Añöaka felt great compassion for his forefather who was about to take birth from the womb of a human mother, which is considered to be an earthly hell. With a desire to benefit Yayāti, Añöaka then said, "If there is a heavenly destination awaiting me as a result of my austerities, then I would like to transfer my pious credits to you so that you will not have to fall down to earth."

However, Yayāti replied, "Charity can be accepted by a brāhmaṇa, but never by a kṣatriya. Therefore, I do not wish to enjoy the heavenly
rewards which you have earned."
There were three other great rājarṣis assembled there, and next,
Pratardana addressed Yaśāti, "If there is a heavenly residence awaiting
me as a result of my pious acts, I want you to enjoy it instead, so that you
will not have to take birth from a mother's womb."
Yaśāti once again refused on the grounds of his being a kṣatriya.
Vasumanaś then said, "Since you are unwilling to accept charity, I will
offer you my heavenly rewards in exchange for a mere piece of straw."
Yaśāti replied, "Never in my life have I bought or sold anything unfairly.
Therefore, I cannot accept your offer."
Śibi then said, "If you do not have the means of purchasing them, then
please accept my pious credits as a gift."
Once again, Yaśāti refused and so, out of frustration, Aśṭaka said, "Since
we have offered you our heavenly destinations and you have refused
them, we will leave them here for you anyway. Then, we shall once
again take birth upon the earth in order to suffer instead of you."
Just then, however, Aśṭaka could see golden airplanes approaching and
when he inquired about them, Yaśāti replied, "O best of rājarṣis, these
celestial vehicles have come here to take the four of you to heaven."
Aśṭaka then urged, "Since you are our forefather, please ascend to
heaven first. We shall join you there later on, when the next
opportunity arises." Yaśāti could then see that the gates of heaven were
open to all of them and so he informed Aśṭaka, "Since there are five
golden chariots awaiting us, we can all go to heaven together."
In this way, Mahārāja Yaśāti was rescued by his descendants, and after
ascending to the sky on one of the golden airplanes, he returned to
heaven along with them.

There was a king named Mahābhīṣa in the line of Ikṣvāku who reached
heaven after pleasing the demigods with his performance of 1,000 horse
sacrifices. One day, the demigods and celestial ṛṣis assembled in order to
worship Lord Brahmā, and at that time, Gaṅgādevī also came there to
offer her respects. However, as Gaṅgā entered the assembly, the wind
happened to displace her fine white garments so that her bodily features
became clearly visible. While the demigods respectfully bent their heads
downwards, Mahābhīṣa rudely stared at Gaṅgādevī's exposed body. Lord
Brahmā perceived this, and so with great displeasure he cursed Mahābhīṣa and Gaṅgādevī to take birth upon the earth. He then further informed the descendent of Ikṣvāku, "You may select your own father according to your desire, and I shall also provide a means for your release from this curse. At the time when your wrath will be provoked by Gaṅgā, you shall once again be reinstated in your original position."

Upon hearing this, Mahābhīṣa began to think about the kings presently living on the earth, and at last he decided to become the son of Mahārāja Pratīpa. As Gaṅgādevī left the assembly of demigods, her mind was absorbed affectionately thinking about Mahābhīṣa. Then, while returning home, she happened to meet the Vasus, who appeared to be in a very dejected mood. When Gaṅgādevī inquired about the cause of their moroseness, the Vasus replied, "We were cursed by the great ṛṣi Vasiṣṭha to be born upon the earth. O Gaṅgādevī, we are horrified at the thought of having to take birth from the womb of an ordinary human being. Please be kind upon us and assume the form of a human female in order to beget us within your womb."

Since she had also been cursed to take birth on the earth, Gaṅgā agreed and then asked, "O Vasus, who would you like to have as your father?"

In reply, the Vasus selected the future son of Mahārāja Pratīpa who would be named Śantanu. Gaṅgā confirmed that this was her choice as well, for she knew that Śantanu would be none other than Mahābhīṣa. The Vasus then requested, "O Gaṅgā, as soon as we are delivered from your womb, throw us into your waters so that we will not have to suffer on earth for very long."

Gaṅgā replied, "I shall drown seven of you if that is your desire. However, one of my sons must live so that the sexual union that I have with my husband may not prove entirely futile."

The Vasus then said, "Each of us shall give one-eighth of our energies to produce this son who will live a long life. However, please grant our wish that he shall not produce any children."

Gaṅgādevī agreed and after all arrangements had been finalized, she and the Vasus went their separate ways. Meanwhile, Mahārāja Pratīpa had been performing austerities at the source of the River Gaṅgā for many years. Then, one day, much to his surprise, the beautiful Gaṅgā personified came there and sat down upon his right thigh. The
astonished king inquired, "My dear woman, what is your intention?"
Gaṅgādevī then replied, "I have come here desiring to become your
wife."
Pratīpa responded, "I am not willing to give up my vows of austerity in
order to marry. Besides, one's right thigh is supposed to be the seat for a
daughter or daughter-in-law, whereas the left thigh is meant for the
wife. For this reason, I request you to become the wife of my future son."
Gaṅgā replied, "I agree to do so, but only on the condition that after our
marriage, my husband may never try to judge the propriety of my acts."
When Mahārāja Pratīpa gave his consent, Gaṅgādevī disappeared and
thereafter, in due course of time, the king's wife gave birth to a son.
This boy, who had formerly been Mahābhīṣa, was given the name
Śantanu, because he had been conceived while his father was engaged in
controlling his senses by the execution of austerities.
When Śantanu had grown up, Mahārāja Pratīpa described to him his
meeting with Gaṅgādevī and then said, "I had arranged for you to marry
this beautiful celestial girl, and so you should accept her as your wife
when you happen to meet her. However, let me warn you. Never judge
the propriety or impropriety of her actions, for if you do so, then she will
immediately leave you."
Then, after some time, Mahārāja Pratīpa installed Śantanu upon the
royal throne so that he could retire to a holy place. Śantanu soon
became addicted to the sport of hunting, and thus he came to spend
most of his time in the forest. Once, as he roamed about on the banks of
the Gaṅgā, Mahārāja Śantanu happened to meet a beautiful girl who
appeared to be wandering at will. As soon as he saw her, Mahārāja
Śantanu felt great delight at heart and as the king intently gazed at her,
Gaṅgā also became attracted and so smilingly glanced at him.
Thereafter, when Śantanu asked Gaṅgā to become his wife, she
remembered her promise to the Vasus and then replied, "I am willing to
marry you, provided that you agree to fulfill my conditions. You must
never interfere with whatever I do, whether it be agreeable or
disagreeable, nor should you ever address me unkindly. Indeed, if you
ever speak to me reproachfully, then I shall leave you at once."
Having become completely under the sway of Gaṅgā's celestial beauty,
Mahārāja Śantanu agreed to her demands without giving the matter
much consideration or even knowing of her actual identity. Thereafter, the newly-wedded couple began to enjoy life together with great pleasure. Indeed, Mahārāja Ģantanu was so enraptured with his wife’s feminine charm that he could not even discern how time was passing. And, as a result of his conjugal happiness, Mahārāja Ģantanu begot seven sons, one after another. However, each time, Gaṅgādevī threw the newborn babies into the river while saying, "This is for your good, my little child."

Although Mahārāja Ģantanu certainly became very disturbed each time Gaṅgā drowned their newborn sons, he dared not object. Remembering his promise at the time of his marriage, the king remained silent out of fear that his wife would leave him. However, when Gaṅgā was just about to drown their eighth son, Mahārāja Ģantanu could not restrain his anger, and thus he exclaimed, "O hard-hearted woman, desist from this cruel act!"

At this, Gaṅgādevī spared her child but then revealed, "O King, please know that I am the celestial goddess, Gaṅgā, and these children that we have bore are the eight Vasus, who had been cursed to suffer human births. Your reproachful words have also freed me from a curse, and so I shall now return to heaven."

Then, as Gaṅgādevī prepared to depart, Ģantanu asked her to explain how the Vasus had been cursed and so, in reply, she narrated the following story:

"Nandinī, the kāmadhenu, was begotten by Kaśyapa in the womb of Dakṣa’s daughter, Surabhi. Later on, Nandinī came under the care of the great rṣi, Vasiṣṭha, and she was invaluable for his performance of sacrifice. Once, while wandering in the forest, the Vasus happened to arrive at the āśrama of Vasiṣṭha, and there, they beheld Nandinī. One of the Vasus, named Dyu, then glorified the kāmadhenu to his wife and concluded by saying, 'If a human being drinks the milk from this celestial cow, he will become endowed with unchanging youth for 10,000 years.' "The wife of Dyu then begged, 'My dear husband, please take this cow so that I can present it to my good friend, Jitavatī.' "Dyu was very eager to act in such a way that his wife would consider him to be a great hero. Thus, when she continued to urge him to fulfill her desire, he stole Nandinī with the help of his brothers. Thereafter,
when Vasiṣṭha returned home and saw that his kāmadhenu and its calf were missing, he began to search for them throughout the forest. However, when he could not find Nandini anywhere, the ṛṣi utilized his mystic power and thus came to understand that she had been forcibly taken away by the Vasus. Flaring up with rage, Vasiṣṭha then vented his anger by cursing the Vasus to take birth within human society, and after doing so, he returned to his meditation.

"Soon thereafter, when the Vasus learned of Vasiṣṭha's curse, they hastened to the ṛṣi's āśrama and tried to pacify him with great remorse. Vasiṣṭha refused to retract his words, however, but as a concession, he allowed that the Vasus could quickly become freed from the curse, with the exception of Dyu, who alone would have to live a long life on earth. After this, the Vasus departed, and it was soon thereafter that I met them and agreed to become their earthly mother."

After finishing her narration, Gaṅgādevī left Mahārāja Śantanu, taking her child with her. The king then returned to his palace with an aggrieved heart. Then, later on, as Mahārāja Śantanu was chasing a deer in the forest which had been pierced by his arrow, he came to the banks of the Gaṅgā. There, he noticed that the river had become abnormally shallow and so, out of curiosity, he began to search out the cause. In this way, the king came upon a handsome youth who was checking the flow of the Gaṅgā by means of a celestial weapon. Although Mahārāja Śantanu could not recognize his son, the boy knew his father. However, instead of identifying himself, the wonderful youth quickly clouded Mahārāja Śantanu's perception by means of his power of illusion and then disappeared at once from that place. Then, while considering the matter, Mahārāja Śantanu began to intuitively feel that the boy which he had seen was his own son. Finally, with an anguished heart, he sat down by the riverside and began petitioning Gaṅgādevī as follows with piteous words: "O Goddess, please be merciful unto me. Kindly give me our son so that my dynasty will be extended."

Upon being thus summoned, Gaṅgādevī appeared before Mahārāja Śantanu, carrying her son in her right arm. She then disclosed, "This boy, named Devavrata, is our eighth child. He is already conversant with all kinds of celestial weapons, he has mastered all departments of Vedic knowledge, and he is fully acquainted with the duties of a king. O
foremost of rulers, you should now take charge of your son and protect him very carefully, for in the future he will perform many wonderful feats.”

Thereafter, Mahārāja Śantanu returned to his capital and later on, he installed Devavrata as the heir-apparent to the royal throne. Then, four years later, as Mahārāja Śantanu was hunting in the forest along the banks of the River Yamunā, he perceived an enchantingly sweet smell that immediately aroused his interest. Becoming very curious to find out its cause, the king wandered here and there and then at last he came upon a young and celestially beautiful girl. When Mahārāja Śantanu inquired about her identity, the girl then replied, "My name is Satyavatī and I am engaged in plying a boat on the river in order to serve my father, the leader of the fishermen."

As Mahārāja Śantanu gazed upon Satyavatī's wonderful beauty, which was greatly enhanced by her sweet and amiable smiles, a great longing to have her as his wife welled up in his heart, and so he approached the fisherman in order to obtain his consent. Satyavatī's father was agreeable to the king's proposal, but only on the condition that his daughter's son would become the successor to the royal throne at Hastināpura.

Although the fire of passionate desire for Satyavatī certainly burned within Mahārāja Śantanu's heart, he could not accept this condition due to his staunch affection for his son, Devavrata. Thus, it was with a heavy heart that the disappointed king returned to his capital, his mind continually dwelling upon the beautiful daughter of the fisherman.

Thereafter, Mahārāja Śantanu began to morosely pass his time in his palace. His despondent mood was clearly visible, and so one day his son approached him and inquired, "My dear father, you look so pale and emaciated, and you seem to have lost all enthusiasm for life. Please tell me the cause of your great unhappiness so that I may try to do something to remedy the situation."

Mahārāja Śantanu replied, "My dear Devavrata, my melancholy is due to the fact that I have only one son. If you were somehow killed, then the great Bhārata dynasty would come to an end."

By saying this, Mahārāja Śantanu hid the real cause of his grief.
However, Devavrata knew that there must be something that his father did not disclose, and so he approached the chief minister and inquired from him about his father's despondency. In reply, the devoted minister explained to Devavrata how Mahārāja Śantanu desired to marry Satyavatī, but was unwilling to do so because of her father's demand that her son must become the next king. After hearing this, Devavrata took some companions and went to see the fisherman in order to beg for his daughter on his father's behalf. The fisherman received the Kuru prince with great respect and after hearing his petition, he replied, "My beautiful daughter has been sought after by many great personalities. Indeed, I even turned down the celestial sage Asita when he came here to request Satyavatī's hand in marriage. Still, I would be very honored to give her to Mahārāja Śantanu except for the fact that you would later on become the rival of her son."

Devavrata was very anxious to help his father and so after hearing the fisherman's words he made the following solemn vow: "I hereby promise that I shall never accept the royal throne. Therefore, you can rest assured that your grandson will become the next Kaurava king."

The fisherman was still doubtful, however, and so he replied, "That is all very good. However, there is still the possibility that your son might claim proprietorship of the throne, in spite of your refusal."

At this, Devavrata further promised, "From this day onward I will take the vow of unbroken brahmacharya. Thus, I will never beget a child throughout the entire duration of my life."

When the fisherman heard this, the hair on his body stood up due to great wonder and delight, and he immediately agreed to bestow his daughter upon Mahārāja Śantanu. At that time, the demigods showered profuse flowers upon Devavrata's head, and then exclaimed, "This boy truly deserves the name Bhīṣma (the terrible), for he had undertaken an awesome vow for the sake of his father."

Thereafter, Bhīṣma escorted Satyavatī back to Hastināpura and while presenting her to his father, he explained all that had happened. Mahārāja Śantanu was extremely pleased with his son and so, as a reward, he granted him the benediction of never having to die against his own will.

Thus, Śantanu and Satyavatī were married and thereafter, in due course
of time, Citrāṅgadā was born and then another son, Vicitravīrya. Mahārāja Śantānu passed away before Vicitravīrya had attained maturity, and at Satyavatī's command, Bhīṣma installed Citrāṅgadā upon the royal throne. Then, one day, when the Gandharva king Citrāṅgadā saw the unrivaled prowess of his namesake, he approached the king of the Kūrus and challenged him to fight. Thus, at Kurukṣetra, on the banks of the River Sarasvatī, the two Citrāṅgadās fought fiercely for three years before the Gandharva king emerged victorious. Bhīṣma dutifully performed the funeral rites for his half-brother, and then he installed Vicitravīrya upon the royal throne at Hastināpura. Actually, due to Vicitravīrya's minor age, Bhīṣma was ruling over the Kūru kingdom under the direction of his step-mother Satyavatī. Then, when Vicitravīrya reached maturity, Bhīṣma wanted to arrange for his marriage. Thus, when he heard that the three beautiful daughters of the king of Kāśī would be married at the same svayāṁvara, he went there after taking permission from Satyavatī. Then, as the names of the various kings and princes who were present there were being announced, Bhīṣma suddenly took all three girls upon his chariot by force and announced to the assembly, "If any of you think that you are able to do so, then I challenge you to try and stop me from kidnapping these girls. You should know that with regards to the eight styles of marriage, the wife who is obtained by force after having vanquished all opponents become especially dear."

As Bhīṣma proceeded to speed away on his chariot, the assembled kings angrily got up from their seats in order to put on their armor and pick up their weapons. Then, when their chariots were hastily brought before them, these kings set out to pursue Bhīṣma, and thus a furious battle soon took place. Although many great warriors simultaneously showered their arrows upon him, Bhīṣma was able to check them. Then, as the Kūru prince began cutting off his enemies' heads by the hundreds, the survivors quickly dispersed in all directions. Bhīṣma then proceeded on, but suddenly Śālva rushed forward and challenged him to a single combat. At this, Bhīṣma angrily turned to meet Śālva and within a matter of moments he killed his horses and driver and then allowed him to go free with his life. In this way, Bhīṣma was able to bring the three daughters of Kāśīrāja
back to Hastināpura as an offering to his half-brother, Vicitravīrya. Then, while Bhīṣma was arranging the marriage ceremony, the eldest daughter of Kāšī, named Ambā, approached him and said, "I have already given my heart to Śālva and similarly, he has fixed his mind upon me. Therefore, I beg that you do not force me to marry Vicitravīrya."

After hearing this, Bhīṣma consulted with some brāhmaṇas and then gave Ambā permission to go wherever she pleased. Thereafter, Vicitravīrya married the other two sisters, whose names were Ambikā and Ambālikā. However, after his marriage, Vicitravīrya became very lusty, and so he spent practically all of his time enjoying the company of his beautiful wives. Finally, after passing seven years in this way, Vicitravīrya was attacked by the dreadful disease tuberculosis, although he was still in the prime of his youth. As a result, in spite of all the attempts which his relatives made to cure him, Vicitravīrya at last succumbed to death. This tragedy plunged Bhīṣma deep into the ocean of grief, and under the direction of Satyavatī, he performed his brother's funeral rites. Satyavatī was also overwhelmed with sorrow because of the death of her last son, but still, she tried her best to console her two daughters-in-law. Satyavatī then told Bhīṣma, "The Kuru race now depends entirely upon you, for you are the last surviving male member. I therefore want you to beget children upon your step-brother's widows. Then, after doing so, you may also marry and ascend the royal throne in order to rule over the kingdom."

Although this request was in line with virtue, Bhīṣma replied, "My dear mother, please remember the vow which I had made at the time of your marriage to Mahārāja Śantanu. I will never renounce truth, even though the earth may give up its quality of scent and the water its quality of moisture."

Satyavatī then argued, "This is a grave emergency, and so you must act in such a way that our dynasty will continue."

Thereafter, Bhīṣma very deeply pondered over the means by which his family line could be continued without his forgoing his vow of brahmacharya. Finally, he came to a conclusion, and to illustrate his point, he narrated the following ancient histories that showed what could be done in such an emergency:
"My dear mother, after Lord Paraśurāma had annihilated the kṣatriya class twenty-one times, the kṣatriya ladies begot children by having connection with the brāhmaṇas. The children that these women bore were then raised by the brāhmaṇas, and in this way, the seemingly extinct kṣatriya line was revived.

"Long before this, there was a rṣī named Utathya, whose wife, Mamatā, was very dear to him. Then, once, Brhaspati, the younger brother of Utathya, became overwhelmed with desire for enjoying sexual intercourse with Mamatā, and so he approached her in that way. Mamatā tried to dissuade Brhaspati by informing him that she was already pregnant due to connection with her husband. However, since he was so overwhelmed by lust, Brhaspati could not be deterred, and so he forcibly began to impregnate her. At this, the child who was lying within Mamatā's womb begged Brhaspati, 'Please give up this sinful act! There is not room enough in this womb for two embryos, and since I have occupied it first, you should not try to impregnate my mother again.'

"Brhaspati ignored the child's plea, however, and thus continued his sexual assault until his urge was gratified. The child in the womb was able to render the discharged semen ineffective, however, and when he understood this, Brhaspati very angrily cursed him to be born blind. Thus, after birth, Mamatā's child was named Dīrghatama, or 'one who was developed in darkness.'

"In spite of this handicap, Dīrghatama became very learned, and thus he was able to marry a very beautiful young brāhmaṇa girl named Pradvesi. However, it so happened that the sons which Dīrghatama begot were all very frivolous and greedy by nature. Then when he became quite old, Dīrghatama' wife became hateful toward him, and thus his household life at last became unbearable. With great agitation, Dīrghatama questioned his wife about her attitude, and so she replied, 'Since you are now old and blind, you can no longer do anything to support or protect me. Therefore, I will not endeavor to serve you anymore as I formerly did.'

"Upon hearing these impudent words, Dīrghatama became very angry and in a fit of rage, he laid down the following Vedic injunction: 'Let it be from this time onward that women will be allowed to adhere to only
one husband! Whether he be dead or alive, she cannot have connection with any other man without being considered fallen!

"When Pradvesi heard this, she also became enraged and so, in retaliation, she commanded her sons to throw her husband into the river. In accordance with this order, the wicked brothers prepared a raft and then tied Dirghatama to it and set him afloat on the waters of the Ganga. The old man thus proceeded to drift along with the current, and in this way he gradually passed through various lands. Then, one day, a king named Vali saw the raft approaching as he was engaged in performing his religious duties on the riverbank. Vali rescued the old man from his plight, and then, when he learned of Dirghatama's exalted lineage, the king requested him to beget children upon his wife, Sudeșṭa, since he himself had never been successful. Dirghatama agreed to the proposal, and so Vali sent the Queen to his room that night. However, when Sudeșṭa saw how old and decrepit the blind rṣi was, she could not bear the thought of embracing him and so she sent her śūdra nurse instead. In this way, eleven sons were produced but then, later on, when Vali saw the children, he had some doubts, and so he inquired about the matter from Dirghatama. The rṣi then explained the Queen's fault and so thereafter, Vali once again sent Sudeșṭa and this time, the rṣi begot five sons merely by touching the Queen."

In this way, Bhīṣma cited two examples of how family lines were continued by inviting brāhmaṇas to beget children upon kṣatriya women. Bhīṣma then said, "My dear mother, I will now leave the matter up to you. However, it is my suggestion that we request a brāhmaṇa to beget children upon the two widows of Vicitravirya."

When Satyavatī heard this, she remembered her own past and began to smile bashfully. Then, after expressing her approval of Bhīṣma's plan, she said, "I had also begotten a glorious son by accepting the fond embraces of a similarly great personality. I have carefully guarded this secret all along but now I shall disclose the truth to you. Once, before my marriage to Mahārāja Śantanu, the great rṣi Parāśara became enamored by my feminine beauty and as a result of our union, Vyāsadeva was born. After birth, as my son prepared to depart for the forest, he told me, 'Just think of me whenever you are in difficulty and I shall appear before you at once.' O Bhīṣma, I think that Vyāsadeva
Bhīṣma highly approved of this idea, and hereafter, when Satyavatī began to meditate upon Vyāsadeva with a concentrated mind, the son of Parāśara instantly appeared before her. Then, as Satyavatī bathed him with her tears while fondly embracing him, Vyāsadeva assured her that he was ready to fulfill the purpose for which he was called. Satyavatī then seated her son, and after making the usual inquiries, she said, "Due to the death of my husband and two sons as well, and because of Bhīṣma's vow to never marry, the Kuru dynasty is in danger of becoming extinct. O Dvaipāyana, since you are my eldest and only remaining son, I now request you to beget children through Vicitravīrya's widows so that our line may continue."

Vyāsadeva then replied, "My dear mother, I accept your proposal, for it is consonant with virtue. Still, the two widows must first undergo austerities for one year, since no woman should approach me like this without having completed rigid vows."

Satyavatī was very anxious and impatient, however, and so she urged, "My dear son, please act so that the girls may conceive immediately, for without a proper king, a kingdom remains in a precarious condition."

Finally, Vyāsadeva relented, saying, "Alright, if the ladies are able to bear the dirtiness of my body and dress, my strong odor, and my overall grim appearance, then that certainly can be counted as their austerity. My dear mother, if the two widows agree to accept my embraces, then the children which they conceive will come to be great personalities. Go now and order Ambikā that when her time for conception arrives, she must wait for me in her bedroom. At that time, make sure that she dresses herself in clean clothes and is adorned with nice ornaments."

After saying this, Vyāsadeva disappeared from that place. Satyavatī then went to Ambikā, and it was only with great difficulty that she was able to convince her to take part in her plan. Thereafter, when Ambikā's time for conception arrived, Satyavatī had her bathed and nicely dressed. Then, after leading Ambikā to her sleeping room, Satyavatī said, "The elder brother of your deceased husband will come here tonight in order to beget a child in your womb. Therefore, you
must make sure that you await his arrival without falling asleep."

As Ambikā lay in her bed that night, she passed the time imagining what kind of man would visit her that night. Indeed, with a heavily beating heart, Ambikā expected that she would soon be engaged in amorous love with a great kṣatriya hero. Then, while Ambikā was thinking in this way, Vyāsadeva suddenly entered her room, and when she saw his matted hair, grizzly beard and blazing eyes, she closed her eyes out of fright. Even as Vyāsadeva proceeded to inject his semen into her womb, Ambikā did not dare open her eyes even once to look at her sexual partner. Then, when Vyāsadeva left Ambikā's bedroom after having finished his business, he found Satyavaté anxiously waiting for him in order to find out what had happened. At that time, Vyāsadeva informed his mother, "The son which I have given Ambikā will be endowed with the strength of 10,000 elephants. In addition, he will have great intelligence and become very learned. He will himself produce 100 sons. However, due to the fault of his mother, this glorious son will be born blind."

At this Satyavatī exclaimed, "A blind son cannot become the king! O foremost of ṛṣis, you should produce one more son, otherwise, our whole intention is frustrated!"

Vyāsadeva agreed to beget another son and then departed. Thereafter, in due course of time, Ambikā gave birth to her blind son. Satyavatī approached Ambālikā and convinced her to unite with her deceased husband's elder brother. As with Ambikā, when her time for conception arrived, Ambālikā had expectations of receiving the affections of a powerful and handsome kṣatriya. Thus, when Vyāsadeva entered her bedroom for the purpose of having sexual relations, upon seeing his unkempt appearance, she became pale with fright. Later that night, when Vyāsadeva came out of Ambālikā's bedroom, he once again found Satyavatī eagerly awaiting him. This time, Vyāsadeva said, "Because of her fault, the son I have given Ambālikā will have an exceptionally pale complexion, and thus he will receive the name Pāṇḍu."

Because of this, Satyavatī was still not completely satisfied, and so she begged her son to produce just one more child. As before, Vyāsadeva agreed and then departed. Thereafter, in due course of time, Ambālikā
gave birth to the pale complexioned son who was endowed with all auspicious bodily symptoms. Then, when Ambikā's time for conception arrived once again, Satyavatī approached her and requested that she have sexual intercourse once more with Vyāsadeva. Out of duty, Ambikā consented, but later on, when she thought about the ṛṣī's grim appearance and strong bodily odor, she solicited her beautiful maidservant to take her place. Thus, when Vyāsadeva was summoned by Satyavatī and then entered Ambikā's room, he found that he was very respectfully received by the śūdrāṇī. Vyāsadeva was very pleased by her submissive and amiable behavior however, and so, at the conclusion of their union, he informed her, "Your son will be very fortunate, and he will come to be known as the most intelligent man on earth."

Thereafter, as previously, Vyāsadeva found Satyavatī anxiously awaiting him. He informed her of how he had been deceived by Ambikā and had thus begotten a son upon her śūdra maidservant. After saying this, Vyāsadeva suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from the sight of his mother.

This son of Vyāsadeva by a maidservant was actually Yamarāja, who was forced to take birth as a śūdra due to the curse of Māṇḍavya Muni. This great ṛṣī used to perform austerities by observing a vow of silence while sitting at the entrance of his cottage with both arms raised above his head. After Māṇḍavya Muni had been sitting in that way for a number of years, it so happened that one day some thieves entered his āśrama after stealing some wealth, and out of fear, they began to hide there. Soon thereafter, the agents of the king came there in pursuit of the thieves, and they asked Māṇḍavya Muni if he knew of their whereabouts. In order to keep his vow, however, the ṛṣī remained silent. Thereafter, when the king's men found the thieves concealed within his āśrama, they arrested him as well, considering him to be an accomplice in the crime.

Thereafter, when the culprits were brought before him, the king ordered that all of them be executed, including the ṛṣī. However, when the officers carried out the king's command and pierced Māṇḍavya Muni with a lance, the ṛṣī miraculously did not die due to the power of his austerity. Then, while remaining tied to the stake, Māṇḍavya Muni summoned some other ṛṣīs who quickly came there in the form of birds.
When those ṛṣis asked him why he had been punished so severely, Māṇḍavaya Muni replied, "This must certainly be the result of a past sinful act."

Meanwhile, the officers went and informed the king of how the ṛṣi did not die, in spite of being pierced by their lance. The king then consulted with his ministers and in accordance with their good advice, he went to Māṇḍavaya Muni and begged to be pardoned for his great offense. In this way, Māṇḍavaya Muni became pacified by the king's genuine repentance. Then, when the king tried to extract the lance from Māṇḍavaya Muni's body, he was unable to do so, in spite of his best efforts. At last, the astonished king simply cut off the lance at the point where it had entered the ṛṣi's body. Thus, when Māṇḍavaya Muni departed, he retained the portion of the lance which was immovably lodged within his body.

Māṇḍavaya Muni went back to performing austerities and then, later on, it so happened that he once journeyed to the abode of Yamarāja. When he came before the lord of death who was seated upon his opulent throne, the ṛṣi took the opportunity to inquire, "O Lord, what sinful act did I commit in the past so as to be punished so severely by the king?" Yamarāja replied, "O ṛṣi, you once pierced an insect with a sharp blade of grass and thus as a reaction, you were pierced in a similar way."

Māṇḍavaya then asked, "At what age had I committed this sinful act?" When Yamarāja informed Māṇḍavaya Muni that he had pierced the insect as a child, the ṛṣi became very angry and responded, "The punishment which you had inflicted upon me was disproportionate to the sin committed, especially when you consider that the killing of a brāhmaṇa is the most sinful of all actions. For this foolishness, I hereby curse you to be born as a śūdra upon the earth! In addition, from this day onward, I order that any sin which is committed by a person below the age of fourteen will not be subject to reaction."

After the births of the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the pale Pāṇḍu, and the intelligent Vidura, the Kuru kingdom remained under the rule of Bhīṣma, and because it was so peaceful and prosperous, it appeared as if Satya-yuga had set in. Actually, the people were so contented under Bhīṣma's rule that citizens of other kingdoms used to give up their homes and come to Hastināpura in order to live under his protection. Bhīṣma
personally raised Vyāsadeva's three sons as if they were his very own, and because of his careful attention, they all grew up to be very well educated in all fields of knowledge, including the science of morality. Pāṇḍu excelled in archery, Dhṛtarāṣṭra was distinguished for his great personal strength, and Vidura became very highly qualified in terms of virtue and wisdom.

When the three boys became grown up, Pāṇḍu was installed as king because Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura were disqualified on account of blindness and a śūdra birth, respectively. Then, one day, Bhīṣma approached Vidura and suggested the names of three girls whose families he felt to be suitable for becoming allied with the Kuru race through marriage. Vidura was agreeable to whatever his uncle thought best, and so Bhīṣma first of all sent a messenger to Subala, the king of Gāndhāra, asking that his daughter be given in marriage to Dhātarāñöra. The princess Gāndhārē had received a benediction from Lord Śiva that she would give birth to 100 sons, and besides this, she was very exalted in character. Thus, at first, Subala hesitated to give such a highly qualified girl in marriage to a blind man. Finally, however, he gave his consent on account of the great prestige which the Kuru dynasty enjoyed. When Gāndhārē heard that she was to be married to a blind man, she voluntarily covered her own eyes with wrappings of cloth, just to follow her future husband's destiny.

Subala's son, Śakuni, then brought Gāndhārē to Hastināpura and the marriage took place with great pomp under Bhīṣma's direction. After the wedding, Śakuni returned home, and Gāndhārē soon pleased her superiors very highly by her gentle nature and good behavior. Gāndhārē was the ideal chaste wife, and in her speech she would never even refer to any other man than her husband or her superiors.

The Yadu king, Śūrasenā, who was the father of Vasudeva, also had a daughter named Pṛthā that was unrivaled in terms of beauty. Out of friendship, Śūrasenā gave Pṛthā to the childless Kuntibhoja, who was the son of his paternal aunt (cousin) so that he could raise her as his own daughter. Therefore, Pṛthā also became known as Kuntī, and in her youth she pleased the great sage Durvāsā Muni by her meticulous service. Foreseeing that Kuntī's future-husband would meet with an
untimely death, Durvāsā granted her the benediction of being able to summon any of the demigods for the purpose of begetting children. Although Kuntī was exquisitely beautiful and possessed of all good qualities, it so happened that when she reached marriageable age, no king came forward to ask for her hand in marriage. Kuntibhoja thus arranged for his foster-daughter's svayamvara and invited numerous kings and princes to attend. Then, when Kuntī entered the assembly and saw how the splendrous Pāṇḍu outshone all the other kṣatriyas, she became very agitated at heart. While quivering with emotion and bending her head downward due to shyness, Kuntī approached her chosen one and placed the marriage garland around his neck. The other kings who were present there then returned home without a fight, and the marriage of Pāṇḍu and Kuntī was joyfully performed by Kuntibhoja. Some time after Pāṇḍu's return to Hastināpura along with his newly-wedded wife, Bhīṣma desired that he should have a second queen. For this purpose, Bhīṣma took his army and ministers and went to visit Śalya, the king of Madras. Śalya provided Bhīṣma with a royal reception and then, when the two were comfortably seated together, he asked the Kuru hero to disclose the purpose of his visit. Bhīṣma then said, "I have come here in the hopes of obtaining your sister for becoming Pāṇḍu's second wife."
Śalya then replied, "It is our family tradition that we give a girl in marriage only after receiving gifts and great wealth in return."
Bhīṣma was prepared for this and so, after presenting Śalya much gold and jewels and many valuable animals as well, he took Mādrī back to Hastināpura. At an auspicious moment, Mādrī was wedded to Pāṇḍu, and thereafter, the Kuru king began to enjoy himself to the limit of his desires in the company of his two beautiful wives. Then, just thirty days after marrying Mādrī, Pāṇḍu left Hastināpura along with his army for the purpose of conquering over all directions. The mighty Pāṇḍu proceeded to vanquish many heroic kings in battle, and after thus subjugating numerous kingdoms, he became regarded by all as the greatest monarch on earth. Then, when Pāṇḍu finally returned to Hastināpura, the citizens welcomed him with great satisfaction, for they considered him to be equal in all respects to his great ancestors, Śantanu and Bhārata.
Under the instruction of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu offered the immense wealth that he had collected during his conquest to Bhīṣma, his two mothers, his grandmother Satyavatī, and Vidura. Then some time thereafter, Pāṇḍu permanently retired to the forest along with his two wives. During this time, Dhṛtarāṣṭra used to send servants to his younger brother, bearing all kinds of enjoyable articles so that he could pass his time happily in the forest. Meanwhile, Bhīṣma came to hear that King Devaka had a very beautiful daughter who was born from a śūdra wife. He then arranged for this girl to be brought to Hastināpura in order to become Vidura's wife. Thus, Vidura was also maintained in royal style, and through his wife he begot many children.

One day during this period, Vyāsadeva happened to come as a visitor to the house of Gāndhārī. The ṛṣi was exceedingly hungry and exhausted and so, when Gāndhārī offered him a very nice reception, he became highly pleased and granted her the benediction of having 100 powerful sons. Then, some time later, Gāndhārī became pregnant from her husband, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and she continued to bear the embryo within her womb for two full years without there being any sign of delivery. This naturally made Gāndhārī very anxious and then, when she heard that Kuntī had already given birth to a glorious son, she became almost mad with jealousy. Due to envy and anger, Gāndhārī lost all reason and in a fit of impatience, she struck her abdomen with her fist. As a result, a mass of flesh that was hard like an iron ball came out from her womb. Then, as Gāndhārī was just about to throw it away in disgust, Vyāsadeva suddenly appeared before her and said, "My dear daughter-in-law, what is it that you have done?"

In reply, Gāndhārī frankly explained, "Due to jealousy of Kuntī's good fortune, I became so upset that I angrily struck my stomach with my fist. Now, since this useless ball of flesh has come out of my womb, I can understand that the benediction which you had given me is of no value!" Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear Gāndhārī, my words can never prove futile. Bring me 100 clay pots and in the meantime, sprinkle some cool water over this ball of flesh."

Miraculously, as soon as Gāndhārī began to sprinkle water as directed by Vyāsadeva, the ball of flesh gradually began dividing into 100 parts, each
the size of a thumb. These were then placed into clay pots which were filled with *ghee* and then stored in a secluded place. Finally, Vyāsadeva instructed Gāndhārī to remove the coverings of the pots only after the passing of two full years and after saying this, he departed for the Himālayas.

Thus it came to be that after two years had elapsed, Duryodhana was born from one of the fleshly parts, and the news was quickly conveyed to Bhīṣma and Vidura. As soon as Duryodhana came out of the clay pot, he began to bray like an ass, and upon hearing this sound, all of the asses, crows, vultures and jackals responded with their respective cries. Along with this uproar, violent winds began to blow and numerous other evil omens were clearly visible.

Yudhiṣṭhira had already been born to Kuntī, and it so happened that Bhīma was born on the same day as Duryodhana. Dhṛtarāṣṭra became very fearful upon hearing his son bray like a donkey, and so he anxiously summoned Bhīma and Vidura as well as many learned *brāhmaṇas*. He then inquired, "O learned personalities, Yudhiṣṭhira is certainly the eldest Kuru prince, and he is thus the rightful inheritor of the royal throne. Still, I want to know whether my son will ever get the chance to become the king after the son of Kuntī."

As soon as these words were spoken, jackals began to howl, and, after taking note of this, Vidura and the learned *brāhmaṇas* replied, "O King, the aggregate of fearful omens which we perceive surely indicates that your son will become the exterminator of your dynasty. You had better abandon your son without hesitation for the welfare of the world."

However, due to staunch paternal affection, Dhṛtarāṣṭra was not able to accept the good advice of Vidura and the *brāhmaṇas*. Then, within a period of one month, the rest of Gāndhārī's 100 sons were born, as well as one daughter. During Gāndhārī's pregnancy, Dhṛtarāṣṭra had also begotten another son named Yuyutsu by having connection with a *vaiśya* maidservant. It was already explained that the lump of flesh which had come out of Gāndhārī's womb became divided into 100 parts. Thus, one may wonder how a daughter could have been born along with the 100 sons. What had happened was that just at the time when Vyāsadeva was engaged in sprinkling water over the lump of flesh and dividing it into 100 parts, Gāndhārī began to feel within her heart the
affection that a mother has toward her daughter. Understanding this, Vyāsadeva decided to fulfill Gāndhārī's desire and so, after dividing the ball of flesh into 100 parts, he informed her that there was still one more remaining which was meant for becoming her daughter. Vyāsadeva then called for another clay pot filled with ghee and thus, it came to be that Gāndhārī's daughter Duḥśalā was born. Being the last to emerge from the clay pots, Duḥśalā was younger than her brothers, and later on, Dhṛtarāṣṭra gave her in marriage to Jayadratha.

Many years before this, as Pāṇḍu was roaming in the forest one day, he happened to come upon a large deer that was sexually united with its mate. Being addicted to hunting Pāṇḍu immediately took up his bow and then pierced the male deer with five arrows. As the deer fell to the ground, however, it cried out in pain just like a human being. Indeed, as Pāṇḍu approached it, the dying deer reproached him by saying, "O wicked king, how have you learned such cruel and abominable behavior?"

Pāṇḍu then harshly replied, "O foolish creature, you must know that ksatriyas engage in killing deer without any kind of moral consideration. Therefore, why do you find fault with me?"

At this, the deer responded, "I am not criticizing you for your act of killing a deer, but for slaying me as I was engaged in enjoying sexual intercourse, which is so agreeable to all living creatures. O King, you should also know that I am not actually a deer, but the ṛṣī Kindama. I have been enjoying with my wife in the form of a deer because I feel too modest to indulge in sexual intercourse in the human form. Nevertheless, since you have been so cruel as to kill me as I was relishing this most pleasurable moment, I hereby curse you so that the next time you approach your wife under the influence of sexual desire, you will also die and your wife will follow you by ascending the funeral pyre."

After saying this, the ṛṣī gave up his life and thereafter, Pāṇḍu and his wives wept bitterly, being plunged into despair. While remembering how his mother's husband Vicitravīrya had also perished due to being too lusty, Pāṇḍu began to condemn his passionate nature. Indeed, he made up his mind to renounce all material life and attain salvation by living a life of a strict brahmacarya. While thinking in this way, Pāṇḍu
suddenly announced, "I will shave my head and give up all connection with my wives. Becoming completely indifferent to all material conditions, I shall maintain myself by begging and always act for the welfare of all living entities."

When Kunti and Madri heard Pandu speak like this, they tearfully begged him to allow them to accompany him in his life of austerity. Then, at last, Pandu agreed that they could remain with him while he followed a life of strict ṛṣaṇa-ṛṣṭha. He first of all gave away all of his ornaments to the brahmanas and then he sent his attendant back to Hastinapura to inform his relatives about his intention. When Dhrtarastra thus heard about Pandu's curse and subsequent resolution, he wept bitterly out of brotherly affection. However, there was really nothing lamentable because it came to pass that Pandu attained the piowess of a brahmaṛṣi due to his performance of great austerity. Indeed, because of his rigid vows, Pandu became a beloved favorite of all the ṛṣis, Caranas and Siddhas who resided in the surrounding forest.

Then, one day, the ṛṣis assembled together in order to start on a journey to Brahma-loka, where a meeting was being held of all the demigods and great sages. When Pandu saw this, he also wanted to accompany the ṛṣis along with his wives. However, when the sages learned of Pandu's intention, they warned him that while ascending the Himalayas they would come to celestial regions and also encounter barren and snow-bound places which were accessible only by ṛṣis or Siddhas. In this way, the ṛṣis begged Pandu to give up his intention, and further warned him that his wives would surely not be able to survive the journey. Then, in reply, Pandu gave vent to his real grief as follows: "O Sages, because I do not have a son, after my death I will surely perish along with all of my ancestors. I have already fulfilled three kinds of debts: I have appeased the demigods by performing sacrifices; I have satisfied the ṛṣis by practicing austerity, meditation and by studying the Vedas; and I have repaid the living beings in general by living a moral and inoffensive life. However, since I have not fulfilled my obligation to my forefathers by begetting a son, my access to the heavenly regions has become blocked. My dear sages, just as Srida Vyasa-deva was invited to beget children upon my mother, I now request you to arrange that my wives may also bear sons."
In reply, the ṛṣis assured Pāṇḍu that he would certainly have exalted sons, and they encouraged him to summon a suitable person for that purpose. Pāṇḍu then called for Kuntī and ordered her to beget children by having connection with another man who she considered to be his equal or superior. In order to convince Kuntī that this act would be in the line of virtue, Pāṇḍu then cited the following incident. "There was once a kṣatriya named Saradandayana, whose daughter had been ordered by her husband to beget children by soliciting another man. After receiving this command from her lord, Saradandayana's daughter took a bath and then went out that night to a place where four roads met. Soon, she saw a brāhmaṇa possessing great ascetic merit come there, and so she begged him to give her offspring. The brāhmaṇa consented, and as a result of their connection, she gave birth to three heroic sons in due course of time.

"My dear Kuntī, you should act in a similar manner so that I may be saved from the precarious position I have been put into on account of having no heir."

However, Kuntī replied, "I shall never be willing to accept the embraces of another man. My dear husband, please listen as I narrate to you a story about King Vyūṣitaśva of the Pūru dynasty. Once, while Mahārāja Vyūṣitaśva was performing a sacrifice, the demigods and celestial ṛṣis personally came to accept his offerings. Then, after becoming intoxicated by drinking the soma-rasa and being highly pleased with the king for his profuse presentations, the demigods began to perform the functions of the sacrifice themselves. Thus, by dint of this sacrifice, Vyūṣitaśva became very powerful. Thereafter, he extracted vast amounts of wealth from subordinate kings in all directions and then performed the āsvamedha-yajña and other even greater sacrifices. However, since Vyūṣitaśva was overly attached to his wife, Bhadrā, due to excessive sexual indulgence with her, he was attacked with tuberculosis and then died within ten days.

"The childless Bhadrā became overwhelmed with grief upon the death of her husband, and she greatly lamented the fate of a widow. Indeed, while frantically clasping the dead body of Vyūṣitaśva, Bhadrā piteously begged him to return to her again and again. Then, all of a sudden, the unembodied voice of her husband miraculously announced, 'Get up my
dear wife, for I shall grant you whatever benediction you may desire.' "Bhadrā then requested, 'O Lord, please give me offspring for I am now without anyone to protect me.' 'Then, in reply, the voice of her husband instructed, 'On the eighth or fourteenth night of the moon, as you are lying down on your bed, I will come and beget a child upon you.' "Bhadrā awaited her husband on those days, and it actually happened that the corpse of Mahārāja Vyūṣitaśva came and begot seven sons within her womb." Kuntī then said, "My dear husband, you should act in a similarly miraculous way by employing the power of your ascetic merit. This is more noble than requesting me to accept the embraces of another man." Pāṇḍu did not deny his ability to perform miracles, but still, he continued to argue as follows: "My dear Kuntī, formerly, women used to roam about freely, enjoying themselves as they pleased. They were not confined to the house, nor were they dependent upon a husband or other relatives. And yet, although these women did not remain faithful to any particular man, this was not considered sinful, just as it is in the society of birds and animals. Previously, this was the standard of morality, and it was sanctioned by the great rṣis. Indeed, even now, such behavior is prevalent amongst the women of the Northern Kurus. In fact, the practice of having women confined to one husband has been introduced only recently. My dear wife, please listen now as I relate to you just how this came about:

"There was once a rṣi named Udālaka, and he had a son named Śvetaketu. One day, a brāhmaṇa came to the place where this father and son were staying, and in their very presence he took Śvetaketu's mother by the hand and declared, 'You are coming with me!' "When Śvetaketu saw his mother being dragged away by force without even objecting, he flared up with rage. Udālaka then tried to pacify him by saying, 'My dear son, do not be angry. It is the custom that women are free to do as they like.' "However, Śvetaketu highly disapproved of this and so he made the following declaration which established the present standard of morality: 'From this day on, a woman must remain faithful to her husband, and if she does not, then she will have to suffer for her sinful behavior. Only if the husband offers his wife to another
man for begetting children in consideration of his own inability, can she
have relations with someone else. And, if she refuses, then that
disobedience will also be considered sinful.'
"My dear Kuntīdevī remember how Kalmāśapāda ordered his wife
Madayantī to engage in sexual intercourse with the great sage Vasiṣṭha
and thus Aśmaka was born. Even my own birth was made possible
because my mother agreed to have union with Śrīla Vyāsa-deva.
Therefore, my dear wife, you should follow my instructions and beget
children by having connection with some superior personality."

Kuntī could see that her husband was determined to convince her to
have children by inviting someone to impregnate her. Thus, in reply,
she decided to disclose the following incident from her youth which she
had always very carefully kept secret: "My dear husband, before our
marriage, my step-father, Kuntibhoja, used to engage me in providing
hospitality to his brāhmaṇa guests. Once, Durvāsa Muni came to our
palace and when he became fully satisfied with my service, he awarded
me with a mantra whereby I could call for any of the demigods in order
to beget offspring. Therefore, my lord, if I must have children by
someone other than you, I suggest that I call for the principal demigods."
Pāṇḍu desired to have a very virtuous son and so as Kuntī awaited his
command, he replied, "This is an excellent proposal! If you are actually
able to do so, then I would like you to summon Dharmarāja, the lord
of justice."
Gāndhārī's conception had progressed one year when Kuntī called for
Yamarāja and requested him to give her a son. Thereafter, when Kuntī's
baby was born, a voice from the sky miraculously announced, "This child
shall be named Yudhiṣṭhīra. He will become the most virtuous of all
persons and he will come to rule the entire earth as its emperor."
Some time thereafter, Pāṇḍu requested Kuntī to beget a child of superior
strength and so she called for the god of wind, Vāyu. By the strength of
the mantra which Durvāsa had given to Kuntīdevī, Vāyu suddenly
appeared and so she requested, "O Lord, please give me a son who is
superior in stature and prowess so that he will be able to humble the
pride of everyone."
Vāyu gave his consent and thereafter, when Kuntī's baby was born, a
voice form the sky proclaimed, "This child shall be named Bhāma and he will become the foremost of persons endowed with superhuman strength."

One day soon thereafter, Kuntī fearfully jumped up from her seat after seeing a tiger nearby. Since she had forgotten that her newborn child was lying asleep upon her lap, the baby fell down upon the rocky mountain-peak where she had been sitting.

And yet, although little baby Bhāma's body wasn't even slightly bruised, the gigantic rock which he fell upon shattered into one hundred pieces.

Then, after some time, Pāṇḍu desired to have a child who would become exceptionally famous and capable of vanquishing all others on the battlefield, and thus he concluded that Indra would be the proper father. Indeed, Pāṇḍu became determined to perform severe austerities in order to please the king of heaven. For this purpose, he ordered Kuntī to observe an auspicious vow for one year while he began to stand on one leg from morning to evening while practicing other severe penances.

Finally, after a long time, Indra appeared before Pāṇḍu and announced, "O descendent of Bhārata, rest assured that your austerities will bear fruit. By my grace you will obtain a greatly celebrated son who will become irresistible in battle."

Thereafter, Pāṇḍu ordered Kuntī to invoke the king of heaven and thus it came to pass that Arjuna was born. Once again, the celestial voice described to Kuntī the glories to her son and also summarily defined his future heroic pastimes. Indeed, as the celestial messenger spoke, showers of flowers rained down upon the mother and child. Then, a host of celestial sages and demigods came before Kuntī to offer her prayers of glorification. Upon witnessing all of this, the neighboring rṣis became highly astonished and began to wonder much about the influence of Kuntī's sons.

Then, some time later on, when Pāṇḍu desired to have more children, he once again requested Kuntī to invoke one of the chief demigods. However, this time Kuntī refused, saying, "When a woman has intimate relations with five men or more, then she certainly comes to be considered a prostitute."

Soon thereafter, Mādri approached Pāṇḍu in private in order to express her great sorrow. With tears in her eyes, she said, "O my lord, although
both Kuntī and I are your wives, she has given birth to three children whereas I have had none. Kuntī is in that sense my rival and so I am too embarrassed to ask her for the mantra which was given to her by Durvāṣā Muni. However, if you were to approach her on my behalf, then I too could get the chance to beget sons." Pāṇḍu replied, "For a long time I have also wished that you would beget some children by calling upon the demigods. It was only because I did not know your mind that I hesitated to suggest this to you. However, now that you yourself have expressed the desire, I will certainly request Kuntī to share the mantra with you."

Pāṇḍu then went to Kuntī and asked her to allow Mādrī to invoke the demigod of her choice. Kuntī cheerfully agreed and then she approached her co-wife and said, "Just think of some demigod and then chant along with me the mantra which I shall now recite. In this way you will be able to receive a child who resembles his celestial father." Mādrī carefully reflected for a few moments and then meditated upon the twin Asvinikumaras. Without delay, the heavenly physicians then came before Mādrī and after they had each impregnated her they once again disappeared from sight. Then, in due course of time, when the twins Nakula and Sahadeva were born, a celestial voice once again announced their future glories. Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, and then Nakula and Sahadeva were born at one year intervals and each time the local ṛṣis performed the birth ceremonies and gave the children their names. All of the sons of Kuntī and Mādrī possessed celestial beauty and because of this they soon became the favorites of all the neighboring sages and their wives. After some time, Pāṇḍu once again approached Kuntī and requested her to allow Mādrī to have another child. However, this time Kuntī refused and then said, "Before, when I helped Mādrī, she deceived me by calling for two demigods at once. Now, if I once again give her the opportunity, she may try to surpass me by having more sons. O my husband, I therefore beg that you please do not ask me this again on Mādrī's behalf."

Pāṇḍu was very pleased with Kuntī for what she had already done and so he agreed to give up the aspiration for having more children. Thereafter, the spring season arrived, which is so delightful for all living
beings. On one especially pleasant day, Pāṇḍu took the opportunity to enjoy wandering through the charming forest in the company of Mādrī. The trees were filled with all varieties of fruits and a dazzling array of multicolored flowers. The singing birds captivated the ears of all who heard them and the warm sunshine was wonderfully agreeable to the sense of touch. There were also gentle fragrant breezes blowing through the flower-resplendent trees and in this heavenly atmosphere Pāṇḍu could not help but enjoy beholding his beautiful and youthful wife. Mādrī was dressed in semi-transparent cloth, making her feminine features distinctly visible, and thus as Pāṇḍu appreciated her loveliness, the desire for sensual enjoyment flared up prominently within his heart. Indeed, Pāṇḍu soon became overpowered by a strong sexual urge, and under its influence he forcibly caught hold of Mādrī to draw her close to him. While trembling with fear, Mādrī tried to resist her husband to the best of her ability, but soon, Pāṇḍu pressed her tightly in his arms. Having completely forgotten about the rṣī's curse, Pāṇḍu appeared to be seeking Mādrī's embraces with the desire of putting an end to his own life. Then, as soon as the great Kuru hero united with his wife in sexual intercourse, he died.

While clasping Pāṇḍu's lifeless body in her arms, Mādrī began to weep loudly so that Kuntī and the children soon came running to that spot. When Mādrī saw them approach she told Kuntī to leave the boys at a distance. Then, when Kuntī came forward, she was shocked to see the lifeless body of her husband. While becoming almost mad with grief, Kuntī exclaimed, "O wretched woman, how could you dare to tempt Pāṇḍu with sexual allurements, knowing that such behavior would become the cause of his death!?

Mādrī then tearfully replied, "My dear Kuntī, do not speak like this. Quite the contrary, I had resisted Pāṇḍu to the best of my capacity. All of a sudden he seized me with great passion and there was nothing I could do." Kuntī became a little pacified by Mādrī's words and then said, "As the elder wife, I shall now follow my dead husband by ascending his funeral pyre. You can remain here in this miserable world in order to raise our fatherless children."

However, Mādrī pleaded, "Since Pāṇḍu was trying to unite with me but then died before either of us were gratified, I should be the one to follow
him so that I can satisfy his desire. O Kunti, I do not feel capable of raising your children as well as my own. Therefore, I beg that you allow me to be the one who ascends the funeral pyre."

Thus, it came to be that when Pāṇḍu's body was cremated, it was Mādrī who followed her husband by entering the fire whereas Kunti stayed behind in order to bring up the children. Then, after the completion of the funeral ceremonies, the ṛṣis consulted each other and then decided that it was their duty to take Kunti and the five Pāṇḍavas to Hastināpura in order to place them under the care of Bhīṣma and Dhṛtarāśtra. Thus, thousands of ṛṣis set out and before long, they brought the mother and her children to the gates of the Kuru capital.

As a messenger was dispatched by the ṛṣis to inform Dhṛtarāśtra of their arrival, throngs of citizens crowded there just to see the great spectacle. Before long, however, Dhṛtarāśtra, Vidura, Bhīṣma, Satyavatī, Gāndhārī and many of the leading members of the Kurus came out to receive the sages, and Bhīṣma immediately worshipped them with presentations of arghya.

In return, the elderly leader of the ṛṣis elaborately described to Bhīṣma everything about the births of the Pāṇḍavas and, at last, the deaths of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī. The ṛṣis then presented to Bhīṣma the unburnt remnants of the royal couple, and after instructing him to perform certain funeral rites, all of the sages instantly disappeared from everyone's view. Being struck with wonder, the crowd gradually dispersed and then Dhṛtarāśtra ordered Vidura to make preparations for the funeral ceremony.

A sacred spot was first of all selected and then the brāhmaṇas went there, bearing the sacred fire. At that place, the remains of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī were wrapped in fine cloth by family relatives and then sprinkled over with perfumes and decorated with garlands. The funeral pyre was also nicely decorated and then, the remains of the king and queen were placed upon it. A procession then commenced as bearers picked up the funeral pyre and began to carry it upon their shoulders. A white royal umbrella was held overhead and many persons stood on both sides waving cāmaras.

As the funeral procession slowly proceeded, hundreds of friends and family members began to distribute gems and other valuable items to the
crowds of many thousands that followed. Finally, the procession halted at some nice woods on the banks of the Gaṅgā. First of all, water was brought in golden vessels and after the remains had been bathed, they were dressed in new cloth and then smeared over with sandalwood pulp. The funeral pyre was then ignited, and as the remains became engulfed in flames, fragrant substances were thrown into the fire. Lastly, the ceremony of offering the holy water of the Gaṅgā was performed, and thereafter, twelve days of mourning were observed. After that, the śraddhā ceremony was performed and at the conclusion, profuse charity was distributed to the brāhmaṇas.

Vyāsadeva then came to Satyavatī and informed her, "My dear mother, the happy days of the Kuru dynasty have now come to an end. Due to the influence of evil, there will be only troubled times ahead. Therefore, you should go to the forest without delay and absorb yourself in meditation by the practice of yoga. In this way, you will not have to witness the annihilation of your race."

Satyavatī took heed of her exalted son's advice and so soon thereafter, she left for the forest, taking Ambikā and Ambālikā with her. Thereafter, the sons of Pāṇḍu and the sons of Dhārtrāśṭra began passing their growing-up years together, and in the course of their play, the superior strength of the Pāṇḍavas became evident. Bhīma especially surpassed all others in prowess, and he was also the biggest eater, the fastest runner and the best in many other fields. Taking advantage of this, Bhīma became somewhat of a bully and would constantly tease the sons of Dhārtrāśṭra. Sometimes he would catch one of the Dhārtrāśṭras by the hair and then drag him along the ground while laughing hysterically. Indeed, Bhīma could not understand the consequences of his boisterousness, but the unfortunate sons of Dhārtrāśṭra would sometimes have their bones broken in the process. Actually, Bhīma could defeat all 101 of Dhārtrāśṭra's sons as easily as if he were wrestling with just one person. Sometimes he would grab ten of his cousins at a time and nearly drown them in the river while playfully holding them under the water. Sometimes, when the Dhārtrāśṭras would climb up into a tree in order to pick some fruit, Bhīma would violently kick the trunk with his feet so that all of the fruits and his cousins as well would fall
down to the ground. Actually, Bhīma used to torment his cousin-
brothers simply out of childishness and not due to malice. However,
after being bullied around by Bhīma, Duryodhana especially became very
envious and hostile toward him.

Duryodhana was very wicked by nature and so, after growing up a bit, he
began to constantly plot within his mind how Bhīma could be killed.
Duryodhana thought that with Bhīma out of the way it would be easy for
him to usurp the royal throne after attaining maturity. Finally,
Duryodhana devised an elaborate plan in the hopes of drowning Bhīma
in the Gaṅgā. First of all, he arranged for a palatial building to be built
on the banks of the river at a place called Pramāṇakoṭi which would
serve as a holiday resort. Then, when the construction was completed
and the palace was filled with all kinds of articles of enjoyment, the evil-
minded Duryodhana invited the Pāṇḍavas to join him and his brothers
in sporting in the water there. Yudhiṣṭhira accepted his cousin's
invitation and so the Pāṇḍavas and Dhṛtarāṣṭras mounted upon their
elephants and chariots and set out for Pramāṇakoṭi.

Upon their arrival, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas entered the gorgeous
palace which Duryodhana has constructed and then sat down to enjoy
all of the things which were provided for their entertainment. Then, as
they engaged in different types of play, the Pāṇḍavas and Dhṛtarāṣṭras
began to affectionately exchange food with one another while feasting
sumptuously. While this was going on, the wicked Duryodhana mixed
poison with some of the food and then presented it to Bhīma, saying,
"My dear cousin, I request you to eat to your full satisfaction."

Duryodhana had a tongue like nectar but a heart that was as sharp as a
razor. After feeding Bhīma, he was convinced that his objective had at
last been accomplished. Duryodhana then invited his brothers and the
Pāṇḍavas to play within the water of the Gaṅgā. Finally, after sporting
for a long time, everyone became exhausted. Thus, they came out of the
water, and after quickly dressing, they laid down to take rest in a garden-
house which was provided there for that purpose. Bhīma was especially
tired due to the influence of the poison which Duryodhana had
administered, and so he laid down upon the ground near the riverside
and soon lost consciousness.

This was what Duryodhana had been waiting for, and so he quickly went
and tied up Bhīma's arms and legs and then threw him into the Gaṅgā. Gradually, the unconscious Bhīma sank down more and more, until he finally reached the kingdom of the Nāgas. Thousands of poisonous snakes then came and began biting Bhīma all over his body, except for his chest, which was too hard for their fangs to penetrate. As a result, when the snakes' poison mixed with the poison which had been administered by Duryodhana, the two neutralized each other, causing Bhīma to return to consciousness.

At once, Bhīma broke apart the ropes that tied his hands and legs together, and he began to massacre the snakes. The surviving serpents then fearfully went and informed Vāsuki, the serpent king, what had happened. In response, the serpent king hurriedly approached Bhīma along with a Nāga named Āryakā who happened to be Kuntī's great-grandfather. Thereafter, when Vāsuki saw how Āryakā embraced Bhīma with familial affection, he expressed his desire to also offer something to the son of Kuntī as a gift of friendship. Āryakā then suggested to Vāsuki that Bhīma should be given Rāsakuṇḍa, a kind of nectar that endows one with immeasurable strength. Immediately, vessels of Rāsakuṇḍa were presented to Bhīma, and so he drank eight of them before becoming filled up to the brim. The serpents then gave Bhīma a very nice bed, and so he laid down to take some rest.

Meanwhile, the Pāṇḍavas and Dhṛtarāṣtras had returned to Hastināpura without Bhīma, thinking that he must have gone ahead of them. Duryodhana was in a very joyful mood while returning home because he thought that he had successfully done away with his arch-rival. The innocent Yudhiṣṭhira was unacquainted with wickedness such as Duryodhana possessed, and so, upon reaching Hastināpura, he inquired from his mother about Bhīma. "We searched for him everywhere," Yudhiṣṭhira explained, "however, when we failed to find him, we started out without him. My dear mother, has Bhīma already come back before us?"

When Kuntī heard this, her heart became filled with fear, and she cried in alarm. Then, after informing Yudhiṣṭhira that Bhīma had not returned, she anxiously called for Vidura. With great agitation she told her brother-in-law, "I am afraid that the greedy and envious Duryodhana has killed my second son."
Vidura was not alarmed, however, and he replied, "O Kunti, rest assured of Bhima's safety. Remember the words of the rṣis, who had predicted that all of your sons would be long-lived.

Meanwhile, after sleeping soundly for eight days, Bhima awoke and found himself to possess great strength beyond imagination due to the nectar which he had drunk. The Nāgas then encouraged Bhima to return home and they presented him with fine clothing. After dressing himself nicely, Bhima rose up from the nether regions, being carried by the Nāgas. He then hurried back to Hastināpura and came before his mother, offering her his obeisances. Kunti and the other Pāṇḍavas then embraced Bhima while feeling the joy which one experiences upon having a lost loved one return from the dead. Bhima then related all that had happened, and after hearing about the incident, Vidura advised Yudhiṣṭhira, "My dear nephew, what has occurred should not be spoken of again so that Duryodhana's wrath may not be further aroused. Just act as if nothing had happened, but in the future, all of you must protect one another more carefully."

Some time after this incident, Duryodhana once again mixed some powerful poison in the food which was going to be served to Bhima. This time, Yuyutsu, the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's vaiśya maidservant, warned Bhima of Duryodhana's evil plan in advance. Actually, the pious Yuyutsu was more sympathetic toward the Pāṇḍavas than Dhṛtarāṣṭra's other sons. In spite of this warning however, Bhima ate the poisoned food without hesitation, and he miraculously digested it completely without experiencing even the slightest ill effect. Thereafter, in league with Karṇa and Śakuni, Duryodhana devised many other wicked plans for killing the Pāṇḍavas. Although these evil schemes always came to their attention, the Pāṇḍavas would suppress their anger in accordance with the advice of Vidura. Dhṛtarāṣṭra could see how his sons were becoming idle and mischievous, and so he appointed Kṛpācārya as their guru and then sent them off to him for receiving instructions in the use of weapons.

Gautama Rṣi had a son named Śaradvān, who had great aptitude for the military science. In the hopes of obtaining celestial weapons, Śaradvān performed severe austerities while holding a bow and arrows in his
hands. Indeed, the penances executed by Śaradvān were so powerful that even Indra became afraid of losing his position. At last, the king of heaven sent the beautiful Apsarā, Janapādī, to deviate Śaradvān from his rigid vows.

After descending to Śaradvān's āśrama, Janapādī came before the ṛṣi and began to tempt him by exhibiting her unrivaled feminine beauty. Upon seeing the naked splendor of the Apsarā as she stood before him, Śaradvān's heart leapt with joy and his whole body shook with excitement. Indeed, the ṛṣi became so bewildered that the bow and arrows which he was holding slipped right out of his hands. Śaradvān tried hard to control his senses, but the agitation was so strong and sudden that his semen involuntarily discharged and fell upon a clump of grass. Then, having realized how his penances had been impaired, Śaradvān left his bow and arrows behind and fearfully fled from the Apsarā. Thereafter, the semen that had fallen onto the ground gradually divided into two parts, and in due course of time, twins were produced. Coincidentally, Mahārāja Śantanu had been hunting in the forest at this time, and it so happened that one of his attendant soldiers found the newborn twins. When he saw the bow and arrows lying nearby, the soldier rightly speculated that the babes were the offspring of a brāhmaṇa who was proficient in the military science. Then, since they were obviously abandoned, the soldier brought the children and the weapons and presented them to the king. Mahārāja Śantanu became overwhelmed with compassion upon seeing the helpless babies, and so he decided to bring them back to his palace. The king had the brāhmaṇas perform all of the purificatory rites, and he then raised the twins as if they were his very own children. Because they were brought up by the mercy of Mahārāja Śantanu, the boy and girl came to be known as Kṛpa and Kṛpī.

By dint of his mystic power, Śaradvān knew that his children were being raised by the king. Then, after some years passed, he paid Mahārāja Śantanu a visit and explained to him the circumstances of Kṛpa's and Kṛpī's birth. At this time, Śaradvān taught Kṛpa the art of employing weapons, and thus, in a short time, the young boy became highly proficient in the military science.

There was another great ṛṣi named Bhāradvāja, who used to perform
austerities at the source of the Gaṅgā. One day, when he went with
many other ṛṣis to bathe in the river, Bhāradvāja happened to see the
beautiful Apsarā, Gṛṭacī. Gṛṭacī had also come there a little earlier to
bathe, and as she got out of the water, Bhāradvāja gazed upon her with
great delight. Then, as Gṛṭacī began to walk along the bank of the
Gaṅgā, her transparent dress revealed the full extent of her exquisite
feminine loveliness. Indeed, just by meditating upon Gṛṭacī's beautiful
bodily features, Bhāradvāja became maddened with the sensuous desire
to enjoy her. As a result of this strong urge of passion, the ṛṣi
involuntarily discharged his semen, and so he quickly picked up an
earthen jar called a drona in order to catch it before it could fall to the
ground. It is for this reason that the child who was born from this clay
pot received the name Droṇa.

Mahārāja Pṛṣata and Bhāradvāja were great friends. Every day, the king
would visit Bhāradvāja's āśrama, and the king's son, Drupada, would
accompany him and then play and study along with the ṛṣi's son, Droṇa.
Later on, when Mahārāja Pṛṣata died, Drupada became the king of the
Pañcālas. Soon thereafter, Bhāradvāja also passed away, and Droṇa
continued to live in the āśrama of his father. Droṇa then married Kṛpī,
and in due course of time a son was born. At birth, this child neighed
just like the celestial steed, Uccaiḥśravā, and then a voice from the sky
announced, "This child's name shall be Aśvatthāmā (the horse-voiced)."
During this time, Droṇa came to hear that Lord Paraśurāma had
renounced fighting once and for all, and that he desired to give away his
accumulated wealth to the brāhmaṇas. Hoping to take advantage of this
opportunity, Droṇa took his disciples with him and went to Mount
Mahendra, where Paraśurāma had retired to perform austerities. After
being very respectfully worshipped by Droṇa, the son of Jamadagni
inquired, "O brāhmaṇa, please tell me what you desire."
Droṇa replied, "O foremost of all warriors, I have come here seeking
wealth." Paraśurāma then explained, "I have already given away my
accumulated wealth to the brāhmaṇas. In addition, after annihilating all
of the kṣatriyas, I handed over the entire earth to my sacrificial priest,
Kṛṣyapa. Now, all that I have left is my body and my invaluable
weapons. Since you have come here to accept charity, you are free to
take either of these as you please."
Droṇa then requested Lord Paraśurāma to give him all of his weapons, along with the knowledge of their usage. Paraśurāma granted this benediction, and after acquiring the complete science of weapons, including the use of the brahmāstra, Droṇa departed for the kingdom of Drupada. It was many, many years since Droṇa had seen Drupada, and so he introduced himself as the king's childhood friend. However, since Drupada had become intoxicated with pride on account of his royal opulence, he felt insulted at Droṇa's presumption and replied, "It may be true that we were once childhood friends. However, now it is not possible for me to consider you as such, for friendship can exist only between equals and not between one who is very rich and another who is very poor."

After hearing these insulting words, Droṇa became highly enraged. Without uttering even a single word in retaliation, he simply left that place the next morning. Droṇa then conceived of a plan for cutting down Drupada's false pride, and with this in mind, he went to Hastināpura. For some time, Droṇa stayed at the house of his brother-in-law, Kṛpācārya, but he remained unrecognized by others. While Kṛpa taught the use of weapons to the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, Droṇa's son Aśvatthāmā also attended the classes. Sometimes, when there was an interval between lessons, Aśvatthāmā would also give instruction, although at that time no one knew his real prowess.

One day, all of the princes came out of Hastināpura in order to roam about in the countryside. Then, it so happened that the ball which they were playing with accidentally fell into a deep well. The Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas tried to retrieve the ball in so many ways, but they were unable to do so and thus they became perplexed and embarrassed. As they argued about what to do next, an old thin brāhmaṇa with dark complexion approached the princes. This person was actually Droṇa and as the boys came and surrounded him, the brāhmaṇa smilingly chastised them by saying, "You kṣatriyas are certainly very proud of your prowess. However, we can now see that you cannot even recover an insignificant ball from this well. If you like, I will retrieve the ball for you, using some mere blades of grass, and all that I ask in return is that you feed me a sumptuous dinner."
The boys happily consented and so, first of all, Droṇa took off his ring and threw it into the well. Out of curiosity, Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O brāhmaṇa, instead of asking for such a trifling reward, why don't you demand something from us that will benefit you for your entire life?" Droṇa simply smiled, however, and without even replying he took up some blades of grass and after investing them with the power of a mantra, he threw one blade down into the well. That blade of grass miraculously pierced the ball, and then, as Droṇa threw more and more blades of grass, they formed a chain. Finally, when that chain reached Droṇa's hand, he easily pulled the ball out of the well and upon seeing this remarkable feat, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas became highly astonished and their wide-open eyes filled with wonder and delight. The princes then asked Droṇa to bring his ring up from the bottom of the well. In response, Droṇa took up a bow and arrow and after piercing the ring, he brought it up effortlessly. Then, when he calmly presented the ring to the astonished princes, they bowed down before him and submissively asked, "O unknown brāhmaṇa, please tell us who you are if you think that we are worthy of knowing it. We await your order with folded hands so that we may have the privilege of rendering service unto you."

Droṇa replied, "Go to Bhiṣma and describe your meeting with me to him. I am sure that in this way my identity will be disclosed."

The Pāṇḍavas and Dhṛtarāṣṭras then hurried back to Hastināpura and excitedly told Bhiṣma everything that had happened. When he heard the description of the brāhmaṇa, Bhiṣma at once understood that he was Droṇa. Bhiṣma felt that Droṇaṃcārya would make the best guru for the young princes and so he immediately went out from the city and gave him a very respectful reception. Then, in answer to Bhiṣma's inquiries, Droṇa spoke about himself as follows: "Because of the relationship of our fathers, Drupada and I were very close friends as children. Indeed, the Pañcāla prince even once promised that when he would become installed upon the royal throne, he would hand over the kingdom to me. Later on, after the deaths of Pṛṣata and Bhāradvāja, I learned the entire science of weapons from Agniveṇa Rṣi, who had received the knowledge from my father. Thereafter, since I desired to beget children, I married Kṛpī, the sister of Kṛpācārya, and in due course of time Aśvatthāmā was
born.
"Once, when Aśvatthāmā was a small boy, he saw some rich man's son drinking milk from a cow and then started crying. I was very pained to see the grief of my under privileged son and so I began to wander from country to country in search of someone who had many cows so that I could beg one from him in charity. I did not want to approach someone who possessed only a few cows, thinking that it might hinder him in the performance of his sacrifices. Anyway, in spite of all my attempts, no one agreed to give me a cow and so I had to return home empty-handed.
"One day thereafter, some of Aśvatthāmā's playmates gave him water mixed with rice powder to drink. My poor son was deceived by this, and he was so happy that he began to dance with joy while singing, 'I have drunk milk! I have drunk milk!' The other boys smiled when they saw Aśvatthāmā's innocence, and since I also witnessed the incident, I felt very pained at heart. Then, soon after this, I overheard some people deriding me for not earning any money and thus allowing my son to become a laughing stock. At last, I decided to visit my old friend, Drupada, who had meanwhile been installed as the king of the Pañcālas. I approached Drupada with great confidence, but unfortunately, he would not even recognize me as a friend, since I had fallen into such abject poverty. In fact, he claimed that he did not even remember his childhood promise and all that he gave me was food and shelter for one night. The next morning, I quickly left the kingdom of the Pañcālas and came here, hoping to become the teacher of your grandsons."
After hearing all this, Bhīṣma immediately responded, "O brāhmaṇa, I gladly accept you as the ācārya for the Pāṇḍavas and Dhṛtarāṣṭras. Rest assured that you will be worshipped by all of the Kurus and provided with the best comforts of life."
Thereafter, Droṇācārya began teaching the Kuru princes and he was provided with his own house and vast amounts of wealth. Then, after some time, Droṇa called together all of his students and after making them touch his feet he said, "I have in my heart some particular purpose for teaching all of you the science of weapons. Thus, when you actually become masters of the entire military science, I will ask you to accomplish my objective."
After saying this, Droṇa paused, and the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas also stood there silently, as if pondering over their preceptor's words. Arjuna then boldly stepped forward and made the following vow: "My dear master, I will accomplish your purpose, whatever it may be, for that is the duty of a genuine disciple."

When he heard this, Droṇa warmly embraced Arjuna, and with tears in his eyes he affectionately smelled his head again and again. Thereafter, Droṇa continued to teach the Pāṇḍavas and Dhṛtarāṣṭras, and gradually many others came to become his disciples, including some of the Vṛṣṇi princes as well as the sūta Karṇa. Karṇa immediately became a favorite of Duryodhana and since he was very jealous of Arjuna, he used to taunt him at every opportunity. Arjuna always stayed close by the side of the preceptor, however, and thus, on account of his great devotion, he excelled all other disciples and became the most skilled in the use of weapons. Droṇa also had a special affection for Arjuna, and he was convinced that no one would be able to surpass him as a warrior on the battlefield.

In spite of his great affection for Arjuna, however, Droṇa naturally favored his own son, Aśvatthāmā. When Droṇa would send his disciples to bring water, he gave them all very narrow-mouthed vessels so that it would take a long time for them to be filled. He would give Aśvatthāmā a wide-mouthed vessel, however. In this way, Aśvatthāmā would return first and then Droṇa would give him superior instructions while the others were absent. One day, Arjuna came to know of this and so, from that day onward, he quickly filled his vessel by means of a Varuṇa weapon. Thus, he was able to return to Droṇa at the same time as Aśvatthāmā and receive the same teachings. Arjuna's devotion certainly made him very dear to Droṇācārya. Still, the preceptor gave the following order to the royal cook: "Never give Arjuna food in the dark, nor should you disclose to him that I have given you this instruction."

Some days later, however, while Arjuna was eating at night, a strong wind suddenly extinguished the lamp. Then, as he continued eating in the dark out of habit, the thought occurred to Arjuna that he could practice shooting his arrows at night in the same way. The next night, Droṇācārya could hear the twanging of Arjuna's bowstring and so he went out and
embraced his dear disciple while exclaiming, "Who else could have such determination! Rest assured that I shall make you unexcelled in the use of the bow."

As Droṇācārya continued giving lessons in the military science, his reputation became widespread and so thousands of kings and princes flocked to Hastināpura in order to become his disciples. One such prince was Ekalavya, the son of the niśāda king, Hiraṇyadhanus. Being aware of moral principles, however, Drōṇa refused to accept such a low-born person, being afraid that he might surpass his high-born disciples. Thus, after touching Droṇācārya's feet, Ekalavya returned home to the forest, his head bent down due to shame and disappointment. The niśāda prince was not to be deterred, however. Ekalavya made a clay statue of Droṇa and while worshipping him as his guru, he began to practice with his bow in front of the deity. Indeed, because of Ekalavya's exceptional devotion for his guru, combined with incessant practice, it came to be that he very quickly mastered the art of releasing arrows.

Some time thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas and Dhṛtarāṣṭras took permission from Droṇācārya and then went to the forest on a hunting excursion. As the party wondered about here and there, one of their dogs happened to come upon Ekalavya, who was engaged in his usual practice. The niśāda's complexion was very black, as were his dirty clothes, and his dirty body was crowned with matted locks, giving him a frightening appearance. Because of this, the dog began to bark very loudly, distracting Ekalavya. Then, desiring to exhibit the dexterity of his bow, the niśāda prince swiftly shot seven arrows into the dog's mouth before it could even close it. After being pierced in this way, the dog returned to its masters and when the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas saw the skill of the unknown Bowman, they became ashamed of their own abilities.

The princes then searched and searched through the forest, and at last they came upon the niśāda prince and saw him unceasingly discharging his arrows. The curious princes inquired about his identity and so the niśāda prince said, "I am Ekalavya, a disciple of Droṇācārya."

When the Pāṇḍavas returned to Hastināpura they eagerly went and related this incident to Droṇācārya. Then, in private, Arjuna
approached his teacher and said, "My dear preceptor, you had assured me that I alone would become the foremost of bowmen. How then is it that this niśāda prince Ekalavya is superior to me?"

After hearing this anxious plea, Droṇa contemplated for a moment and then took Arjuna with him to the forest. When they came to where Ekalavya was engaged in his usual uninterrupted practice, the niśāda prince immediately stopped upon seeing his guru before him. With great reverence Ekalavya fell prostrate onto the ground in order to touch his spiritual master's feet. Then, as Ekalavya stood before him with folded hands, awaiting his order, Droṇācārya said, "My dear prince, if you really consider yourself to be my disciple, then you should reward me with my preceptoral fee."

Upon hearing these words, Ekalavya thought that Droṇācārya had finally accepted him. Therefore, he very happily replied, "O Master, you may ask from me whatever you like, for I am eager to please you in all respects."

Droṇācārya then said, "If you are actually anxious to give me what I desire, then I would like to have the severed thumb from your right hand."

Although these cruel words were certainly very painful for him to hear, Ekalavya did not express any disappointment, for he was highly devoted to truthfulness. Without hesitation, he immediately cut off his right thumb and then presented it to Droṇācārya, keeping a cheerful countenance all the while. With his purpose accomplished, Droṇācārya then departed along with Arjuna, and Ekalavya resumed his methodical practice. However, the niśāda prince found, much to his unhappiness, that the lightness of hand which he had formerly enjoyed while discharging his arrows was now lost. On the other hand, Arjuna felt very happy upon returning to Hastināpura, for he had become relieved of his burning jealousy.

Bhīma and Duryodhana became especially expert in wielding the mace, and they were always very envious of each other. Nakula and Sahadeva became highly skilled in the use of the sword and Yudhiṣṭhira became a superlative chariot-warrior. Aśvatthāma became highly accomplished in the use of numerous weapons, but it was Arjuna who outshone everyone.
Indeed, Arjuna was considered to be an *atiratha*, or one who is capable of simultaneously fighting against 60,000 ordinary warriors, and thus his fame soon spread all over the world. However, when the wicked sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra beheld the incomparable strength of Bhīma and the unrivaled expertise of Arjuna, their hearts became more and more inflamed with jealousy.

Thereafter, when Droṇācārya had almost completed his course of instruction, he assembled all of his students in order to test their comparative proficiency. For this purpose, Droṇa placed an artificial bird at the top of a tall tree and then ordered his students, one after another, to cut off its head. Yudhiṣṭhira was the first to be called upon, and after he had taken up his bow and aimed his arrow, Droṇa asked, "Do you see the bird at the top of the tree?"

Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "Yes, I do", and Droṇa next inquired, "Aside from the bird, can you see the tree, myself or your brothers?" Yudhiṣṭhira then replied, "My dear preceptor, I see the tree, yourself and my brothers as well."

Again and again Droṇācārya repeated this question, and each time Yudhiṣṭhira gave the same reply. Finally, this made Droṇācārya become very irritated and so he ordered Yudhiṣṭhira to stand aside. Then, beginning with Duryodhana, Droṇa called for all of the princes, one after another, including those who had come from other kingdoms. Droṇa asked each of them the same questions, and in reply, all of the students spoke exactly as Yudhiṣṭhira had done. Because of this, Droṇācārya reproached all of his disciples and made them stand aside as well. After all others had thus failed his test, Droṇa next smilingly called for Arjuna. Then, as the Pāṇḍava hero took up his bow and arrow and began to carefully take aim, Droṇācārya asked, "Are you able to see the bird at the top of the tree?"

Arjuna replied, "Yes, I can", and Droṇa next inquired, "Aside from the bird, can you see the tree, your brothers and myself?" Arjuna then said, "My dear preceptor, I can only see the bird and I do not see either the tree or yourself and so what to speak of my brothers."

Next, Droṇa requested, "Please describe the bird to me." Arjuna replied, "Actually, I do not see the entire bird, because I am concentrating only
on its head."
When Drona heard this, the hair on his body stood erect because of great wonder and delight. Then, when he ordered Arjuna to release his arrow, the son of Kunti immediately struck the bird's head, making it fall down to the ground. At this, Drona went and embraced Arjuna with great satisfaction, for he considered that Drupada was already as good as vanquished.
One day soon thereafter, Drona took all of his disciples to the banks of the Gaṅgā in order to bathe in the sacred river. Then, while the preceptor was within the water, an alligator suddenly came and forcibly seized him by the thigh. Although he was certainly quite capable of fending for himself, Drona anxiously called out to his disciples for help. While all the other princes simply stood there dumbfounded, Arjuna immediately picked up his bow and then killed the alligator with five arrows, thus releasing Drona from its clutches. Because of Arjuna's skill and alertness, Dronācārya considered him to be his foremost disciple, and as a reward, he gave him the use of the brahmāstra along with knowledge of how to retract it. However, at the same time, Drona warned, "Never use this weapon against a weaker enemy, or a mere human being. Such a rash act could lead to the destruction of the entire universe."
Dronācārya then went to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and informed him, "O King, now that the education of your sons and their cousins is complete, I would like to hold an exhibition in order to show off their acquired skills."
Dhṛtarāṣṭra was very pleased with Dronācārya and so he immediately ordered Vidura to assist the brahmāna preceptor in making the necessary arrangements. Thereafter, a flat, treeless piece of land was selected and the necessary stage and seating arrangements were erected. Then, when the day for the tournament arrived, Mahārāja Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma, Kṛpa, Kunti, Gāndhārī and numerous other leading persons of the Kuru dynasty came there. Indeed, all of the citizens gradually came out of the city in order to witness the spectacle so that finally the vast concourse appeared just like an agitated ocean.
Dronācārya was the first to enter the arena. He looked quite venerable and aristocratic with his white hair and beard and he was also dressed completely in white and was decorated with a white garland and white
sandalwood paste. Next, the brāhmaṇas performed the customary preliminary worship and chanting of auspicious mantras along with musical accompaniment. Then, when these rituals were completed, the Pāṇḍavas, Kauravas and other princes entered the arena according to their age, beginning with Yudhiṣṭhīra. Thereafter, the exhibition commenced, and as the princes proceeded to display their various skills, the audience became filled with wonder upon witnessing their remarkable feats and so applauded them heartily.

Bhīma and Duryodhana then entered the arena with maces in hand. Considering this an opportunity to fight, both heroes felt very enlivened and the crowd immediately began to take sides according to their partiality. However, when Droṇācārya saw that the spectators were becoming very agitated, he ordered his son to go and restrain the two combatants. Aśvatthāmā thus appealed to Bhīma and Duryodhana, and at the same time, Droṇa personally went and ordered the musicians to stop and then diverted everyone's attention by announcing the appearance of Arjuna.

As Arjuna majestically entered the arena the crowd became highly delighted just by seeing him. Kuntidevī was seated along with Dhṛtarāśtra and Gāndhāri, who were listening as Vidura described to them all what was taking place. When she saw her son enter the arena, Kuntī began to cry out of strong maternal affection and thus her tears fell down and mixed with her breasts' milk. Dhṛtarāśtra was also very happy to learn that the crowd was heartily cheering for Arjuna, for he felt blessed to have such wonderful nephews as the Pāṇḍavas.

Arjuna then proceeded to display the prowess of his numerous celestial weapons. He created fire by using an Agni weapon and then put it out with a Varuṇa weapon that produced water. By employing the Parjanya weapon, Arjuna made clouds appear in the sky overhead and then with a Vāyavya weapon he dispersed them with strong winds. Arjuna created land with a Bhauma weapon and then made mountains suddenly appear by discharging a Parvatya weapon. Having done this, he next employed an Antardhana weapon so that instantly all of these creations miraculously disappeared. After this, Arjuna shot 21 arrows into the hollow of a cow's horn which was hanging by a rope and swinging to and fro. Indeed, Arjuna performed many wonderful feats which greatly
astonished and delighted all those who were assembled there. Then, after some time, when the roar of the crowd died down, a thunderous sound made by the slapping of arms was suddenly heard near the stadium gate. When the startled spectators turned their eyes in that direction they saw an unknown person that appeared to be as splendid as the sun. He was adorned with natural armor and dazzling celestial earrings, and while carrying his mighty bow, he entered the arena. After bowing his head indifferently to offer respect to Droṇa and Kṛpa, Karna approached Arjuna and declared, "I shall now excel all of the feats which you have just performed. Just stand here awhile so that you can witness my unexcelled prowess!"

Upon hearing these words, the crowd stirred with excitement and everyone stood up in great expectation. Duryodhana especially was highly delighted to see that someone was challenging Arjuna. Arjuna himself appeared to be dumbfounded and as he stood there, embarrassed and angry, Karna took permission from Droṇa and then proceeded to duplicate all that he had done. Indeed, the sūta warrior also performed many wonderful feats that excelled Arjuna's demonstration, and at the end, Duryodhana and his associates went and embraced him with great joy. Indeed, in order to further cement their friendly relations, Duryodhana offered to put his entire kingdom at Karna's disposal. In response, however, Karna said, "O King, all that I want is your friendship and the chance of having a single combat with Arjuna."

At this, Arjuna and Karna began to exchange some heated and insulting words while challenging each other to fight. Then, after being embraced by his brothers and taking permission from Droṇācārya, Arjuna approached his adversary with determination. Suddenly, clouds adorned with flashes of lightning appeared overhead in the sky and then the rainbow of Indra was seen. However, when Sūrya saw how Indra had appeared there out of affection for his son, he began dispersing those clouds out of love for his own son. Thus, Arjuna remained under the cover of clouds while Karna became bathed in bright sunlight. Duryodhana then came and stood by the side of Karna in order to give him encouragement while Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Kṛpa supported Phālgunī. Indeed, all of the spectators became divided into two camps, and when Kuntī realized the gravity of the situation, she immediately fainted.
Vidura soon revived Kunti's consciousness, but when she saw that her
two sons were prepared to fight, she once again became overwhelmed by
fear and grief since there was nothing she could do to stop them.
Kṛpa then said to Karṇa, "Arjuna will accept your challenge, but first of
all you must state your royal lineage, since kṣatriyas never agree to fight
with persons of lower birth."
Karṇa's face became pale when he heard this, but Duryodhana quickly
replied, "O brāhmaṇa, if Arjuna is unwilling to fight on these grounds,
then I hereby bestow the kingdom of Aṅga upon my ally so that no one
can refuse to recognize him as a king."
After saying this, Duryodhana had Karṇa crowned right on the spot by
arranging for the proper ceremonies to be performed while the
brāhmaṇas chanted the Vedic mantras. When Karṇa thus saw that the
royal umbrella was being held over his head and attendants were
fanning him with cāmaras, he felt tremendous gratitude toward
Duryodhana. With heartfelt feeling, Karṇa assured Dhṛtarāṣṭra's eldest
son of his unalloyed friendship, and in this way, their alliance became
solidly cemented.
Just then, however, the charioteer Adhiratha entered the arena, and
while supporting himself with his staff, he perspired greatly and
trembled due to fatigue. As soon as Karṇa saw his foster-father before
him, he went and bowed down before him with great affection.
Adhiratha then took Karṇa in his arms, and while bathing him with his
tears, he expressed his great joy at having his son installed as king.
However, when Bhima saw that Karṇa was the son of a charioteer, he
taunted him by saying, "O Śūta, you do not deserve to fight with Arjuna.
Instead, you should take up a whip and remain in your rightful position.
How can you dare to even think of sitting upon the throne of Aṅga,
since you no more deserve to do so than a dog deserves to eat the
libations of ghee which are offered in sacrifice?"
While hearing these insulting words, Karṇa looked up at the sun and his
lips quivered with rage. Duryodhana also became very agitated and
sharply replied to Bhima by saying, "Heroism is the real qualification of a
kṣatriya and not mere birth. There are many persons of lower or
unknown births who became elevated to exalted positions by dint of
their superior qualities and character. Take, for example, the case of
Viśvāmitra, who was a kṣatriya by birth but was then later on recognized as a brahmārṣi. Because of his superior prowess, Karṇa actually deserves to rule the entire earth. If anyone objects to his being installed as the king of Aṅga, then I personally accept this as a challenge."
The crowd highly approved of Duryodhana's speech. However, since the sun had already set, Duryodhana thought it best to forgo further strife and so he escorted Karṇa out of the arena after having the way lit by bearers who carried numerous lamps. The Pāṇḍavas, accompanied by Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Kṛpa, also returned home, and as the crowd dispersed, some of them named Arjuna, some Karṇa and some Duryodhana as the hero of the day. Kuntī had recognized her son because of his natural armor and earrings, and she was highly pleased that he had been accepted as a king. After witnessing Karṇa's unparalleled prowess and skill, Duryodhana gave up all fear of the Pāṇḍavas while Yudhiṣṭhira became filled with anxiety, believing that no one on earth was equal to the sūta.

Thereafter, Droṇa decided to ask for his preceptoral fee and so he called for all of his disciples and gave them the following order: "My dear princes, since it is the duty of the student to reward his spiritual master, I request you to go and seize Drupada, the king of the Pañcālas and deliver him to me alive."
All of the princes were very enthusiastic to satisfy their guru and so they started out at once with Droṇācārya himself accompanying them. Thereafter, when the attack was launched upon Drupada's capital, all of the Kauravas competed with each other for taking the lead. Drupada then came out of his palace, accompanied by his brothers, and at that time, Arjuna informed Droṇa, "My dear master, I know that the Kauravas will not be able to defeat Drupada. Therefore, I wish to let them fight first and then, after they become frustrated, I will accomplish your desire with the help of my brothers."
The Pāṇḍavas thus remained at a distance while King Drupada began to greatly afflict the Dvārakāśtras. Indeed, the ruler of the Pañcālas fought with such fury that the panic stricken Kauravas thought that there must be many Drupadas roaming the battlefield. Finally, when Duryodhana and Karṇa were vanquished, all of the other Kauravas fled in fear. At
this time, Arjuna offered his obeisances unto Droṇācārya and then set off. Nakula and Sahadeva protected Arjuna's chariot-wheels, the mace-wielding Bhīma went in front, and Yudhiṣṭhira remained at the back. As Bhīma attacked the elephant division of Drupada's army, Arjuna's shower of arrows made the Paṇcāla king fall from the back of his elephant carrier. At this, the Paṇcāla army began to fight heroically in order to check Arjuna from capturing their king. Still, Arjuna proceeded to rush toward Drupada and so the Paṇcāla commander-in-chief, Satyajit, intervened by challenging him. Satyajit was soon driven away from the battlefield, however, and meanwhile, Drupada mounted upon a chariot and then began showering his arrows upon Arjuna. Arjuna fought very fiercely, however, and within a short time he broke Drupada's bow and flagstaff and then killed his horses and charioteer. Drupada thus had to get down from his disabled chariot, and taking advantage of this opportunity, Arjuna quickly went and seized him. Then, as the Paṇcāla warriors fled in fear, the Kauravas began to destroy their capital city. However, Arjuna quickly restrained them for Mahārāja Drupada was related to the Kuru dynasty.

Droṇācārya felt great satisfaction when he saw Arjuna approaching with the captive Drupada, who was humiliated and deprived of his kingdom. While remembering the king's former hostility, Droṇa smilingly said, "Since we are meeting again, although under different circumstances, I once again wish to request your friendship. I have now conquered over your entire kingdom, but I will give you back half so that you can retain the southern portion while I remain in possession of the northern part." Drupada replied, "O brāhmaṇa, I appreciate your magnanimous offer and so I agree to enter into a relationship of eternal friendship with you." Drupada was then released by Droṇa, and thereafter, he continued to rule over the southern Paṇcālas. At heart, however, his only desire was to gain revenge, although he was now convinced that he would never be able to do so merely by dint of his kṣatriya prowess. Thus feeling himself to be incapable, Drupada left his kingdom and began to wander over the earth in the hopes of finding some way of obtaining a child who would be able to defeat Droṇācārya.
Meanwhile, Droṇa took up residence at Ahicchatrā, Drupada's former capital which was bestowed upon him by Arjuna. Then, one year later, Dhṛtarāṣṭra installed Yudhiṣṭhīra as the heir-apparent to the royal throne, being moved by feelings of compassion for the citizens. Dhṛtarāṣṭra knew that Yudhiṣṭhīra was the reservoir of all good qualities and so he appreciated the fact that he would make a far better king that his own son, Duryodhana.

It was during this period that Bhēma received instructions from Balarāma in the art of fighting with a club. Then, one day, Droṇācārya suddenly appeared in the royal court at Hastināpura and before all of the Kaurava princes, he addressed Arjuna as follows: "Long ago, I had received the brahmāstra weapon from the great rṣi, Agniveṇa. Then, when you were a student under my care, I passed the knowledge of the brahmāstra on to you. Now, O son of Kuntī, I want you to reward me for that special gift."

Arjuna unhesitatingly consented and so Droṇa continued: "It is known to me that some time in the future I will be obliged to fight against you. O son of Pṛthā, my request is that you fight wholeheartedly against me at that time." Arjuna once again expressed his agreement and then with great reverence he touched his preceptor's feet. After this, Arjuna began traveling all over the world and with the assistance of Bhēma, he subjugated the kings of numerous lands. In this way, he was able to bring immense wealth back to Hastināpura which was deposited in the treasury of the Kurus.

However, the great prowess and influence which the Pāṇḍavas exhibited caused Dhṛtarāṣṭra to become very anxious and unhappy. Finally, the blind king called for his chief minister Kanika and said, "Again and again the Pāṇḍavas accomplish wonderful feats that surpass my own sons. Because of this, my heart burns with envy and I cannot find any relief. Should I try to keep friendly relations with my nephews or should I deal with them as enemies? Which course of action will bring me happiness?"

Kanika then advised, "O King, you should act in such a way that your own sons will always be protected from the might of the Pāṇḍavas. For this purpose you can employ any of the four means of dealing with those who are considered to be enemies, or in other words, those persons who
oppose the fulfillment of your aspirations. In this way you will not have to grieve for your sons in the future."

After saying this, Kanika discoursed at great length on how a king should deal with adversaries, and here are some of the most noteworthy things which he said: "The king should always be prepared to strike with his uplifted mace so that everyone will fear him. The king should act in such a way that no enemy can discover his weaknesses, and like a tortoise, he should always conceal his plans and objectives. Once having begun a project, a king should accomplish it thoroughly so that he will not be left open to ridicule. Especially when threatened by a problem, a ruler should root it out completely, for such a complication is just like a thorn, which, if not extracted fully, produces an infected sore. An enemy should never be neglected, no matter how weak or insignificant, for even one tiny spark can consume a whole forest by spreading from tree to tree. On the other hand, if a king is not strong enough to conquer over one who opposes him, then he should tolerate his enemy's faults. Indeed, a wise ruler should pretend that he does not even notice the inimical dealings of such a powerful adversary."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then requested, "My dear Kanika, please describe to me in detail the four means of subduing one's enemy: conciliation, bestowing favors, creating disunion, and, if all else fails, killing."

In reply, the minister related this instructive story:

Once, there was a wise jackal who was fully acquainted with the science of diplomacy, and he lived in the forest with his four friends: a tiger, a mouse, a wolf and a mongoose. There was also a very strong deer that was living in this forest, and although the jackal and his friends wanted to capture and eat it, they could not do so because of it’s swiftness. Then, one day, the jackal assembled his friends and advised, "As you all know, the tiger has been unable to capture the deer, in spite of trying to do so again and again. Now, I suggest that when the deer is sleeping soundly, the mouse should go and eat away at his feet. In this way, the deer's fleetness will be impaired, and so the tiger will easily be able to go and kill him. This is the means whereby we can all have a nice feast of the deer's flesh."

Everyone liked this plan, and so that night, the mouse went and began to eat away at the deer's feet as it soundly slept. Thereafter, the tiger
attacked the deer, and since it could no longer run swiftly, it was easily captured and killed. Then, when all of the animal friends came to where the deer lay slain, the jackal told them, "All of you should go and bathe before we eat, and I will remain here to guard the carcass."

When the tiger, mouse, wolf and mongoose had departed, the jackal sat down and began to deeply ponder over what should be done next. Thereafter, the tiger was the first to return, and when he saw the jackal absorbed in thought, he said, "My dear friend, what is your lamentation? You should be happy that you will be able to eat to your full satisfaction today."

The jackal then morosely replied, "In your absence, the mouse began to boast by saying, 'It was I who actually killed the deer, and thus, it is only by my mercy that the tiger can eat.' After hearing this impudent talk, I lost all my desire to take part in this feast." The tiger then said, "I am very glad that you have told me this. At last, I have come to my senses and can realize the foolishness of keeping such so-called friends. From now on, I shall simply hunt by myself and eat whatever I kill."

After saying this, the tiger departed, and then, a little while later, the mouse arrived. The jackal immediately informed him, "While you were away, the mongoose came here and said, 'This carcass has become poisonous due to being touched by the claws of the tiger. O wise jackal, since the deer cannot be eaten, with your permission, I would like to devour the mouse instead.'"

Upon hearing this, the mouse became very afraid and hurriedly entered a hole in the ground. Next, when the wolf returned, the jackal said, "While you were gone, the tiger came here and told me, 'I am very displeased with the wolf, and so I will come here shortly along with my wife in order to make him the second course of my feast.'"

The wolf ran away after hearing this story, and then, finally, the mongoose came back after having bathed. The jackal said to him, "I have already defeated the tiger, the mouse and the wolf. Now, if you so desire, you may try to fight with me for possession of the deer's carcass." The mongoose replied, "Since you have already defeated the others, including the powerful tiger, I will just go away without attempting to fight with you."

After saying this, the mongoose departed, and so the jackal, who was
very pleased with the good result he had achieved by applying the science of politics, sat down to enjoy a peaceful meal in private. Kanika then recommended, "O King, any person who had become one's enemy, never mind whether he be a son, friend, brother, father or even a guru; he should be killed by any means possible. He can be killed by curse, by poison, by deception, by weapons, or by any other method. Beggars, thieves and atheists are also natural enemies, and so they should never be allowed to live within one's kingdom."
After listening to the advice of his chief minister, Dhṛtarāṣṭra became very pensive and melancholy, for his mind had become so poisoned that whatever sympathy he had for the Pāṇḍavas was now destroyed.

At this time, Duryodhana, Śakuni, Duḥśāsana and Karna also consulted together, and so at last they devised a plot whereby Kuntī and her five sons would be burnt to death. For a long time, Duryodhana had felt ever-increasingly distressed while hearing the citizens glorify Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Indeed, practically all of the residents of Hastināpura were in favor of Yudhiṣṭhira, and so Duryodhana's heart gradually became inflamed with a bitter jealousy.
Finally, when his envy became unbearable, Duryodhana approached Dhṛtarāṣṭra and confided, "My dear father, the thought that my rival cousin-brother will occupy the royal throne instead of me has plunged me into an ocean of despair. If Yudhiṣṭhira becomes king, then naturally the right to the throne will pass on to his children and grandchildren, and thus, your unfortunate sons will be entirely neglected. O Father, you must think of some means whereby my brothers and myself may not suffer by becoming perpetually dependent upon the Pāṇḍavas. Certainly you can understand that for me to lead such a humiliating life would be worse than death!"
After taking leave of his father, Duryodhana once again consulted with Śakuni, Karna and Duḥśāsana. In this meeting, it was decided that somehow or other the Pāṇḍavas must be peacefully exiled to the town of Vāraṇāvata so that they would be kept out of the picture for some time. Duryodhana then went and presented this plan to his father. However, after hearing of the proposal, Dhṛtarāṣṭra was afraid to sanction it, for
he could remember all of the things Pāṇḍu had done for his sake. Thus, he replied, "My dear son, if I were to harm the Pāṇḍavas in this way, then the citizens would certainly criticize me very harshly."
Then, in order to refute this doubt, Duryodhana said, "My dear father, rest assured that the citizens' favor can gradually be won over by offering them gifts and honor. Later on when our position is secure and I am actually installed as king, the Pāṇḍavas can be invited back to Hastināpura."
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then argued, "If we try to exile the Pāṇḍavas, even gently as you propose, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa and Vidura will never allow it to happen."
However, Duryodhana countered, "You can be assured that Bhīṣma will remain neutral because he is the grandfather of all of us. And, since Aśvatthāmā is on our side, Droṇa will not interfere, and thus, Kṛpa will also remain silent. Now, as far as Vidura is concerned, although he definitely favors the Pāṇḍavas, he is dependent upon us, and so he cannot do any real harm."
In this way, Dhṛtarāṣṭra became convinced by his wicked son to give permission for the exile of the Pāṇḍavas. Thereafter, Duryodhana and his brothers began to gradually win over the citizens by awarding them gifts of wealth and honorable positions. At the same time, under the order of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the clever ministers began describing in the royal assembly the festival in honor of Lord Śiva that would soon be held at Vāraṇāvata. After repeatedly hearing Vāraṇāvata described as a very charming place, the Pāṇḍavas gradually developed a desire to go and see it. Then, when Dhṛtarāṣṭra understood this, he called for his nephews and invited them to go there for a vacation. The intelligent Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could understand his uncle's real intention, but he still obediently and cheerfully accepted the proposal. Thus, after taking Dhṛtarāṣṭra's blessings for future royal prosperity, Yudhiṣṭhira started out along with his mother and brothers.
Duryodhana then summoned a minister named Purocana and spoke to him as follows: "If you help me in executing a very clever plan for exterminating my enemies, then in return I promise to share my vast kingdom and its immense wealth with you. O Purocana, I want you to go quickly to Vāraṇāvata and construct a very beautiful palace out of
inflammable materials such as ghee, shellac, dry grass, oil and wood. This mansion will serve as a residence of the Pāṇḍavas, who have already left for that place. Somehow, you must build the palace in such a way that, although living in it, the Pāṇḍavas will not be able to guess that it is actually meant for their doom. After finishing the construction, you must lavishly furnish the palace so that anyone would be very happy to live there. Worship the Pāṇḍavas with all reverence so that they will surely accept your invitation on my behalf for them to live there. Thereafter, continue to remain at Vāraṇāvata in order to attend to all of the Pāṇḍavas' needs. In this way, you will surely gain their confidence after some time. Then, when this is accomplished, set fire to the palace at night, beginning from the outer door, while the Pāṇḍavas and their mother are soundly sleeping. Thus, it will appear to everyone that my cousins were accidentally burnt to death while residing in their own house."

Purocana readily agreed to take part in Duryodhana's wicked plan and he immediately departed for Vāraṇāvata on a chariot drawn by swift mules. Before the Pāṇḍavas had departed for Vāraṇāvata, they first of all went and touched the feet of their elders, such as Dhātarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa and Vidura. It was with some remorse that the Pāṇḍavas left Hastināpura, and Vidura as well as many of the citizens followed them out of the city. Everyone knew the wicked intentions of Dhātarāṣṭra, who was now fully under the sway of partiality towards his own sons. Thus, as they went along the road, the citizens talked amongst themselves, expressing their great unhappiness due to the impending separation from Queen Kuntī and her sons.

Yudhiṣṭhira then began to persuade the citizens to turn back, and at this time, Vidura spoke to him as follows, using the language of the Mlecchas so that others would not understand: "My dear nephew, he who knows the evil plans that his enemies contrive in accordance with the science of politics, should act so as to avoid all danger. He who knows that there are sharp weapons that are not made of steel and who understands how to ward them off, escapes calamity at the hands of his foes. Be on your guard. Make your abode like that of a jackal, having many outlets. The consumer of straw and wood and the evaporator of water cannot harm one who stays within a hole, deep within the woods."
Although Vidura's words were apparently very vague, Yudhiṣṭhira assured his uncle that he understood his intention. Vidura then turned back toward Hastināpura and at that time, Kunti approached her son and asked, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, what were you talking about with Vidura? His words were entirely unintelligible to me."

Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear mother, Vidura warned me of an inflammable mansion that is being prepared for us at Vāraṇāvata. At the same time, he assured me that the means of our escape will become known at the proper time."

Thereafter, when the Pāṇḍavas arrived at Vāraṇāvata, all of the residents came out of their houses to joyfully greet them. The Pāṇḍavas first of all went to pay their respects to the brāhmaṇas, the city officials and then to other leading citizens. Finally, when the Pāṇḍavas and their mother arrived at the palace which Purocana had prepared for them, they were received by Duryodhana's wicked minister who very respectfully worshipped them and then provided a sumptuous feast. The Pāṇḍavas then took up residence in the palace made of lac and very quickly they came to be adored by all of the people of Vāraṇāvata. Since they had already been warned by Vidura, the Pāṇḍavas carefully inspected their residence at the first opportunity. Yudhiṣṭhira could clearly discern the smell of ghee and fat, and so he told Bhima, "My dear brother, this mansion appears to be made entirely of inflammable materials that have all been soaked in ghee."

Bhima then suggested that they move elsewhere, but Yudhiṣṭhira intelligently replied, "I think that it would be better for us to remain here, pretending to be unsuspecting but actually always alert. You should begin to secretly construct an underground tunnel so that we can save ourselves in the event of a fire. Every day now, as we roam the countryside while hunting, we should familiarize ourselves with the land so that if necessary we will know the proper paths and directions."

Soon thereafter, a skillful miner who was sent by Vidura came to the Pāṇḍavas and said, "O descendants in the line of Bhārata, I have been sent here to warn you that Purocana will attempt to burn down your palace on the fourteenth night of the dark moon. I have come here on the order of your uncle, Vidura, who reminds you of his conversation with Yudhiṣṭhira in the language of the Mlecchas."
The Pāṇḍavas heartily welcomed the miner and then Yudhiśṭhira explained, "This palace has been cleverly constructed right up against the high walls of an adjoining arsenal, and it has only one door so that escape will be very difficult in the event of a fire."

Thereafter, the miner began to excavate a large tunnel from the center of the palace. During the daytime, however, the hole was kept covered with floor boards so that no one would become suspicious. All the while, the Pāṇḍavas pretended to place their full trust in Purocana, and in this way one full year passed. Although the Pāṇḍavas appeared to be living a very carefree life, they were constantly on the alert, and they always slept with their weapons close at hand.

Then, one day, when Yudhiśṭhira was fully convinced that Purocana had been deceived by their act, he addressed his brothers saying, "Now is the time for us to act. Let us burn down this palace at night while Purocana is sleeping and then escape undetected through the underground tunnel."

Soon after this decision was made, Kunti invited a large number of brāhmaṇas and their wives to the palace in order to worship them and give them charity. Finally, after being very sumptuously fed, the brāhmaṇas took their leave and returned home. It so happened, as if ordained by Fate, that a niṣāda woman also came there along with her five children. After eating the remnants left by the brāhmaṇas and drinking a large quantity of wine, they all became intoxicated and then fell asleep somewhere in a corner of the palace. That night, after everyone had gone to bed and all was quiet, a violent wind suddenly came up just at the time when Bhīma set fire next to the place where Purocana was sleeping. Bhīma also started fires at the palace's only entrance and various other places, and thus the inflammable building quickly became engulfed in flames. Queen Kunti and her sons then entered the secret tunnel and escaped the conflagration through the underground passageway.

After some time, the towns-people began to awaken, and when they saw the fire-gutted palace, they hatefully condemned Duryodhana, thinking him to be responsible.
Meanwhile, the Pāṇḍavas and their mother came out of the tunnel exit somewhere in the surrounding forest. Then, after walking for some time, their progress became very slow, especially on account of Kuntīdevī's fatigue. Thus, Bhīma took his mother upon his shoulders and then put Nakula and Sahadeva on his hips and finally, picked up Yudhiṣṭhīra and Arjuna in his arms. In this way, they proceeded quickly as Bhīma pressed the earth with his thundering footsteps and smashed the impeding trees with his mighty chest. When the Pāṇḍavas arrived at the banks of the Gaṅgā, they began cautiously measuring its depth to see if they could cross over to the far shore. Just at this time, a trusted person who had been sent by Vidura arrived there, and he led the Pāṇḍavas to where a boat was being kept for them. Finally, after reaching the other side of the Gaṅgā, Vidura's man quietly departed, and the Pāṇḍavas continued on their journey through the forest.

Meanwhile, at Vāraṇāvata, after extinguishing the fire, when the townspeople searched through the smoldering debris, they found that Pūrocana had been burnt to death. They also saw the charred remains of the niṣāda woman and her five children, and so they naturally assumed that these were Kuntī and her five sons. The miner had departed unnoticed after covering over the entrance to the tunnel, and so no clue remained of the Pāṇḍavas' escape. While harshly condemning Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the citizens sent a message to the blind king at Hastināpura, informing him that Pūrocana, Kuntī and the Pāṇḍavas had all been burnt to death. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra received this news, he was genuinely mortified and immediately sent some men to Vāraṇāvata in order to perform the funeral ceremonies. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then offered water for the benefit of his departed nephews and their mother, and while doing so, he wept aloud with grief. Vidura did not cry however, for he knew the real situation.

After crossing the Gaṅgā, the Pāṇḍavas disguised themselves as brāhmaṇas for fear of being detected by Duryodhana's spies and then entered a dense forest. Being overwhelmed by sleep and having lost his way, Yudhiṣṭhīra greatly lamented the wretched condition which he found himself in. Once again, he asked Bhīma to carry the others, and so the party proceeded on swiftly as Bhīma created a pathway by knocking down all of the trees that stood in his way. Throughout the day,
Kuntidevi and her sons had to swim across numerous streams and then, as evening arrived, they entered another dense and uninhabited forest. Darkness soon shrouded everything, and since they were all very tired and thirsty, they sat down to rest. Queen Kuntī then lamented, "Although I am the mother of five heroic sons, and although I am surrounded by them, still, I am burning with thirst!"

Upon hearing this remark, Bhīma felt very aggrieved, and so once again he picked them all up and carried them further until they reached a pleasant spot where a beautiful banyan tree stood. Bhīma put down his mother and brothers and then said, "Just stay here and rest while I go and fetch water, for I can hear some aquatic birds chirping nearby."

With Yudhiṣṭhira's permission, Bhīma departed and after a little while, he came to a nice lake. After bathing and drinking the cool water, Bhīma soaked his upper garments, and in this way, he brought some water back for the others to drink. However, after traversing the four miles from the lake to where his mother and brothers were staying, he saw that they had all fallen fast asleep upon the bare ground. This sight pained Bhīma greatly, and as he meditated upon how their forced exile was due to the evil-minded Duryodhana, his anger to kill the Dhrṣtarāśtras became strongly aroused.

As Bhīma continued to watch over his mother and brothers as they slept, a Rākṣasa named Hiśimba, who was living nearby, happened to see them. Being hungry for human flesh, he commanded his sister, who was named Hiśimbī, to go and kill the Pāṇḍavas and then bring them back for him to eat. When the female Hiśimbī went to the spot where the Pāṇḍavas and their mother were sleeping, as soon as she saw Bhīma, she fell madly in love with him. Hiśimbī strongly desired to have Bhīma as her husband, and so she thought, "I will not do as I was told, because the love for a husband is stronger than the love for a brother. And besides, if I kill and eat this handsome hero, my enjoyment will only be flickering, whereas if I spare him and make him my husband, then my pleasure will be everlasting."

After taking a beautiful human form, Hiśimbī approached Bhīma and said, "I have been deputed by my Rākṣasa brother to kill you and your companions. However, as soon as I saw you I became afflicted by the arrows of Cupid. O mighty one, become my husband so that we can
enjoy life together in the gardens of the heavenly regions which are nearby."

Bhīma replied, "O amiable one, how can I go with you and leave my poor helpless mother and brothers here unprotected?"

Hiḍimbi then said, "O Hero, do not worry, for I shall help you rescue them from the wrath of my brother."

Bhīma felt this to be an insult, however, and so he replied, "I am not afraid of any Rākṣasa, and thus I do not require any help from you."

While the two were thus talking, the male Hiḍimba became very impatient because his sister did not return. Thus, he personally went to where the Pāṇḍavas and their mother were staying. With his copper-colored hair and beard, and his wide open mouth which was filled with sharp teeth, the Rākṣasa was very ferocious in appearance. When Hiḍimbi saw her brother coming, she fearfully advised Bhīma, "O handsome hero, quickly awaken your mother and brothers, and then, by my mystic power, I shall carry you all away through the sky."

Bhīma refused by saying, "Do not fear. Rest assured that I will have no difficulty in vanquishing this Rākṣasa."

These words were overheard by the male Hiḍimba, and when he saw how his sister had taken a beautiful human form, he could understand that she desired to enjoy conjugal love with Bhīma. Thus with great anger, the Rākṣasa told his sister, "Because you have foolishly insulted me by neglecting my order, I will now kill you along with these human beings."

Bhīma then challenged the Rākṣasa with strong words, and in response, Hiḍimba impetuously rushed at the son of Vāyu with outstretched arms. As if in sport, Bhīma grabbed the Rākṣasa by his arms and then began to drag him forcefully along the ground. Hiḍimba cried out in pain, and so Bhīma dragged him to a greater distance so that the noise would not awaken his sleeping mother and brothers.

Thereafter, the two opponents fought with full fury, and their shouts and grunts soon made Kuntī and her sons wake up. When they saw a young girl sitting next to them, the Pāṇḍavas were very surprised, and they marveled at her exquisite beauty. Then, in answer to Kuntī's inquiries, the Rākṣasi explained how she came to fall in love with Bhīma, who was now engaged in fighting with her brother. When Arjuna then
saw that Bhīma was hardpressed by the ferocious Rākṣasa, he asked his brother for permission to kill him. However, Bhīma replied by assuring Arjuna that he would quickly do the needful. After saying this, Bhīma gathered all of his strength and, while flaring up with rage, he lifted the Rākṣasa off the ground with his hands. Holding the Rākṣasa high over his head, Bhīma whirléd him around 100 times and then smashed him onto the ground with all of his might. As the mangled Rākṣasa roared with agony, Bhīma grabbed hold of his body and proceeded to bend it in half until it finally broke in the middle, causing Hiśimba to give up his life. The Pāṇḍavas felt highly elated upon beholding this wonderful feat, and so they quickly went and congratulated their victorious brother. Considering that there must be a town nearby, Arjuna suggested that they resume their journey. Then, as the Pāṇḍavas and their mother continued to walk through the forest, the rākṣasi, Hiśimba, followed them. Upon seeing this, Bhīma angrily said, "These Rākṣasas are deceptive by nature, especially when it comes to taking revenge." After saying this, Bhīma turned his back to Hiśimba. Yudhiṣṭhira quickly restrained his brother, however, and reminded him that women are never to be slain. Thereafter, Hiśimba submitted the following plan to Kuntidevī, "O pious lady, I have completely given my heart to your heroic son and therefore, I beg you to arrange for our marriage. If you are unwilling to favor me in this way, then I will not be able to continue living without him. I only want to enjoy with your son for some time, and so I promise that I will return him to you before long. And, if you are ever in danger, just think of me, and I will immediately come to your aid."

Yudhiṣṭhira and Kuntī then consulted together, and they decided to let Hiśimba sport with Bhīma during the day and then return him home by nightfall. Bhīma liked this idea, but then added the condition that he would remain with Hiśimba only up to the time when she would give birth to a son. Hiśimba agreed to accept this arrangement, and then, without delay, she took Bhīma upon her huge body and sped off with him through the skies. Thereafter, Hiśimba took a beautiful human form and sported with Bhīma in various heavenly forests, mountains and riverbanks until she finally begot a son. This child was exceedingly fearful to look at with his pointed ears and sharp teeth, and he grew up
within the very hour which he was born. Indeed, this was the same day on which he was conceived, for this is the way of the Rākṣasas. This wonderful child possessed prowess that excelled all other Rākṣasas, and because he was bald, his parents gave him the name Ghaṭotkaca (the pot-headed one). Thereafter, in spite of his ghastly appearance, Ghaṭotkaca became a favorite of the Pāṇḍavas, and indeed, he was almost considered to be their sixth brother. Soon after delivering the child, Hīḍimbī departed, and then Ghaṭotkaca also took his leave after promising Bhīma that he would come to him whenever thought of. Actually, Ghaṭotkaca was a special creation of Indra for the purpose of becoming a fit match for Karṇa. Indra knew that Karṇa would possess his invincible dart, and so he made this arrangement to protect his beloved son Arjuna.

The Pāṇḍavas continued to wander from forest to forest, killing many deer as they went along, and in this way they passed through numerous kingdoms such as those of the Pañcālas, Trigartas, Matsyas and Kīcakas. Keeping matted hair and dressing in tree bark and deerskin, the Pāṇḍavas appeared just like ṛṣīs. Then, one day, Vyāsadeva appeared to Kuntī and her sons, and as they stood before him with folded hands, he spoke as follows: "By dint of my spiritual vision, I have understood everything about how you had been deceitfully exiled by Duryodhana. Both you, the Pāṇḍavas and your cousins, the Kauravas, are equal in my eyes. Still, due to your misfortune at the hands of the evil sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, I am especially inclined to act for your welfare. Thus you should be confident that you are always under my able protection. Now, I want you to go to the nearby town of Ekacakra and live there incognito until I once again come to see you there."

Vyāsadeva then led the Pāṇḍavas along the forest path, and while doing so, he took care to comfort Kuntī. He said, "My dear daughter-in-law, you can rest assured that your son, Yudhiṣṭhira, will one day become the emperor of the entire earth. Therefore, do not become overly discouraged by the present difficulties which you are facing."

Finally, after bringing the Pāṇḍavas to the house of a brāhmaṇa in Ekacakra, Vyāsadeva departed. The Pāṇḍavas began residing at that brāhmaṇa's house, and during the day, they would wander through the
streets as mendicants. Then, each evening, when the five brothers would return home, they presented whatever they had collected to their mother, and she in turn would divide it amongst her sons after giving Bhima half.

One day, Bhima remained at home with Kunti while the others went out begging. Later on, as mother and son were sitting together, they could distinctly hear heart-rending cries coming from the brähmana's room. Kuntidevi could not bear to remain indifferent, knowing that her hosts were suffering, and so she told Bhima, "A truly good man is one who pays back more than what he receives from others. Therefore, we must try to do something for the benefit of this brähmana who has so kindly allowed us to stay in his house."

Bhima then said, "Mother, please go and find out what is troubling the poor brähmana and his family. Then, I will do whatever is required in order to rectify the situation."

Kunti went and peered into the brähmana's room, and there she saw that the husband, wife, son and daughter were all deeply plunged into despair. The brähmana was wailing aloud and lamenting, "Now our happy life has ended, for I must face the prospect of either losing my own life or that of one of my dear family members."

Kunti then heard the wife reply, "My dear husband, do not be aggrieved, for I shall go to the Rakṣasa. He may not even kill me, for the slaying of a woman is forbidden by the codes of morality."

When the brähmana heard this statement, he lovingly embraced his wife, and then both of them began crying together. Then, after a moment, the daughter spoke up and said, "My dear mother and father, I will go to the Rakṣasa. After all, since you will eventually have to abandon me at the time of my marriage, there is no reason for you to feel grief about losing me now."

When the parents heard their daughter say this, their agony became even more intensified and then, the three of them began weeping together. Next, the small son, who was too young to even speak properly, came forward and said, "My dear mummy, papa and sister, do not cry."

Then, as he smilingly picked up a sharp blade of grass the boy declared, "I will kill the mean old Rakṣasa with this kuśa-weapon."

Upon hearing their son's sweet but childish words, the brähmana and his
wife certainly felt some joy, but it soon transformed into intense sadness. At this time, Kuntī came into the room and inquired, "O brāhmaṇa, what is the cause of your great distress? If it is possible, then I and my sons will do whatever we can to alleviate your sorrow."

The brāhmaṇa then explained, "Near to our town there lives a fierce Rākṣasa named Baka who is the lord of this country. Because of his unrivaled prowess, we have no fear from the attacks of enemies. However, in return for his protection, the Rākṣasa demands that we supply him with all of his food. Thus, every day, by rotation, a family has to send one of its members to be devoured by the Rākṣasa after delivering to him a cartload of rice along with two buffaloes. In this way, a family's turn comes after many years. And, if someone tries to avoid having one of his kinsmen deliver the food, the Rākṣasa Baka comes and devours the entire family in retaliation. Tomorrow, it is our turn to deliver the food, and since I do not have enough money to purchase a human replacement, nor can any of us bear to part with a single family member, we shall all go together so that we can be devoured at once. For a long time we were living happily in this village. However, I can now understand the truth of the maxim: 'In order to achieve security, one should first strive to live under the protection of a good king. Only thereafter should he endeavor to acquire a qualified wife, and then he may work hard for attaining wealth.'"

Kuntī then said, "O gentle brāhmaṇa, please be assured that there is a way of avoiding this calamity. I have five sons, and so, if you allow, I shall send one of them to the Rākṣasa."

However, the brāhmaṇa exclaimed, "Alas! I would never be so callous as to sacrifice the life of a guest in order to save my own!" Kuntī then assured the brāhmaṇa by saying, "The only reason I am offering to send my son is because I know that the Rākṣasa will not be able to harm him. I have seen him kill other Rākṣasas in the past, and thus you should allow him to kill Baka so that everyone can gain relief from his oppression."

At this, the brāhmaṇa agreed, and thus he felt as if a great burden had been lifted off from his head. Kuntī then went to solicit her son's consent and in response, Bhīma readily agreed to display his prowess for the purpose of rendering service unto the brāhmaṇa. That evening,
when the other Pāṇḍavas returned home with the alms that they had collected, Yudhiṣṭhira could understand just by seeing Bhīma's face the nature of the very grave task that he was about to undertake. In private, Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired from his mother, "What is it that Bhīma is about to do? Is it of his own volition or by your order?"

Kuntī replied, "It is I who have commanded Bhīma to kill the terrible Rākṣasa Baka in order to benefit the poor brāhmaṇa and all of the other towns people." Upon hearing this, Yudhiṣṭhira became very upset and said, "What a rash thing you have done! It goes against all moral principals for a woman to sacrifice her own son for the sake of another. It is only by relying upon Bhīma's strong arms that we sleep peacefully at night and hope to regain our parental kingdom. O Mother, what have you done? Has your reason become clouded on account of your intense misery?"

Kuntī remained firm, however, and replied, "My dear son, I am fully confident of Bhīma's strength, and furthermore, I have full faith that one achieves the highest merit by rendering unhesitating service unto the brāhmaṇas."

Finally, Yudhiṣṭhira admitted that his mother was doing the right thing, but still, he warned her, "You must make the brāhmaṇa promise not to tell anyone about the incident and thus reveal Bhīma's prowess. Otherwise, there is a good chance that our real identities may be detected."

The next morning, Bhīma set out with the cartload of rice, drawn by two buffaloes. Then, as he approached the forest where the Rākṣasa Baka lived, Bhīma began to eat the food himself while loudly calling out the man-eater's name. When he heard this, Baka angrily came there, and when he saw how Bhīma was eating the food that was intended for him, he shouted with rage, "Who is the fool that desires to go to the abode of Yamarāja by eating my food in my very presence?"

However, Bhīma simply turned his face a little, and after smiling disdainfully, he resumed eating. Baka was terribly fearful to look at with his reddish hair and beard, his gaping mouth with protruding sharp teeth, and his large pointed ears. Upon seeing Bhīma's arrogance, the Rākṣasa let out a terrible roar. Then, while raising both of his arms, Baka rushed at Bhīma with the intention of killing him at once. Bhīma merely
glanced at the onrushing Rākṣasa and then continued to eat as if nothing very significant was happening. Baka then forcibly struck Bhīma on the back with both of his monstrous arms. And yet, amazingly enough, Bhīma did not even bother to look up but just went on eating without displaying the least sign of agitation. The enraged Rākṣasa then tore up a huge tree and rushed at Bhīma once again. Meanwhile, Bhīma had finally finished his meal and then gotten up to wash his hands. Thus, by the time that Baka hurled the tree at him, Bhīma was prepared and easily caught it with his left hand. Thereafter, both combatants tore up one tree after another and the fighting became so fierce that the surrounding forest was soon depleted of all trees.

At this point, Baka pounced upon Bhīma and seized him within the grips of his mighty arms. Bhīma also squeezed the Rākṣasa in his embrace and then began to drag him with great force. Baka dragged Bhīma as well, but then, as the tug-of-war continued, the Rākṣasa became fatigued. When Bhīma realized that his opponent had now weakened, he suddenly threw him upon the ground with great force. Then, while pressing the Rākṣasa's body with his knees, Bhīma began to strike him violently with his fists. At last, Bhīma pressed one knee upon the middle of the Rākṣasa's back and then grabbed his neck with one hand and the cloth tied around his waist with the other. Then, as Bhīma began to bend Baka's body, the Rākṣasa let out a frightful roar and vomited blood as he gave up his life in great agony.

When they heard Baka's horrendous screams, the Rākṣasa's family members came running to the spot. There, they saw Bhīma bending over Baka's dead body and thus they became very afraid for their lives. Bhīma assured the Rākṣasas of safety, however, and then in return, he made them promise never again to kill or eat human beings. Thereafter, Bhīma dragged Baka's dead body to the city gate, and after leaving it there, he went away unobserved. Then, after returning to the brāhmaṇa's residence, he related the entire incident to Yudhiṣṭhira while the others listened intently with wide open eyes.

Early the next morning, some of the citizens discovered the bloody dead body of the Rākṣasa, and soon, a huge crowd gathered at the city gate in order to see the gruesome sight. Indeed, everyone was struck with wonder to see that their tormentor had been slain. Then after figuring
out whose turn it had been the previous day to supply Baka with food. The people curiously went to the house of the brāhmaṇa. Since the brāhmaṇa had given his solemn promise to conceal the Pāṇḍava's identities, when the people inquired about the Rākṣasa's death, he replied as follows: "A highly exalted rśi happened to visit my house, and when he saw how we were weeping and grief-stricken, he inquired about the cause. I explained to the rśi how we were being oppressed by a wicked Rākṣasa, and so he volunteered to deliver the food, assuring us that he could easily kill our tormentor with the use of powerful mantras. Therefore, I can only conclude that Baka must have been killed by that powerful brāhmaṇa."

The townspeople were satisfied with this story and later on that day they organized a grand festival in which the worship of the brāhmaṇas was the main event. The Pāṇḍavas continued to live at the house of their host-brāhmaṇa and they spent much of their time engaged in the study of the Vedas. Then, after some time, another brāhmaṇa arrived there, and he also became a guest along with the Pāṇḍavas. One day, Kuntī approached this brāhmaṇa and requested him to narrate any interesting experiences which he might have had during his extensive travels. In response, the brāhmaṇa talked about various lands and their inhabitants and finally, he described the births of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Śīkhaṇḍī and Draupadī, as well as the Princess's svayamvara which was soon to be held.

After Drupada had been captured by Arjuna and brought before Droṇa, he had promised his eternal friendship to the brāhmaṇa Droṇa and then departed. The great humiliation which he had experienced never left Drupada's mind, however, and so, due to intense moroseness, he practically wasted away. Drupada's lamentation was further enhanced by the fact that he was childless. At last, Drupada began traveling over the earth, visiting the āśramas of great rśis in the hopes of finding someone of superior prowess who could help him, for he was convinced that mere ksatriya strength was useless.

Once, while wandering on the banks of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā, Drupada came to an āśrama where he met two rśis named Yaja and Upayaja. Drupada quickly became convinced that these brāhmaṇas were competent to accomplish his purpose. Then, when he saw that of the
two, Upayaja, the younger brother, was superior; he endeavored to please him by offering every conceivable object of human desire. Drupada then approached Upayaja one day and said, "O best of brahmaṇas, if you perform a sacrifice that enables me to have a son who can slay Droṇa, then I will reward you with 10,000 cows or whatever else you may desire."

Upayaja replied, "O King, please excuse me, for I am not capable of performing such a sacrifice."

Drupada did not take these words to be factual, however, and so he continued to serve the rṣi in all humility and to the best of his ability. In this way, an entire year passed and then, one day, Upayaja informed Drupada, "Once, as he was wandering in the forest, my elder brother Yaja saw a fruit which had fallen onto the ground. Much to my surprise, without even considering its purity or impurity, Yaja unhesitatingly ate the piece of fruit. Actually, a person who does not judge purity in one case is not likely to do so in other instances as well. When Yaja was living at the house of his guru, he used to eat the unclean remnants of other persons' food without any consideration. Therefore, I can understand that my elder brother is very greedy for material things, and so I recommend that you approach him for the purpose of performing your desired sacrifice."

Although Drupada did not have a very high estimation of Yaja, he took this advice and went to the rṣi's home. After worshipping Yaja very respectfully, Drupada humbly explained, "O Sage, for a long time I have had a burning desire to obtain a son who would be capable of killing Droṇa. I know that brahminical prowess is superior to that which is possessed by kṣatriyas. Therefore, if you will kindly perform a sacrifice that will enable me to have such a son, I will reward you with 10,000 cows or whatever else you may desire."

Yaja happily agreed, but since this particular sacrifice was very difficult to perform, he solicited the help of his younger brother. Upayaja then instructed Drupada how to make all of the necessary arrangements, and he assured him that by this sacrificial performance, he would receive a very powerful son. Thereafter, the sacrifice commenced, and after pouring oblations of ghee into the sacrificial fire, Yaja picked up the sanctified prasādam and commanded the Queen, "Come forward, for a
son and a daughter have arrived here for you." However, the Queen replied, "O brähmaṇa, my mouth is filled with saffron and perfumed spices, and so I am not fit to accept the sanctified oblation. Please wait a bit for me to purify myself, and then I shall accept the prasādam which will enable me to have offspring." Still, Yaja insisted, "The purpose of this sacrifice must be accomplished at once, irrespective of whether you wish to come now or later." After saying this, Yaja poured the oblation into the sacrificial fire, and as a result, a male child miraculously rose out of the flames. This greatly effulgent boy appeared to be just like a demigod, and he wore a crown on his head, carried a sword and a bow in his hands, and he shouted loudly with great exuberance. Immediately after his birth, this remarkable and impetuous child mounted upon a chariot and began driving it here and there for some time. The Pañcālas became mad with joy upon seeing this supernatural boy, and then a voice from the sky proclaimed, "This child has been born for the destruction of Droṇa, and thus he will dispel the unhappiness of King Drupada."

Soon thereafter, a wonderful female child also rose up from the sacrificial fire. Having curly bluish-tinged hair and a dark complexion, she was exceptionally beautiful. She had a bodily fragrance like that of a blue lotus flower and which could be perceived at a distance of up to two miles. A voice from the sky then announced, "This girl will become the cause of destruction for innumerable kṣatriyas, headed by the Kauravas. In this way, she will play a very important role in executing the mission of the demigods to relieve the burden of the earth."

After hearing these words, the jubilant Pañcālas began to roar like lions. Drupada's queen then approached Yaja with the request that the two children which were produced from the sacrificial fire thereafter be known as her own. The priest consented, and the brähmaṇas then performed the name-giving ceremony, and thereafter, the two children were known as Dhrṣṭadyumna and Kṛṣṇā. Later on, Droṇācārya accepted Dhrṣṭadyumna as a student in his house. The magnanimous brähmaṇa unstintingly taught the young prince the entire science of weapons as repayment for the half of the Pañcāla kingdom which he had received from Drupada. Droṇa knew that Dhrṣṭadyumna was destined to kill him, but since he considered Destiny to be irreversible, he did not
hesitate to impart instructions unto him.

After hearing from the brāhmaṇa about Draupādi's extraordinary birth and exceptional beauty, the hearts of the Pāṇḍavas became pierced with the arrows of love, and thus they lost all peace of mind. At this time, Vyāsadeva once again visited the Pāṇḍavas, as he had previously promised, and Queen Kuntī and her sons worshipped him with great reverence. Thereafter, Vyāsadeva discoursed on many interesting topics, and in the course of his talks, he narrated the history of Draupādi as follows:

There was once a rṣi's daughter who was very beautiful and chaste, but due to her past karma, she did not get a husband. She was very unhappy at this, and so she began to perform severe austerities in the hopes of receiving a good mate. Very soon, this rṣi's daughter was able to satisfy Lord Śiva by her worship. Then, when the lord appeared to her in order to award her a benediction, the girl requested, "O foremost of the demigods, I desire to have a good husband. Therefore, I request you to please give me a good husband. I only wish to receive a good husband and nothing else. My single minded desire is to find a qualified husband. Therefore, please grant me my wish so that I may be united with a suitable husband."

Lord Śiva then said, "O brāhmaṇa's daughter, as a result of your austerities, in the future, you will simultaneously marry five heroic princes in the Bāhārata line."

At this, the girl pleaded, "O Lord, I only desire to have one husband, and so please do not reward me with five."

Lord Śiva then explained, "Since you implored me to give you a husband five times, you will have to accept five husbands in your next life so that your words may not prove false."

Vyāsadeva then informed the Pāṇḍavas, "This rṣi's daughter has now once again appeared as the daughter of King Drupada. She has been appointed by divine authority to become the common wife for all of you. Go now at once to the capital of the Pañcālas. You will certainly obtain Draupādi as your wife, and in this way you will all become very happy."

After saying this, Vyāsadeva bid the Pāṇḍavas and their mother farewell and then departed. Kuntī could understand that her sons were already
completely enamored with the idea of obtaining Draupadi. With this in mind, she addressed Yudhiṣṭhira as follows: "My dear son, I also think that we should go without delay to the kingdom of the Pañcālas. We have lived here at Ekacakra for such a long time that it is not easy for us to collect alms as it was before."
The Pāṇḍavas readily agreed, and after taking leave from their brāhmaṇa host, they set out for Drupada's capital. With joyful hearts that were filled with high expectations, the Pāṇḍavas walked day and night. Finally, they came to the banks of the Gaṅgā just after the sun had set. It so happened that Aṅgāraparṇa the king of the Gandharvas, was sporting there in the water along with his wives. When he heard the intruders approaching, Aṅgāraparṇa angrily came out from the water and then picked up his bow. Then, coming before the Pāṇḍavas, he said, "I am Aṅgāraparṇa, the chief of the Gandharvas, and I forbid you to go any further. Now is the twilight hour, which has been appointed especially for the Gandharvas, Yakṣas and Rākṣasas. During this time, no human being should approach our domain, and since this garden happens to belong to me, you had better turn back at once!"
Arjuna then replied to these haughty words, "You are a fool for trying to stop us because everyone is free to approach the Gaṅgā, the ocean and the Himālayas at any time and under any circumstance. Therefore, I warn you not to try and stop us. Otherwise, you will have to face the severe consequences!"
When Aṅgāraparṇa heard this, he angrily drew back his bow and began to discharge his arrows at the Pāṇḍavas. Arjuna warded off these shafts with his shield and then declared, "O worst of the Gandharvas, since your race is considered to be superior to the human beings, I shall fight with you by employing celestial weapons. Just stand before me a moment as I release a weapon of Agni which was given by Bhṛhaspati to Bhāradvāja, by Bhāradvāja to Agniveṣa, by Agniveṣa to Droṇācārya, who then passed it on to me."
After saying this, Arjuna released the Āgneya weapon, and as the Gandharva king remained stationed in the sky, it burnt his aerial chariot to ashes, causing him to tumble headfirst to the ground. Arjuna then grabbed the unconscious Aṅgāraparṇa by the hair and began to forcibly drag him along the ground toward his brothers. At this time, the
wife of Aṅgāraparṇa, named Kumbhīnasī, took shelter of Yudhiṣṭhira with a desire to save her husband. When he saw how distressed the woman was, Yudhiṣṭhira mercifully ordered his younger brother, "O Arjuna do not slay this enemy, for he has already been defeated by you." In this way, the Gandharva king was released and then, with a great feeling of indebtedness, he said, "O son of Kuntī, I shall now discard my name Aṅgāraparṇa (the one who possesses a blazing chariot) and instead take the name Citraratha (one whose chariot was burnt). Because you have so kindly spared my life, I wish to repay the favor by teaching you Cākṣuṣi, the mystic Gandharva art of illusion. This knowledge can normally be obtained only after performing austerities while standing on only one leg for six months. However, I shall impart the science of Cākṣuṣi unto you without your having executed the required penances. Besides this, I would like to present 100 celestial horses to each of you five brothers." Arjuna then said, "O Gandharva king, I am not inclined to take anything in exchange for your release, for it is not my practice to accept charity from others." However, Citraratha pleaded, "The only reason that I am offering you these gifts is that I feel very fortunate to have met such an exalted personality as yourself. O descendent of Bhārata, if you think that the exchange should not be one-sided, then I would be happy to accept your Āgneya weapon in return." Arjuna finally agreed to accept Citraratha's horses on this basis and then he inquired, "What is the reason that you tried to stop us from approaching the Gaṅgā at night?" Citraratha replied, "There were two faults which you displayed while coming here. First of all, you do not belong to any proper āśrama since your schooling is finished (brahmacarya) but still you have not yet married (grhastha). Secondly, you were proceeding along the path without observing the principle of keeping a brāhmaṇa in front. O Arjuna, the real truth, however, is that I became angry with you because you approached me while I was enjoying with my wife. No man who considers himself to be a powerful hero should tolerate any improper behavior in the presence of his wife. I know fully well your true identities as the sons of illustrious demigods. Still, the only reason why you were able to defeat me is that you are a brahmacārī. No married kṣatriya could possibly survive fighting
with me at night when my strength greatly increases, unless he were being protected by a powerful brähmana."

While speaking with Arjuna, Citraratha had several times referred to him as Tapatya (the son of Tapati). Arjuna inquired about this, since he was accustomed to being called Kaunteya (the son of Kunti), and in response, the Gandharva king narrated the following story:

Sūrya had a daughter named Tapatī, who was the younger sister of Sāvitri. Tapatī was unequaled in terms of beauty and good qualities, and so her father thought that there was no one who was actually worthy of becoming her husband. Because of this, when Tapatī reached the age of puberty, Sūrya became very anxious about to whom he could give away his beloved daughter. At this time, there was a king in the Kuru dynasty named Saṁvaraṇa, who was engaged in worshipping the sun-god while performing great austerities. In consideration of the king's great piety and devotion, Sūrya gradually came to consider him to be the right match for Tapatī. One day, while Saṁvaraṇa was hunting in a mountain forest, his horse died after becoming overwhelmed by hunger, thirst and fatigue. Then, as he wandered alone on foot, the king happened to come upon an astonishingly beautiful young girl. Indeed, he was so taken aback by her that for some time all he could do was simply stand there motionless and stare. As he gazed at the lovely girl, Saṁvaraṇa then thought, "After seeing her, I feel disgust when I think of the other so-called beautiful women that I have known. My eyesight has become truly blessed today by obtaining this lovely vision."

In this way, Saṁvaraṇa's heart became completely captivated by the girl. Then, after gaining a little composure, the Kuru king inquired, "My dear young girl, please tell me who you are and why you are wandering alone in this uninhabited forest. I have never before met anyone else having such an agreeable and enchanting smile, and the exquisite beauty of your lotus-like face makes all other women seem no better than monkeys."

Then, as Saṁvaraṇa continued to praise the girl for her beauty, she suddenly disappeared from that spot. This was a great shock for the king, and so in separation he began to wander through the forest just like a madman, searching feverishly for his beloved. At last, when he failed to find her anywhere, Saṁvaraṇa stood motionless, as if bereft of life.
Then, as the king became more and more overwhelmed by intense grief, he suddenly fell to the ground, bereft of all reason. Just at this moment, the young maiden once again appeared and smilingly said, "Get up my dear hero. It is not at all befitting for a great man like yourself to lose control of his senses."

When Saṃvaraṇa opened his eyes, he saw the object of his love standing before him. Being extremely eager to have the girl, the king begged her to accept him according to the Gandharva style of marriage (by mere consent). For this purpose, Saṃvaraṇa spoke to her in a pitiful voice as follows: "O most beautiful one, I am now completely helpless, having been deeply pierced by the arrows of Cupid. Please accept me as your lover and slave, for if you reject me, I shall not be able to bear to go on living."

The girl then replied, "My name is Tapatī, and I am the daughter of the sun-god Vivasvān. Therefore, I am not independent. I cannot choose you for my husband on my own, although I am quite willing to do so, since I am also stricken with love for you. If you truly desire to marry me then please go to my father and receive his permission."

Having said this, Tapatī rose up into the sky, and after her disappearance, Saṃvaraṇa once again fell to the ground on account of intense grief. The king's ministers and attendants soon came there, and the chief minister affectionately lifted Saṃvaraṇa up thinking that he must have become exhausted due to hunger and thirst. After cold water had been sprinkled on his face, Saṃvaraṇa regained consciousness, and then he sent back all of his retinue except the chief minister.

Thereafter, in order to achieve his desired goal, the king of the Kurus began to devoutly worship the sun-god without interruption, day and night, while performing severe penances.

While worshipping Sūrya, Saṃvaraṇa began to think of his preceptor Vasiṣṭha. Then, after twelve days, the great ṛṣi appeared to his disciple. By dint of his mystic power, Vasiṣṭha knew that the king had completely lost his mental equilibrium due to attachment for Tapatī. Being Saṃvaraṇa's well-wisher, the ṛṣi mercifully assured him that his hopes would soon become fulfilled and then he once again ascended into the skies.

Soon thereafter, Vasiṣṭha came before Sūrya with folded hands. Then,
when the sungod inquired about his purpose, Vasiṣṭha humbly requested that his daughter be handed over to King Saṁvarana. Śūrya happily consented and thereafter, when Saṁvarana saw Vasiṣṭha returning through the sky, accompanied by Tapatī, his joy knew no bounds. In this way, the king of the Kurus came to marry the daughter of the sun-god and thereafter, he continued to enjoy her company in those mountainous regions for twelve years. During this time, however, Indra did not shower any rain upon the Kuru kingdom, and so all of the citizens, trees and animals began to die of starvation. Indeed, due to extreme hunger, many of the citizens left their homes, abandoning even their wives and children, and due to their deprivation, they began to act ruthlessly toward each other. When Vasiṣṭha saw that the subjects had become reduced to mere skeletons, he resolved to rectify the situation, and so he went and ordered Saṁvarana to come back from his life of seclusion. Then, as soon as the king arrived at his capital in order to resume taking responsibility for the state administration, Indra also once again showered rain so that the kingdom gradually returned to normal. Citraratha then said, "After some time, Saṁvarana and Tapatī begot a son named Kuru, in whose dynasty you have appeared. My dear Arjuna, it is for this reason that I had addressed you as Tapatya (the son of Tapatī)."

Arjuna was very happy to hear this historical narration, and since his curiosity had become aroused, he requested Citraratha to describe the pastimes of Vasiṣṭha, the priest of his forefathers. The Gandharva king was happy to continue speaking and so in response, he related the following incidents.

King Gāḍhi had a son named Viśvāmitra, who used to roam throughout the forest along with his ministers while hunting deer. Once, while so engaged, Viśvāmitra became very tired and thirsty, and in that condition he happened to arrive at the āśrama of the great sage, Vasiṣṭha. The ṛṣi gave the king a very respectful reception and then provided him with all kinds of luxuries which were produced by his wonderful kāmadhenu named Nandinī. This celestial cow could supply any desirable article upon request. Thus, when Vasiṣṭha provided Viśvāmitra as well as all of his ministers and soldiers with innumerable
varieties of food and drink, as well as clothes, gems and other such articles, they became highly gratified. However, at the same time, Viśvāmitra became very envious upon seeing the rṣi’s good fortune. Because of this contamination, a greedy obsession to possess Nandini soon eclipsed Viśvāmitra’s good intelligence. Then, as he spoke with Vasiṣṭha, praising his kämadhenu very highly, the king took the opportunity to ask, "O great sage, kindly give me your celestial cow, and in return I shall present you with 10,000 other very good cows. Indeed, anything else you may desire, including my entire kingdom, I will give to you."

However, Vasiṣṭha replied, "My dear king, this kämadhenu is absolutely essential for my performance of sacrifices as well as for my worship of the demigods, forefathers and guests. Therefore, I cannot agree to part with her for any amount of wealth."

Viśvāmitra mistakenly thought that brāhmaṇas were simply peace-loving people who lacked prowess. Thus being deluded, he then arrogantly announced, "O Rṣi, if you refuse to accept my kind offer, then I will carry away your kämadhenu by force, as is the custom amongst kṣatriyas."

Indeed, after saying this, Viśvāmitra got up from his seat and then forcibly caught hold of Nandini. The kämadhenu was able to break loose from the king’s grip, however, and since she was unwilling to leave Vasiṣṭha’s āśrama, she ran to the rṣi’s shelter while piteously crying out for help. Vasiṣṭha then informed Nandini, "Since I am a brāhmaṇa, I must never give up the practice of tolerance and forgiveness. Because of this, there is nothing I can do to help you. O best of celestial cows, I am unwilling to retaliate against the king’s aggression, and so you will have to fend for yourself."

Nandini was terrified of Viśvāmitra and his soldiers and as she clung closely to Vasiṣṭha she implored, "O Rṣi, why are you acting indifferently toward me, as if I have no master?" However, even after hearing this plea, Vasiṣṭha remained unmoved and then replied, "Tolerance and forgiveness are the strength of the brāhmaṇas. Therefore, I cannot abandon these exalted qualities under any circumstance. O Nandini, if you like, you are free to go with the king or else you can stay here, whatever you choose."

Nandini then asked, "O Rṣi, does this mean that you are now discarding
me? Please answer me clearly, for I know that if you do not willfully neglect me, then no one can take me away from here by force." Vasiṣṭha replied, "I am not casting you off. Thus, if you are able to do so, then you are quite welcome to stay here with me."

As soon as Nandini heard the word "stay" she assumed a gigantic form that was very frightening to behold. As her eyes became red with rage, Nandini produced a shower of hot coals from her tail. Then, from other parts of her body she manifested an army of Yavanas, Mlecchas, Śakas, Kirātas, Pulindas, Hūṇas, and other uncivilized tribes. These barbaric warriors were so numerous that each of Viśvāmitra's soldiers was attacked by six or seven of them. However, without any killing, Nandini's army simply drove off Viśvāmitra's panicstricken soldiers, making them flee in all directions while the king looked on with wonder.

After witnessing this vivid demonstration of brahminical prowess, Viśvāmitra became disgusted with mere kṣatriya strength, and thus he realized that real power is gained as a result of austerity. Viśvāmitra then gave up his kingdom and all desire for material pleasures in order to turn his mind toward asceticism. Finally, after executing severe penances for many thousands of years, Viśvāmitra attained the fulfillment of his desires by becoming elevated to the status of brahmārṣi.

Long ago, there was a king in the line of Ikṣvāku named Kalmāṣapāda, who was a disciple of Viśvāmitra. Once, while hunting in the forest, Kalmāṣapāda became very tired after killing numerous animals, and so he stopped for awhile to rest. However, since he was also greatly afflicted with hunger and thirst, Kalmāṣapāda soon resumed walking, and while going on the forest path he happened to meet Śakti, the son of Vasiṣṭha, approaching from the other direction. Since the path was very narrow, the arrogant King Kalmāṣapāda ordered. "Please move aside so that I can pass!"

In spite of being roughly addressed, Śakti politely replied, "O King, it is a religious principle that a kṣatriya must always make way for a brāhmaṇa." Kalmāṣapāda remained adamant, however, and thus, again and again, the two requested each other to move aside. Because of great pride, however, neither would yield the right-of-way, although it was certainly a fact that Śakti had spoken correctly. Finally, Kalmāṣapāda flared up in
anger and struck Śakti violently with his whip. This made the rṣi lose all
tolerance, and in retaliation, he angrily cursed the king by saying, "You
will soon become just like a Rākṣasa, for by persecuting the rṣis, you are
already acting like one."
Formerly, Viśvāmitra had gotten into an argument with Vasiṣṭha over
who would become the preceptor of Kalmāṣapāda. Now, when
Viśvāmitra understood by dint of his mystic power that the King
Kalmāṣapāda was quarreling with Vasiṣṭha's son, he quickly came to that
spot in the forest. While remaining hidden, Viśvāmitra saw how
Kalmāṣapāda was repentantly trying to pacify Śakti with sweet words.
Fearing that the two might become reconciled, the son of Gādhi ordered
a Rākṣasa named Kiṅkara to enter Kalmāṣapāda's body at once, in
accordance with Śakti's curse. Viśvāmitra then departed, and soon
thereafter, King Kalmāṣapāda lost all good reason and became possessed
with the nature of a Rākṣasa.
Then, one day, a hungry brāhmaṇa happened to meet Kalmāṣapāda in
the forest and so he approached him in the hopes of begging for some
food. In response to the brāhmaṇa's appeal, the king replied, "Kindly
wait here for some time while I go and bring some food for you."
Kalmāṣapāda left that place and then, after roaming here and there for
some time, he returned to his palace to take rest. Suddenly, at midnight,
he woke up with a start, realizing that he had completely forgotten the
promise which he had made to the brāhmaṇa. Kalmāṣapāda quickly
summoned his cook and ordered him to prepare some meat and take it to
the brāhmaṇa in the forest. After receiving this order, the cook went to
get some meat, but then, when he failed to find any, he returned and
informed the king of the situation. Since Kalmāṣapāda was possessed by
a Rākṣasa, his moral discrimination had been lost. Thus, he ordered the
cook to take human flesh to the brāhmaṇa if there was nothing else to be
found. The cook then approached the king's executioner, and in this
way he received some human flesh. After cooking it, he covered it over
with some rice and then went to the forest and offered it to the
brāhmaṇa. With his spiritual vision, however, the brāhmaṇa could
understand that the meat was impure and so he angrily cursed King
Kalmāṣapāda by saying, "You shall have to wander over the earth with a
craving for human flesh and thus you will become a cause of terror for
all."
Since this was a repetition of Śakti's former curse, its effect upon Kalmåśapāda became very strong. As a result of this, the king became bereft of whatever little good sense he had still possessed. Soon thereafter, when Kalmåśapāda happened to once again meet Śakti, he declared, "O Rṣi, I am now going to begin my life as a man-eater by devouring you, for it was you who cursed me to become like a Rākṣasa."
After saying this, Kalmåśapāda murdered Śakti and ate him on the spot, just as a tiger slays another animal and then devours it. After this incident, Viśvāmitra repeatedly urged the Rākṣasa within Kalmåśapāda to attack the other sons of Vasiṣṭha, and thus within a short while all 100 were slain. Vasiṣṭha knew that Viśvāmitra was the real cause of his sons' deaths, but with great determination he tolerated this thinking, "I would rather give up my own life than retaliate against Viśvāmitra by killing his sons." Still, Vasiṣṭha became so aggrieved at the loss of his sons that at last he could no longer bear to continue living. Desiring to give up his life out of desperation, Vasiṣṭha climbed to the top of Mount Meru and then jumped from its peak. However, when he landed upon the rocky ground below, it felt to him just as if he had leapt onto heaps of flutry cotton, and thus his attempt at suicide was a failure.
Next, Vasiṣṭha ignited a blazing fire in the forest. However, when he entered into the flames with a desire to end his life, instead of his body being burnt to ashes, he felt the fire to be cool, like ice. Vasiṣṭha then went to the ocean, and after tying a heavy rock around his neck, he threw himself into the water. Instead of drowning, however, the ṛṣi was washed back onto the shore by the waves. After seeing how all of his attempts at suicide were not sanctioned by the Supreme Controller, Vasiṣṭha gave up the idea of ending his life and then returned home to his āśrama. However, when he saw how desolate his abode was without his children, Vasiṣṭha again became so aggrieved that he could not bear to remain there. After wandering here and there, Vasiṣṭha came to a broad stream whose swift current had become swollen by the monsoon rains. When he saw how the raging river was carrying away big trees from its banks, the ṛṣi considered this to be a good opportunity to drown himself. With this in mind, Vasiṣṭha tied his arms and legs together with stout ropes and then threw himself into the water. Miraculously,
however, instead of drowning him, the strong currents cut loose his bonds and then washed him ashore.
Due to his great unhappiness, Vasiṣṭha could not bear to remain in one place and so he once again continued his wanderings. When he came to the banks of the river Haimavatī, he saw many fierce crocodiles living within the water. Taking this to be another opportunity, Vasiṣṭha jumped in from a high place. However, as soon as the river saw the ṛṣi, she scattered in a hundred directions, thinking him to be a mass of fire, and because of this, Vasiṣṭha landed upon dry ground. Ever since that time, this river has been called the "Śatadrū" (having 100 courses).
After this, Vasiṣṭha concluded that it was not possible for him to commit suicide by personal endeavor, and he once again turned back toward home. Then, as he was approaching his āśrama, Vasiṣṭha could hear someone following him who was reciting the Vedas very eloquently. After turning around, Vasiṣṭha saw that Adṛśyanti, the widow of Śakti, was walking on the path behind him. With great surprise, Vasiṣṭha inquired, "My dear daughter-in-law, whose voice have I just heard, reciting the Vedas just like my son Śakti used to do?"
Adṛśyanti then replied, "O venerable ṛṣi, you heard the son of Śakti, who has been within my womb for the last twelve years."
When Vasiṣṭha heard this, he became very happy to know that he had a remaining descendent to perpetuate his family line and thus he finally gave up all desire to end his life. Then, some time later, as Vasiṣṭha and his daughter-in-law were walking together in the forest, they came upon Kalmāṣapāda. Immediately, the king rushed forward with the intention of devouring them, and so Adṛśyanti became terrified and begged Vasiṣṭha to give her protection. Vasiṣṭha gave his daughter-in-law assurances and then uttered the vibration 'hūm' in order to invest some water with the mantra's potency. Vasiṣṭha then sprinkled the water over Kalmāṣapāda, and the king at once became freed from the curse that had overwhelmed him for the past twelve years.
When Kalmāṣapāda thus came to his senses, he offered obeisances unto Vasiṣṭha, and then, with folded hands he said, "O best of the brāhmaṇas, I now beg to become your disciple. Therefore, please order me so that I may engage in your service."
However, Vasiṣṭha simply replied, "Just return to your capital and resume ruling over the kingdom as before. In addition, make certain that you never again dare attempt to insult or harm a brāhmaṇa."

Kalmāśapāda then said, "From now on, I promise to always worship the brāhmaṇas with the greatest reverence. O Ṛṣi, kindly accept one small request which I humbly submit before you. As you know, due to being cursed, I am unable to beget children. Therefore, I beg you to beget a son upon my wife so that I can absolve my debt to the Ikṣvāku dynasty. Vasiṣṭha assured Kalmāśapāda that he would give him a glorious son, and thereafter they both returned to Ayodhya. Since the king had come back after such a prolonged absence on account of being cursed, the citizens were overjoyed to see him freed from all evil effects. Then, after some time, Kalmāśapāda instructed his wife Madayantī to approach Vasiṣṭha, and thus the ṛṣi united with the queen in a righteous manner. Shortly thereafter, Vasiṣṭha departed, and Madayantī continued to bear the embryo in her womb for a long time. Finally, when there was no sign of delivery, in spite of so much time having past, the queen became exceedingly restless. At last, in a fit of impatience, she tore open her womb by using a sharp stone, and in this way twelve years after the time of conception, Aśmaka was born.

Meanwhile, Adṛśyantī had given birth to a son while residing at Vasiṣṭha's āśrama, and when the ṛṣi performed the birth ceremonies, he named the boy Parāśara. Because Śakti had died, Parāśara grew up thinking that Vasiṣṭha was his actual father. One day, however, when Adṛśyantī heard her son address the ṛṣi in that manner, she explained to him that Vasiṣṭha was his grandfather and that his real father had been devoured by a Rākṣasa. When Parāśara heard this, he became overwhelmed with anger and grief, and in order to avenge his father's death, he resolved to destroy the entire material creation. When Vasiṣṭha understood what was on the boy's mind, he then related to him the following story in order to dissuade him from his determination:

There was once a great king named Kṛṭavīrya, who was a disciple of the brāhmaṇa descendants in the line of Bhṛgu. Once, Kṛṭavīrya gave the brāhmaṇas a vast amount of wealth after they had performed a lengthy sacrifice on his behalf. Then, later on, after Kṛṭavīrya's death, it so happened that his descendants gradually became poverty-stricken. In
this condition, they decided to approach the Bhārgavas and ask for some of their previously acquired wealth. After disguising themselves as beggars, the descendants of Kṛtavīrya went and presented themselves before the brähmaṇas. However, in order to protect their wealth, some of the Bhārgavas had buried their treasure in the ground and some had given their wealth to other brähmaṇas for safe-keeping.

Then, one day, as some of the descendants of Kṛtavīrya were digging up the earth near the house of one of the Bhārgavas, they uncovered a vast buried treasure. Having thus exposed the deceitful behavior of the Bhārgavas, the Kārtavīryās became highly enraged, and although the brähmaṇas piteously begged for forgiveness, these kṣatriyas killed many of them with their sharp arrows. This enmity began to spread and thus, at last, the descendants of Kṛtavīrya roamed the earth, killing even the embryos within the wombs of the bhārgava women. Out of fear, many of the kṣatriya ladies fled to the Himālayas, and one of them, desiring to perpetuate her family line, hid a powerful embryo within one of her thighs for 100 years. However, another brähmaṇa woman became very fearful that this act of deception would bring the wrath of the kṣatriyas down upon them all. Hoping to save herself, she went and informed the Kārtavīryās of this, and so, without delay, the kṣatriyas went to the Himālayas in order to destroy the undetected embryo. There, the Kārtavīryās saw a woman who blazed forth radiantly with energy coming from within her body. Then, as the kṣatriyas looked on with wonder, a male child suddenly appeared by tearing open the woman's thigh. This boy was given the name Arurva (the thigh-born), and he was so effulgent that all of the kṣatriyas whose gaze fell upon him became blind. The Kārtavīryās then left that place and began wandering about, devoid of sight. At last, having become very distressed, those blind kṣatriyas returned to Arurva's mother and begged, "O noble lady, if you kindly enable our vision to be restored, then we will prepare to give up our sinful practice of killing the descendants of Bhrigu."

However, the mother replied, "It is not I whom you must appease. It was my son who blinded you, being enraged at the destruction of his dynasty. If you want to regain your sight, then you had better go and pacify him." The kṣatriyas then approached Arurva, and at last, the child mercifully agreed to restore their vision. The kṣatriyas then happily departed, but
soon thereafter, Arurva's wrath once again flared up, just as a fire that is not completely extinguished rekindles itself at the first opportunity. As a result, Arurva at last became determined to destroy all of the living creatures in the creation in order to avenge the killing of his ancestors. Thereafter, as Arurva began executing severe austerities for this purpose, the entire three worlds gradually came to be afflicted. Finally, his pitṛs came before Arurva and said, "My dear boy, you should know that the descendants of Bhṛgu were not incapable of defending themselves from the wrath of the kṣatriyas. We had grown very weary of our long duration of earthly life and so we desired to die in order to attain heaven without delay. It was only for this reason that the Bhārgavas had buried their treasure thus causing a dispute with the kṣatriyas that brought about their deaths."

Arurva was convinced by his forefathers' explanation, but still he replied, "O pitṛs, even if the kṣatriyas were to be considered innocent, my anger cannot go in vain. And, the fact is that since they had mercilessly killed the bhārgava women and their embryos, these kṣatriyas are not at all innocent and thus deserve to be punished. It is my duty to chastise them, for crime that is left unpunished simply encourages more lawlessness. In addition, one who is capable of punishing a criminal but does not do so himself, becomes implicated in sinful reactions. My dear forefathers, I cannot obey your command to give up my anger, for if I do so, I myself will surely be consumed by it. Therefore, I request you to think of some way for me to vent my rage so that both myself and the entire world shall benefit."

In consideration of Arurva's request, the pitṛs finally suggested, "Let the fire of your wrath be thrown into the ocean. In that way, your vow to destroy the universe will technically remain intact because the world is largely composed of water and all living creatures depend upon it for their existence. At the same time, however, the universe will remain intact because the unlimited ocean will be able to assimilate your fierce energy."

Thereafter, Arurva cast his anger into the abode of Varuṇa, and in this way, the subterranean fire, which always engages in consuming the ocean, came into being.

After hearing this narration from his grandfather, Parāśara also
restrained his anger from destroying the three worlds. Still, with Vasiśṭha's consent, he inaugurated a great Rākṣasa sacrifice, and thus all of the man-eaters began to be consumed one after another in the sacrificial fire. Atri Rṣi then came there along with Pulastya, Pulaha and Kratu in the hopes of putting a stop to this ghastly sacrifice. Pulastya then said, "O Parāśara, do you take pleasure in killing innocent Rākṣasas who had nothing to do with your father's death? This sort of destruction is not the occupational duty of a brāhmaṇa. The highest virtue for a brāhmaṇa is nonviolence and therefore I request you to put an end to this sacrifice. Besides, you should know that your father Śakti was actually killed by his own will. Ordinarily, he would have never allowed himself to become disturbed by such a small insult. Thus, you should understand that his cursing of Kalmāṣapāda was the means which he provided for his own death. Otherwise, such a great ṛṣi can never be killed by any Rākṣasa. My dear boy, all of these things are actually the arrangement of Destiny, and thus, even Viśvāmitra was a helpless instrument in the killing of your father, just as you are now a blind instrument in the performance of this sacrifice. I can assure you that your father, his younger brothers, and Kalmāṣapāda are all enjoying life together in heaven this very moment."

After hearing this, Parāśara agreed to stop the rākṣasa-yajña, and then, Atri and the others departed since their mission had been accomplished. Arjuna then inquired, "O king of the Gandharvas, why did Kalmāṣapāda order his wife to have sexual union with Vasiśṭha? Is such connection actually sinful or virtuous according to the injunctions of śāstra?"

In order to reply to Arjuna's questions, Citraratha continued his narration as follows:

Once, during the period when Kalmāṣapāda was under the influence of Kiṅkara the Rākṣasa's possession, he went to the forest along with his wife Madayantī. Finally, after wandering about for some time, Kalmāṣapāda became very hungry and so he began to search for food. In this way, he happened to come upon a brāhmaṇa who was engaged in sexual intercourse with his wife. Although their sexual urges had not yet been gratified, the couple began running away in great fear upon seeing the frenzied king. By giving chase however, Kalmāṣapāda was able to seize the brāhmaṇa, and after doing so he prepared to eat his flesh then
and there. The wife of the brahmaṇa knew who Kalmāšapāda was and how he had been cursed to become just like a Rākṣasa. In a pitiful voice she pleaded, "My dear king, please remember your exalted lineage and thus give up your abominable intention to devour my innocent husband. Now is the time for me to conceive a child, and yet I have not yet been gratified by union with him."

Kalmāšapāda hardly paid attention to the woman's appeal, however, and he proceeded to devour the brahmaṇa just as a tiger eats its prey. The aggrieved wife of the brahmaṇa then angrily cursed Kalmāšapāda by saying, "The next time that you try to sexually unite with your wife, you will instantly die. However, in order to beget an heir, your wife will have sexual intercourse with the great sage Vasiṣṭha, whose 100 sons you have already devoured."

After saying this, the brahmaṇi built a fire for cremating the remains of her husband. Then, as Kalmāšapāda looked on, she entered the flames in order to follow her husband to his destination. Then, once, later on, after Kalmāšapāda became freed from his curse, he approached his wife at the time which was suitable for her conception. Because of his passionate desire for sexual gratification, Kalmāšapāda had forgotten all about the brahmaṇi's curse. Madayantī anxiously reminded him however, and so Kalmāšapāda became very alarmed at what he had almost done, and then gave up his intention. After this incident, he appointed Vasiṣṭha to beget a son upon Madayantī as previously described.

At the beginning of their conversation, Citraratha had stressed to Arjuna the importance of having a good brahmaṇa priest. Arjuna thus requested him to suggest someone whom he felt to be qualified and so the Gandharva king recommended Dhaumya, the younger brother of Devala, who was residing nearby. Arjuna was very pleased with Citraratha for his lengthy discourse and then, as he presented his Āgneya weapon he said, "You may keep the horses which you have offered to me for some jime. Later on, we shall take the celestial steeds when the need arises."

Thereafter, Citraratha departed and the Pāṇḍavas proceeded toward Utkocaka, where the ṛṣi Dhaumya was engaged in performing
austerities. Dhaumya readily agreed to become the Pāṇḍavas' priest, and after having him ceremoniously installed in that position, the five brothers felt as if their mission to obtain Draupadī had already been accomplished. Indeed, the Pāṇḍavas felt so protected under Dhaumya's shelter that they considered their sovereignty and kingdom to be as good as regained. 

Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas departed for the kingdom of the Paṅcālas, and while going along the road, they saw that many brāhmaṇas were also proceeding in the same direction. When the brāhmaṇas inquired about their identities, the Pāṇḍavas simply explained that they were also brāhmaṇas, coming from the town of Ekacakra. The brāhmaṇas then described the grand festival which was being arranged by Mahārāja Drupada (who was also called Yajñasena) on the occasion of his daughter's svayaṁvara. They also described Draupadī's exquisite beauty and then said, "Princes will be coming from all over the world just to try and win her hand. These kṣatriya heroes will distribute vast amounts of wealth to the brāhmaṇas in the hopes that this will enable them to fulfill their ardent desire. Why don't you accompany us to this festival and thus take advantage of this good opportunity to receive charity?"

Indeed, while appreciating the Pāṇḍavas' celestial beauty, the brāhmaṇas further remarked, "Draupadī might even choose one of you for her husband, thinking you to be superior to all of the kṣatriyas."

Thereafter, as they proceeded toward the kingdom of the Paṅcālas, Vyāsadeva once again briefly came to the Pāṇḍavas, just to give them further encouragement in the matter of winning Draupadī's hand. Finally, Drupada's magnificent capitol came into view, and after entering the city, the Pāṇḍavas and their mother took up residence at the house of a potter. Actually, Drupada had always desired to give his exceptionally beautiful daughter to Arjuna, although he had never mentioned this to anyone. Still, the king knew of Arjuna's unrivaled strength and skill in archery and so he made a very stiff bow that could only be strung by him. Then, he contrived a very clever target by hanging a fish on the ceiling behind a revolving protective wheel. Drupada then declared that only one who would pierce this target could gain the hand of his daughter in marriage, and in this way he announced the svayaṁvara of Draupadī, knowing that only Arjuna was able to come
A great arena was then constructed and gorgeously decorated, and surrounding it were built numerous seven-story palaces, each having 100 doors and encircled by high walls and moats. These palaces were meant to house all of the prominent princes and kings of the world who were then invited to attend Draupadi's *svayamvara*. Soon thereafter, heroic *kṣatriyas* began pouring into the Pañcāla capital from far-off lands, and they included Duryodhana, Karṇa and many other members of the Kuru dynasty.

The great festival was scheduled to last for fifteen days, climaxing with the appearance of the princess Draupadī, and all of the citizens came to watch the entertaining performances given by the musicians, singers, dancers, reciters and dramatists.

When the appointed day arrived, Draupadī carefully bathed, dressed and then fully decorated herself with ornaments. At last, the princess entered the arena of her *svayamvara*, carrying a flower garland in one hand and a golden dish of *arghya* in the other. The fire sacrifice commenced along with the chanting of the Vedic *mantras*, and when the crowd became perfectly still, Dhṛṣṭadyumna took his sister by the arm and announced the rules of the contest. Then, addressing his father, Dhṛṣṭadyumna read aloud the names and achievements of all the heroic princes and kings who were present there, including such illustrious personalities as Duryodhana, Śakuni, Aśvatthāmā, Virāṭa and his two sons, Śalya, Pauṇḍraka, Bhagadatta, some of Lord Kṛṣṇa's sons including Śāmba, Pradyumna and Cārudeśṇa, Śiśupāla, Jarāsandha, and many, many others. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then informed his sister that she could choose her husband from amongst those who could string the bow and then successfully pierce the fish target.

All of the assembled *kṣatriyas* were intoxicated with pride, and thus they were very jealous of each other. After seeing the incomparably beautiful Draupadī, they became maddened with lust at the thought of winning her. While uttering exclamations such as, "This beautiful princess shall be mine!" the *kṣatriya* heroes proceeded to where the bow was being kept in the sacrificial arena. At this time, even those who were known to be the best of friends regarded each other as bitter enemies.
All of the demigods had curiously appeared overhead in their celestial vehicles in order to witness Draupadi's svayamvara. Lord Kṛṣṇa then suddenly made a dramatic entrance, accompanied by Lord Balarāma, and He could immediately recognize the Pāṇḍavas in disguise as they were seated amongst the brāhmaṇas. Great ṛṣis like Nārada, as well as numerous Gandharvas, Siddhas and other celestial beings also appeared in the sky. Thus, it soon became so crowded that the demigods could hardly find enough space to maneuver their chariots in order to get a good view.

Thereafter, the heroic kṣatriyas began to come forward in order to show off their prowess in the hopes of winning the beautiful Draupadi. All of them, including the Pāṇḍavas, gazed upon the princess with wide-open eyes, for they were pierced by Cupid's arrows of love. One by one they came forward in order to attempt to string the mighty bow. Yet, although these mighty warriors were bursting with energy and possessed mighty arms which were adorned with golden bracelets, none of them could even begin to string the extraordinarily stiff bow; not even in their imaginations. Indeed, some of the heroes were thrown down violently onto the ground while trying to string the bow, and thus they lay there for some time, completely exhausted. With their garlands and ornaments in disarray, these kṣatriyas cursed bitterly their defeat while panting hard to catch their breath.

In this way, practically all of the assembled princes and kings became frustrated and morose, their ambitions for winning the fair Draupadi having been smashed. Seizing this opportunity, Karṇa next approached the bow, and after quickly stringing it, he put the arrow in place and took careful aim at the target. When the Pāṇḍavas saw this, they became stunned, knowing that because of Karṇa's superior prowess, the fish-target was already as good as pierced. However, before Karṇa could release the arrow, the quick-witted Draupadi loudly declared, "I am not willing to accept a sūta as my husband!"

At this, Karṇa angrily glanced up at the sun and then threw the bow aside out of frustration. Śiśupāla then came forward, but as he attempted to string the bow, he fell down to his knees due to exhaustion. Jarāsandha took his turn next, but he was soon thrown to the ground by the spring of the mighty bow. The same thing happened to Śalya, and so
the crowd began making derisive comments amongst themselves about the failure of the assembled kṣatriyas.

Then, suddenly, Arjuna rose up from the section of brāhmaṇas and began majestically striding toward the bow. Indeed, this caused quite a stir amongst the brāhmaṇas. Some of them were very pleased, but others were annoyed, thinking that if Arjuna failed, then it would be a great disgrace for them. On the other hand, many of the brāhmaṇas felt confident of Arjuna's success. They not only appreciated his superior bodily strength, but they had full faith in the efficacy of brahminical prowess as well.

First of all, Arjuna circumambulated the bow, and then, after bowing his head to Lord Śiva, he firmly fixed his mind upon the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna then took the bow in his hands and strung it in an instant. After placing an arrow upon the bowstring, he drew it all the way back to his ear and then carefully took aim. When Arjuna then released the arrow, it pierced the fish target, making it crash to the ground after falling through one of the openings in the protective wheel. At this, there was a great uproar both in the sky and in the assembly. Thousands of brāhmaṇas began to wave their upper garments with joy while the demigods showered down flowers upon Arjuna's head. Then, as the musicians struck up a victory song, the unsuccessful kṣatriyas let out a groan of despair. Lord Kṛṣṇa felt extreme delight upon seeing Arjuna's victory, and He at once came forward to present him with a white robe and a flower garland. King Drupada also felt exhilarated upon witnessing the unknown brāhmaṇa's accomplishment, and he was ready to provide him with his entire army if the assembled kings wanted to put up a fight.

When Drupada announced that he intended to give his daughter to the unknown brāhmaṇa who had successfully pierced the target, all of the assembled kings and princes began looking at one another in amazement. Then, feeling very angry and insulted, they began to heatedly address one another as follows, "We should kill Drupada and Dhṛṣṭadyumna or else throw Draupadī into the sacrificial fire so as to avoid this impending disaster! Of course, we cannot kill the brāhmaṇa. Still, something must be done to punish him, just so that future svayaṁvaras may not take such a perverse turn as this one has."
Svayamvaras of royal princesses are only meant for kṣatriyas. Thus, if we do not act to rectify matters, then the whole system will go to hell."

The invited kings then picked up their weapons and rushed at Drupada, desiring to kill him on the spot. Out of fear, the Pañcāla ruler ran to the shelter of the brahmanas, and so Bhīma and Arjuna came forward to combat the onrushing kings and princes. As Bhīma tore up a huge tree, Arjuna had the brahmaṇas move aside, and at this time, Lord Kṛṣṇa told Balarāma, "My dear brother, I am convinced that these two so-called brahmaṇas are actually Bhīma and Arjuna."

Balarāma then replied, "If this be the case, then I am very happy to learn that my aunt and her children were not actually burnt in the fire at Vāraṇāvata."

Being eager for battle, Bhīma rushed at the opposition, who now justified their attack on the two unidentified brahmaṇas by saying, "To fight against an adversary who is anxious for combat is always considered to be permissible." Karna confronted Arjuna and Śalya took on Bhīma, while the others, headed by Duryodhana, began to mildly fight with the brahmaṇas. Arjuna quickly released a torrent of arrows that made Karna momentarily fall unconscious onto the ground. After recovering himself, however, Karna retaliated with showers of arrows, and thus the two began madly fighting each other. Karna was very surprised by his opponent's great prowess, and so he asked, "O brahmaṇa, are you in actuality Paraśurāma, Kṛṣṇa, Indra or Arjuna? As far as I know, no one else is capable of facing me on the battlefield."

Arjuna then replied, "I am simply a poor brahmaṇa. However, let me warn you that I possess the brahmāstra and will slay you with it very shortly."

Karna considered the brahmāstra to be invincible, and so, after hearing this, he gave up fighting. Meanwhile, Bhīma and Śalya were engaged in dragging each other about and striking one another with their fists. Bhīma then picked up Śalya and threw him some distance. Although Śalya wasn't really hurt, all of the kṣatriyas were astonished and so they wondered much about the identities of the two powerful brahmaṇas.

Indeed, after witnessing the prowess displayed by Bhīma and Arjuna, all of the kings and princes lost their inclination for fighting. Thus, when Lord Kṛṣṇa took the opportunity to request them to stop, pointing out
how Draupadi had been fairly won by the brāhmaṇa, the kings readily agreed and then returned to their respective countries. Meanwhile, Yudhiṣṭhira, Nakula and Sahadeva had returned to the potter's house after Draupadi had been won by Arjuna. However, after some time, when Bhima and Arjuna did not return, Kuntī began imagining out of maternal affection that they must have been recognized and then killed by the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Indeed, as Kuntidevi remained absorbed in thinking like this, the sun gradually began to sink below the western horizon. Then, all of a sudden, Bhima and Arjuna returned home with Draupadi and surrounded by all of the brāhmaṇas. Kuntidevi was within the potter's house, and so when her sons announced from outside, "We have brought some alms," she mechanically replied, "Make sure that whatever you have received is enjoyed by all five of you."

When the Pāṇḍavas then entered the house along with Draupadi, Kuntī began to marvel with great wonder at what she had unwittingly said. With a desire to act virtuously, Kuntī then took Draupadi by the hand and addressed Yudhiṣṭhira as follows: "My dear son, when I said that all of you should enjoy the alms that you had received I had no idea what the implications of my speech would be. Still, I want my words never to prove false, for truth is considered to be the most exalted religious principle. On the other hand, it is certainly not possible for Draupadi to devote herself to more than one husband. Therefore, please tell me what I can do to satisfy the Pañcāla princess and at the same time prevent my speech from becoming falsified."

After pondering over the situation for a moment, the intelligent and magnanimous Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear mother, since Draupadi was won by Arjuna, he should be the one that marries her."

Arjuna immediately objected however, saying, "No! Since you are the eldest brother, it is proper for you to marry first, then Bhima, and then myself."

As Arjuna fell silent, all five brothers simply remained standing like statues, intently staring at the beautiful Draupadi, while she in turn looked longingly at them. The hearts of the five Pāṇḍava brothers had already been pierced by Cupid's arrows, and now that Draupadi was standing before them, they could think of nothing else but her, for she
was the most beautiful girl in the world. Yudhiṣṭhira could very well understand the feelings of his brothers and at the same time he remembered the words of Śrīla Vyāsadeva. Thus, at last, he said, "It is my final opinion that Draupadī should become the common wife for all of us."

When they heard this, the other four brothers felt great joy, and just at this time, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma arrived at the potter's house. After touching the feet of Yudhiṣṭhira and Kuntī, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma had a very brief conversation with their cousin-brothers and then departed so that the Pāṇḍavas' identities would not be disclosed.

Dhṛṣṭadyumna had secretly followed Bhima and Arjuna when they had returned home with Draupadī. Then, in order to observe the mysterious brāhmaṇas, Dhṛṣṭadyumna had concealed himself within the house. In this way, as he remained hidden, Dhṛṣṭadyumna saw the Pāṇḍavas hand over the alms that they had collected to Yudhiṣṭhira. Kuntī had then instructed Draupadī how to prepare their meal, and after the cooking was finished, the princess had offered it to the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa, and then distributed the mahā-prasādam to the brāhmaṇas. After that, some guests were fed, and then the remaining food was divided into two halves. One half was given to Bhima, and the other half was divided into six parts for the rest of them.

That night, when it was time to take rest, the Pāṇḍavas lay down on their bed made of kuśa-grass. Kuntidevī then laid down at her sons' heads while Draupadī positioned herself at her husbands' feet. At this time, Dhṛṣṭadyumna could hear the Pāṇḍavas talking amongst themselves about military subjects such as celestial chariots and weapons. The next morning, Dhṛṣṭadyumna reported back to his father, and in answer to Drupada's eager inquiries he said, "It appears to me from their conversation which I overheard that these brāhmaṇas are actually kṣatriyas. They might even be the Pāṇḍavas, for it is rumored that they escaped from the fire at Vāraṇāvata. Indeed, it is my conviction that these are in fact the mighty sons of Kuntī, disguised as wandering mendicants."

Drupada was very pleased to hear this, and next, he sent his priest in order to ascertain the real fact. When the brāhmaṇa arrived at the potter's house, Yudhiṣṭhira immediately ordered Bhima to bring arghya
and water for washing his feet. Then, after being worshipped, the priest spoke as follows: "The king of the Pañcālas expressed his happiness upon beholding the hero who pierced the target and thus won the hand of his daughter. After providing the details of your family and dynasty, Mahārāja Drupada wishes that you gladden his heart by conquering over all of your enemies. You see, Pāṇḍu was a very dear friend of the Pañcāla ruler, and thus he always desired to bestow his daughter upon Arjuna. If this now be the case, then King Drupada considers that there is nothing of greater fortune to be gained."

Yudhiṣṭhira then replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, the king should not inquire about the identity and lineage of his son-in-law, for the requirement of piercing the target has already been fulfilled. Thus, his daughter should be given away on that basis alone, without there being any questions asked. Of course, it is a well-known fact that no one less qualified than Arjuna could have possibly strung the bow. Therefore, what to speak of hitting the target and making it fall to the ground? Keeping this in mind, the king should not uselessly worry."

Just then, another messenger arrived from Mahārāja Drupada and announced, "A grand feast has been prepared for the bridegroom's party on the occasion of Draupadī's wedding. The king extends his invitation to you and has sent these royal chariots to carry you to his palace."

As the Pāṇḍavas prepared to depart, putting Kuntī and Draupadī upon one chariot and themselves mounting another, King Drupada received Yudhiṣṭhira's inconclusive reply to the priest. Then, in order to meet any eventuality, he kept ready the paraphernalia suitable for the marriage of persons from each of the four varṇas (social divisions). In addition, just to ascertain the real identity of his son-in-law, Mahārāja Drupada kept many interesting articles on display to see which of them would draw the bridegroom's attention. After arriving at Drupada's palace, Kuntī and Draupadī entered the women's apartments while the Pāṇḍavas sat down on the royal thrones which were provided for them. A sumptuous feast was then served, and thereafter, as the Pāṇḍavas were relaxing, they began to inspect the various articles which had intentionally been put on display. Drupada then observed that his guests quickly passed over all other items in order..."
to closely scrutinize the various weapons which he had kept there. Besides this, Drupada could appreciate their great bodily strength and so he happily concluded that they were actually kṣatriyas. Then, at last, Drupada implored, "Kindly disclose whether you are kṣatriyas or brāhmaṇas or perhaps even residents of heaven who have come here for the sake of my daughter. Please speak the truth and then in accordance with your reply I shall arrange for the marriage ceremony without delay." Yudhiṣṭhīra then confided, "O King, do not grieve. Be joyful, for your cherished desire has been fulfilled! We are indeed kṣatriyas, the sons of Pāṇḍu, and thus you are our revered superior."

When Drupada heard this he became so ecstatic that he remained absolutely speechless for quite some time. Then, after recovering his presence of mind, the king asked the Pāṇḍavas to explain how they had managed to escape from the burning house of shellac. In response, Yudhiṣṭhīra related the whole story, and when Drupada thus learned the truth of the matter, he began to greatly condemn Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Then, when Drupada urged Arjuna to marry his daughter that very day, Yudhiṣṭhīra responded, "O King, since my younger brother is going to be married, then by social custom I am also obliged to wed."

Of course, Drupada did not understand Yudhiṣṭhīra's intention, and so he replied, "It is quite acceptable to me if you marry my daughter instead of Arjuna. Indeed, you may select any of your brothers to wed Kṛṣṇā." Yudhiṣṭhīra then explained, "Draupādi shall become the common wife for all five of us brothers, for that is the order which we have received from our mother."

Drupada was a little shocked to hear this and so he argued, "Although a man may certainly have more than one wife, a woman is never allowed to accept more than one husband according to Vedic culture."

In answer to this, Yudhiṣṭhīra said, "O King, the ways of morality are actually very subtle. Therefore, I believe that the best path is to follow the direction of one's superiors. Since my mother has sanctioned the marriage, and I also feel at heart that it is virtuous, you should give up all doubts in this connection."

Finally, Drupada concluded, "Please consult with Kuntī and Dhṛṣṭadyumna. Then, the marriage ceremony will be performed tomorrow according to whatever decision you have agreed upon."
While Drupada and Yudhiṣṭhira were discussing in this way, Vyāṣadeva suddenly arrived there, and thus everyone quickly stood up in order to offer him respect. Then, after the great sage was seated, Drupada made inquiries regarding what he should do about the marriage of his daughter. "Is it possible for Krṣṇā to marry all five of the Pāṇḍavas without incurring a sinful reaction?" Drupada asked. "O foremost of ṛṣis, has such a marriage ever been sanctioned according to the principles of religion?"

In response, Vyāṣadeva explained, "O King, it is a fact that the śāstra never enjoins that a girl may be allowed to marry more than one husband. Nor is such a thing accepted in common practice. However, let everyone give his own opinion, and then we shall arrive at some conclusion."

Drupada spoke first as follows: "I think that such a marriage is sinful, and I cannot think of any instance, either at present or in the past, where a woman has had numerous husbands." Dhrṣṭadyumna also expressed his strong disapproval, and then Yudhiṣṭhira said, "I am always perfectly truthful, and my heart is never inclined toward sin. When I honestly consider the prospect of all five of us marrying Draupadi, I find that my heart approves and thus I must conclude that this act cannot be sinful. In the Purāṇas there is the story of Jațilā, who married seven ṛṣis. There is also the account of a ṛṣi’s daughter who was raised by the trees and men later on married the ten Pracetās. Thus, we do find that there is precedence for such a marriage. Still, above and beyond all of these considerations, I feel that the highest morality is obedience to one's superiors, of whom the mother is foremost. Since my mother has sanctioned our marriage, I consider it to be perfectly virtuous."

Kuntidevi then said, "I had ordered my five sons to share whatever they would happen to receive in charity. Therefore, I am in favor of the marriage so that my words may not prove false."

After thus letting everyone speak his mind, Vyāṣadeva then said to Drupada, "O King, what Yudhiṣṭhira has said is actually correct. In private I shall explain to you how the practice of a girl marrying many husbands was established and how it is eternally applicable."

After saying this, Vyāṣadeva took Drupada by the hand and led him into a private room. As the others anxiously awaited their return, the great
sage related the following ancient historical narration to the king: Long ago, the demigods once inaugurated a sacrifice at the holy place, Naimiśāraṇya, and Yamarāja himself became the priest in charge of offering the animals. For as long as that sacrifice continued, Yamarāja did not cause the death of a single human being, and thus, since death was suspended, the number of humans began to increase greatly. This created a fearful situation, and so all of the demigods approached Lord Brahmā in order to express their concern. Lord Brahmā heard the pleas of the demigods and then inquired, "Why should you be afraid of mere human beings?"

The demigods replied, "O Lord, now that the human beings have become immortal, there is no longer any real distinction between us and them. Therefore, we implore you to create some distinction so that our superior status may not be impaired."

Lord Brahmā then explained, "O Celestials, Yamarāja's sacrificial duties will soon be finished, and at that time death will once again begin taking its toll upon the human society."

After being thus reassured, the demigods returned to Naimiśāraṇya. Some time thereafter, as the demigods were sitting on the banks of the Gaṅgā, at that sacred place, they happened to see a golden lotus flower being carried downstream by the river's current. Somehow, this lotus captured everyone's attention, and especially Indra became very curious to find out where it had come from. Indra thus followed the river upstream until he reached the source of the Gaṅgā. There, he saw a splendid woman bathing in the water while crying out in anguish. As soon as her tears fell upon the water, they miraculously transformed into golden lotus flowers. When Indra saw this wonder, he approached the woman and asked, "Please tell me who you are and why you are crying."

The woman then replied, "O king of heaven, if you want to find out who I am and why I am weeping, then just follow me and see for yourself the cause of my sorrow."

After accompanying the woman for a short distance, Indra came upon a handsome young man who was sitting with his consort upon a throne on top of a peak of the Himavat mountain. The couple was absorbed in playing dice, and so in order to attract their attention, the king of heaven loudly announced, "I am Indra, the ruler of the entire universe!"
Being completely engrossed in the game, however, the youth did not pay any heed to Indra but simply continued playing. This greatly annoyed Indra, and when he angrily repeated his statement, the youth, who was actually Lord Śiva, simply smiled at the king of heaven's impudence and then cast his glance upon him. As a result, Indra's entire body at once became paralyzed so that he was left standing there just like a wooden stake.

Thereafter, when Lord Śiva finished his game of dice, he ordered the weeping woman, "Go and bring Indra here so that I can deal with him in such a way that false pride will never again enter his heart."

Then, as soon as Indra was touched by the woman, he helplessly fell onto the ground. Lord Śiva then said, "You must never again act impudently like this. Now, I order you to remove this great stone and enter the hole which it covers. There, you will find other powerful persons who had behaved just like you."

Indra obediently removed the indicated rock, and after doing so, he saw four persons who resembled himself staying within the hole. When he beheld their pitiful condition, Indra exclaimed, "Is this to be my destination as well?"

Lord Śiva replied, "This is the ordained punishment for your impudent behavior, and so now you must enter this hole."

While shaking with fear from head to foot, Indra then pleaded with folded hands, "O Lord, I admit that it is you and not I who is the appointed overseer of the universe. Therefore, please forgive my impudence which was simply born of ignorance."

Lord Śiva simply smiled, however, and then once again commanded, "Enter this hole without delay! You will have to share the fate of these others who had also acted like you. All of you will take birth upon the earth as human beings. Then, after accomplishing many difficult tasks and killing innumerable enemies, you will once again attain to heavenly regions."

Upon hearing this, the other Indras who were within the hole, bereft of their original splendor, requested, "O Lord, since we will have to take birth as human beings at least grant us the favor that Dharma, Vāyu, Indra, and the twin Aśvins will beget us within our mother's womb."

When Indra heard this plea of the former heavenly kings, he also
requested, "O Lord, instead of personally appearing on the earth, may I create someone out of a portion of my energy to accomplish the required mission?"

Lord Śiva magnanimously granted all of these requests and then he appointed a girl, who was an incarnation of Lakṣmī, to become the common wife for all five. After this, Lord Śiva took the five Indras and went to see the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa, in order to obtain sanction for all that he had arranged. Lord Nārāyaṇa gave His approval, and thus it came to be that these former Indras appeared upon the earth. Lord Nārāyaṇa then took two strands of hair from His body: one black and one white. After entering the womb of Devakī, these two hairs became Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. The four former Indras and the portion of the present Indra in turn became the five sons of Pāṇḍu.

Then, in order to further convince Mahārāja Drupada, Śrīla Vyāsa-deva gave him the spiritual vision whereby he could behold the Pāṇḍavas in their original celestial bodies. The king thus saw the five brothers appear like so many Indras, each decorated with a golden helmet, and untarnished ornaments. After witnessing this divine revelation, Drupada felt great joy, and with awe and reverence, he touched the lotus feet of Śrīla Vyāsa-deva. Vyāsa-deva then explained to Drupada how Draupadī had been the daughter of a certain ānì in her last life and how, by worshipping Lord Śiva, she had received the benediction of obtaining five husbands in her next birth. In this way, Vyāsa-deva fully convinced the king that his daughter had been ordained by higher authority to become the common wife of all the Pāṇḍavas. Thus, Drupada at last happily consented to the marriage, and then, when Vyāsa-deva pointed out that the present day was very auspicious, the Pañcāla ruler quickly arranged for a very opulent celebration. The fire sacrifice was performed by Dhaumya, and on the first day, the hand of Draupadī was placed into the hand of Yudhiṣṭhira. Then, on the next four successive days, the other brothers were also united with Draupadī in marriage, one after another. After the completion of the marriage ceremony, Drupada gave his daughter an immense dowry, and for some time the Pāṇḍavas and their newly-acquired wife remained at the Pañcāla capital.

Having thus secured an alliance with the Pāṇḍavas, Mahārāja Drupada
felt relieved from all fear of his enemies. Soon after the marriage, a vast amount of wealth sent by Lord Kṛṣṇa arrived, and Yudhiṣṭhira accepted it just to please his worshipable Deity. Soon thereafter, all of the kings and princes who had attended Draupādi’s svayāmvar learned by means of spies that it was actually Arjuna who had pierced the fish-target. They marveled at the Pāṇḍavas' prowess, and at the same time, they greatly condemned the Kurus and Purocana for their wicked assassination attempt. When Duryodhana found out that it was Arjuna who had won Draupādi, he became plunged into a gloomy and depressed mood. Along with his brothers, Karna, Ṛṣabhadeva, Śakuni and Kṛpa, Duryodhana set out for Hastināpura, and while going along, he lamented to himself as follows, "May Purocana be damned for his carelessness! Alas, it appears that Fate is indeed supreme. Only on account of the Pāṇḍavas' miraculous escape was Arjuna able to win Draupādi instead of me. Now that the Pāṇḍavas are allied with Drupada instead of us, our position has become even weaker!"

Thus, it was with gloom and despair that the Kauravas re-entered Hastināpura. On the other hand, Vidura was overjoyed to hear that the Pāṇḍavas were not only alive and well, but won the beautiful daughter of King Drupada as well. After coming before Dvārakā, Vidura happily announced, "O King, the Kurus have prospered by achieving good fortune!"

Upon hearing this statement, Dvārakā blindly thought that Vidura was informing him that Duryodhana had won the hand of Draupādi. Thus, without even waiting for Vidura to say anymore, he ordered that special ornaments be prepared for his supposed daughter-in-law, and that arrangements be made for her and Duryodhana to be brought home with great pomp. Only thereafter did the clever Vidura disclose the real situation to Dvārakā by saying, "My dearest brother, it was Arjuna who won the beautiful Draupādi, and not your son. The Pāṇḍavas are not only alive and well, but they have made alliances with many powerful kings as well."

Upon hearing this, Dvārakā expressed great joy, and he said, "O Vidura, the virtuous sons of Pāṇḍu are as dear to me as my own sons. They deserve all success in life, and thus I consider this to be wonderful news that you have given me."
Vidura was very pleased to hear his elder brother say this, and in response, he remarked, “I hope that you maintain this magnanimous outlook throughout the entire duration of your life.”

Then, after Vidura had left, Duryodhana came to see Dhṛtarāśtra along with Karna, and after offering his obeisances he said, “My dear father, I have waited until you were alone because what I have to say cannot be spoken of in front of Vidura. O Sire, why were you speaking so highly of the Pāṇḍavas? This is highly improper! How can you desire the prosperity of our enemies? From now on, we must act in such a way that their position becomes weakened, day by day. Otherwise, you will soon find that your own sons have become swallowed up by the sons of Pāṇḍu!”

Dhṛtarāśtra then said, "My dear son, there is no need for you to become so agitated. You can rest assured that I only desire to do that which is agreeable to you. However, I do not want Vidura to know this, and so I made a show of being pleased just to fool him. Now, my dear Duryodhana, please tell me what is on your mind."

Being thus encouraged, Duryodhana then said, "My dear father, there are many plans which I have been considering. Perhaps dissension can be sown among the Pāṇḍavas so that their united strength will be broken. Another possibility is that now that the Pāṇḍavas are married, they can be urged to settle down in the Paṅcāla kingdom. In this way, we could become the unrivaled rulers of Hastināpura. Then again, it is a fact that if Bhīma were killed, all of the Pāṇḍavas would be cut down because it is solely upon his strength that they depend. One more possibility would be to influence Draupadī in such a way that she becomes dissatisfied with her husbands. Everyone knows about the fickle nature of women, and since she has five husbands, it should not be hard to create jealousy among them. Once Draupadī begins to neglect the Pāṇḍavas, they will gradually wither away, for they could not bear to live without her.

"O King, you are our father and so we cannot do anything without your sanction. Therefore, please select the plan which you feel to be effective and then we can decide how to execute it. My dear Karna, what do you think?" Being thus invited to speak, Karna began refuting all that Duryodhana had said as follows:
"O Prince, it does not appear to me that your reasoning is well-founded. We already tried so many times in the past to vanquish the Pāṇḍavas, and in every case we were unsuccessful. And, at that time, they were mere boys living at home. Now, on the other hand, they are grown-up men and they are living far away. How can you hope to defeat them by some mere plot?"

"It is also a foolish dream to think that we can create some dissension between the brothers, or between them and Draupadi. The Pāṇḍavas are completely dedicated to each other and I am sure that Draupadi as well could never be turned against them. Therefore, my conclusion is that the only way to deal with the Pāṇḍavas is to attack them immediately before they can further accumulate allies. We must act quickly before Lord Kṛṣṇa and the other Yādavas help the Pāṇḍavas to regain their rightful share of the kingdom."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra highly applauded Karna's words and then said, "I like the idea of showing our prowess in battle rather than resorting to the use of trickery. Still, I will have to take the advice of Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Vidura before actually making up my mind as to what should be done."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then called for Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Vidura, and after they had arrived and were comfortably seated, he described in detail his son's grief. Then, being so requested, Bhīṣma gave his advice as follows: "O King, I can never approve of quarreling with the Pāṇḍavas, for I consider your sons and the sons of Pāṇḍu equally. My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, instead of acting with partiality, Why not divide the kingdom into two parts so that both the Pāṇḍavas and your sons can rule independently? Actually, it is the Pāṇḍavas alone who are the rightful heirs of the entire kingdom, and so this compromise should be quite acceptable to you and your sons. Don't you know that ever since the attempt was made to burn to death the Pāṇḍavas and their mother at Vāraṇāvata, the world regards you with even more contempt than Purocana? Therefore, a peaceful settlement with the Pāṇḍavas is imperative if you at all want to restore your good reputation. O King, the Pāṇḍavas are all virtuous souls, and they are unalloyed devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Because of their adherence to religious principles, you will never be able to deceitfully deprive them of their kingdom as you are now hoping to do."

Droṇa next said, "O King, what Bhīṣma has said exactly expresses my
feelings as well. Therefore, I advise you to immediately send a messenger to Drupada. After presenting to the king all kinds of costly gifts for his daughter, the messenger should relay your desire for a peaceful alliance. Then, he should extend an invitation to the Pāṇḍavas to return to Hastināpura in order to take back their paternal kingdom."

At this point, Karṇa impudently exclaimed, "Just see the behavior of these two! Although they have been pampered with royal luxuries by the kindness of Dhr̥tarāśtra, they are now trying to turn against him!"

Then, turning to Dhr̥tarāśtra, Karṇa said, "O King, by destiny you have gained possession of the royal throne and so, if destiny wills it, you can remain in control as well. A good example of this principle is found in the ancient history of Ambuvīca who was the ruler of the Māgadhas. Ambuvīca was such an exalted personality that he made absolutely no endeavor to even maintain his material body and so what to speak of executing his royal duties. The only effort that he would make was to inhale air and nothing else. As a consequence, his minister, Mahākarni, had to govern the state, and because of this, he soon came to have absolute authority within the kingdom. Finally, Mahākarni took advantage of Ambuvīca's passivity to such an extent that he appropriated all of the royal property and even the queens. And yet, even in spite of enjoying all of this, the minister was so greedy that at last he desired to occupy the royal throne itself. However, it so happened that, in spite of all Mahākarni's endeavors, he was not able to dethrone the king, and then, even though Ambuvīca did nothing but breathe, he remained fixed in his position by the supreme will of Destiny. In the same way, my dear king, you should keep possession of the royal throne. Do not allow yourself to be dissuaded by the wicked advice of Bhīṣma and Droṇa."

After being struck with these harsh words, Droṇa indignantly said, "It is you, Karṇa, who is wicked, for you desire to harm the innocent Pāṇḍavas. It is for this reason alone that you find fault with us. You should know that whatever I have spoken is for the welfare of everyone concerned and the prosperity of the Kuru dynasty. If, on the other hand, my advice is ignored and your evil words are heeded, I find that the destruction of the Kurus will soon take place!"

Vidura then said, "My dear brother, the words of Bhīṣma and Droṇa are
actually meant for your welfare. However, since you are generally unwilling to listen to such good advice, I can understand that their words will not have any effect upon you. Bhīṣma and Droṇa are both elderly, wise and respected authorities, and they are not motivated by base desires for wealth, power or fame. They are your true well-wishers, and so how can you dare to even imagine that their intentions are wicked? Besides this, I am convinced that the virtuous Pāṇḍavas are invincible. In addition, their claim to the royal throne is more valid than yours. Therefore, O King, it behooves you to treat the Pāṇḍavas honorably in all respects. And, above and beyond all of these considerations is the fact that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Pāṇḍavas' avowed ally. My dear brother, you must know for certain that wherever there is Kṛṣṇa there must always be victory. Do not listen to the advice of your foolish son, Karṇa, or Śakuni, for all of them are sinful and inexperienced."

At this point, Dhṛtarāṣṭra admitted, "Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Vidura have certainly spoken what is truthful and beneficial. I also believe that my sons and the sons of Pāṇḍu deserve to share the kingdom equally. Therefore, let the Pāṇḍavas and their mother be called back to Hastināpura at once!"

After receiving this command, Vidura set out without delay for the kingdom of the Paṇcālas, taking with him many gifts for Mahārāja Drupada, his daughter, and the Pāṇḍavas. Upon his arrival, Vidura first of all went to see the Pāṇḍavas. Lord Kṛṣṇa was present there with Kuntidevi and her sons, and they all worshipped their uncle with great respect. Vidura explained to the Pāṇḍavas how he had come on behalf of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and then he presented them all of the valuable gifts that he had brought with him. Vidura then went to King Drupada and relayed Dhṛtarāṣṭra's message as follows:

"It is with great pleasure that I congratulate my nephews, the sons of Pāṇḍu, upon their prosperity and alliance with the Paṇcālas. Now, I request you to kindly grant the Pāṇḍavas permission to return to Hastināpura, for we are all very eager to see them again."

Drupada then told Vidura, "I am very happy that Dhṛtarāṣṭra has adopted such a friendly attitude. Now, if Yudhiṣṭhira wants to return to Hastināpura, then I gladly grant him permission to depart without
Yudhiṣṭhira responded, "My dear father-in-law, we are completely dependent upon you. Therefore, it is up to you to order us as you see fit." Then, Lord Kṛṣṇa intervened at this point by saying, "My dear Drupada, it is My desire that the Pāṇḍavas return to Hastināpura at once so that they can make their rightful claim to their paternal kingdom." Drupada wholeheartedly agreed, and so, soon thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas departed. Then, when Dhṛtarāṣṭra was informed that Kuntī and her sons had reached the outskirts of Hastināpura, he sent out many of his sons along with Droṇa and Kṛpa to welcome them. Then, as the Pāṇḍavas entered the Kuru capital, all of the citizens came out to greet them, for they were overjoyed at their long-awaited return. Indeed, everyone felt themselves to be blessed with good fortune just having the Pāṇḍavas in their city again. The Pāṇḍavas first of all went and worshipped the feet of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Bhīṣma. Then, they met with numerous citizens, according to their positions, and at last they entered the rooms which had been made ready for them by Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

After allowing the Pāṇḍavas to take sufficient rest, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Bhīṣma summoned them to the royal court. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then made the following proposal: "My dear nephews, I wish for you to go to Khāṇḍavaprastha and rule half of the Kuru kingdom there. In this way, there will be no opportunity for any disagreement to arise between you and your cousinbrothers."

Yudhiṣṭhira happily accepted his uncle's proposal, and so shortly afterwards, the Pāṇḍavas went to Khāṇḍavaprastha, which at that time was almost like a desert. The Pāṇḍavas were not discouraged, however, and within a short time, they were able to convert the place into a veritable heaven. Vyāsadeva came to direct the Pāṇḍavas, and he first of all showed them how to select a sacred place to perform certain preliminary auspicious rituals. Then, under Vyāsadeva's direction, the Pāṇḍavas laid out dimensions of their capital city and began to construct high walls and a moat to surround it. Thereafter, numerous palaces, gates and various fortifications were built. Turrets were placed upon the walls, and they were manned by soldiers and equipped with defensive weapons. Finally, at an auspicious site, the Pāṇḍavas constructed their
own palace and then filled it with every imaginable kind of opulence. At last, when the city was completed, many brähmanas came to reside there, being attracted by the piety of the Pāṇḍavas. Then, many merchants also arrived, being allured by the good prospects for acquiring wealth. Skilled artisans also flocked to Khāṇḍavapraṣṭha, and thus the city soon became adorned with beautifully landscaped parks that were filled with all varieties of flowering trees and which resounded with the cries of exotic birds, headed by the peacock. Thus, the city flourished day by day, and the joy of the Pāṇḍavas also steadily increased. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Balarāma had accompanied the Pāṇḍavas to Hastināpura, and They also went to Khāṇḍavapraṣṭha in order to help Their devotees get settled. Therefore, the Pāṇḍavas' royal happiness was only of incidental importance in comparison with the transcendental bliss which they felt in the association of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. After some time, however, Kṛṣṇa took permission from Yudhiṣṭhira and then returned to Dwārakā along with His elder brother. The Pāṇḍavas named their capital city Indrapraṣṭha, and from there they ruled one-half of the Kuru kingdom. Then, one day, Nārada appeared at the Pāṇḍavas' royal assembly. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had the devarṣi sit upon his royal throne, and then, after offering him arghya, he began to give a report of the state of affairs within the kingdom. Nārada requested Yudhiṣṭhira to also take his seat, and then the king called for Draupadī so that she could also take the opportunity to worship the lotus feet of the mahājana. Nārada in turn offered Draupadī his benediction, and after dismissing her, he began to talk to the Pāṇḍavas in private. Nārada wanted to give the five brothers good instruction so that no disagreement would arise between them over their common wife. For this purpose, in the course of his talks, Nārada referred to the following ancient history:

There were once two brothers named Sunda and Upasunda who had both received benedictions from Lord Brahmā making them incapable of being slain by anyone except by each other. These brothers were such intimate friends that they lived in the same house, ruled the same kingdom, slept on the same bed, and even ate from the same plate. And yet, in spite of this, it so happened that they killed each other for the sake of a woman named Tilottamā. Since Nārada only briefly described
this incident, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became very curious to know all about it. When the king thus requested Nārada to narrate the story in full, the great sage amongst the demigods happily obliged. There was a great asura named Nikumbha who was born in the dynasty of Hiranyakāśipu, and his sons were the aforementioned Sunda and Upasunda. Sunda and Upasunda were by nature wicked-hearted, and as they grew up, they did everything together. Indeed, they shared the very same desires, and had the same disposition. Thus they appeared to be just like two halves of the same person. After taking initiation, Sunda and Upasunda went to the Vindhya mountains in order to perform austerities, and for that purpose they put on tree-bark and made their hair matted. Thereafter, the two brothers commenced throwing pieces of their own flesh into the sacrificial fire, and because of the severity of their austerities, intense heat began to emanate from their bodies. Even the demigods became afflicted by the warmth, and in great alarm they sent beautiful girls and precious gifts to Sunda and Upasunda in the hopes of breaking their determination. The two brothers did not waver however, and so next, the demigods created an illusion whereby it appeared as if the sister, wives, and mother of Sunda and Upasunda were taking shelter of them due to being chased by a fierce Rākṣasa. And yet, in spite of hearing the anguished cries of their "relatives", Sunda and Upasunda remained unmoved, and thus the illusory women and Rākṣasa soon disappeared from sight. At last, Lord Brahmā appeared to Sunda and Upasunda, and upon seeing him before them the brothers stood up with folded hands. Lord Brahmā then said, "O best of the asuras, I have come here to offer you my benediction so that all of your desires may become fulfilled." Sunda and Upasunda replied, "O Lord, kindly hear our desires. We wish to obtain knowledge of all kinds of weapons. We would like to possess the mystic powers of illusion, to have incomparable strength, and to be capable of assuming any form at will. And, finally, we want to become immortal." Lord Brahmā then said, "I shall grant all of your requests, with the exception of the last one. Immortality cannot be awarded to you because you have performed austerities with the intention of conquering the
universe. However, so that you can almost be equal to the immortals, I shall allow you to choose the way in which you will die."
The brothers replied, "O Lord, let us be subject to death only at the hands of each other, and not by any other means."
Lord Brahmā consented and then, since he had accomplished his purpose by making the asuras desist from their austerities, he departed for his own abode. Sunda and Upasunda then returned home, much to the delight of their relatives, and after cutting off their matted hair, they attired themselves in the costliest of clothes and ornaments. The two brothers then began to live a life of eat, drink and be merry along with their demoniac associates. Indeed, due to their merry-making, sounds of hilarity could be heard coming from every house in the city of the asuras. Because of their absorption in sensual pleasures, time passed by very quickly for the demons, and thus an entire year seemed to be no more than a moment.
Thereafter, Sunda and Upasunda decided to go out and conquer the three worlds. After gathering together their army and performing some preliminary rites for such an undertaking, the brothers took permission from their relatives and friends and then set out at an auspicious moment. The demigods knew that Sunda and Upasunda had received benedictions from Lord Brahmā and so, when they saw the demons approaching, eager for battle, they abandoned their heavenly abodes. Thus, Sunda and Upasunda easily conquered Indraloka and then, one after another, the planets of the Yakṣas, Rākṣasas and Nāgas. Then, desiring to conquer the earth, Sunda and Upasunda ordered their soldiers to kill all of the brāhmaṇas and rājarṣis, whose sacrificial offerings increased the strength of the demigods.
Thereafter, when the brāhmaṇas were attacked by Sunda and Upasunda, their curses proved to be ineffective because of the benedictions of Lord Brahmā. Thus, the surviving brāhmaṇas fled in fear and as a result, all of the āśramas either became desolate or were destroyed. Then, in order to kill the remaining rṣis, Sunda and Upasunda assumed various forms by utilizing their acquired mystic power. After taking the form of elephants, they searched out and killed the rṣis who were hiding in caves. Then, they took the form of tigers in order to kill the other rṣis, and thus soon there were no more brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas. Vedic study
and sacrificial performances came to an end, as did all kinds of religious ceremonies, such as marriage. Being bereft of the guidance and protection of the higher two classes, even the merchants gave up buying and selling. Gradually, agriculture became neglected as well, and the cows were left to roam at will without being properly tended. Towns became desolate and the earth was scattered over with bones, while whoever still survived lived in constant fear of their lives. The residents of the sky, such as the sun, moon and the stars, all became very aggrieved upon seeing the destruction wrought by the asuras.

While Sunda and Upasunda took up residence at Kurukṣetra after conquering over the three worlds, the great ṛṣis approached Lord Brahmā. Lord Brahmā was surrounded by all of the demigods and brahma ṛṣis as the ṛṣis described to him the devastated condition of the earth. Lord Brahmā carefully thought over the situation for a few moments. Then, after deciding upon a plan for vanquishing the two demoniac brothers, he summoned Viśvakarmā. Lord Brahmā then ordered the architect of the demigods, "I want you to create a woman who is capable of completely captivating the hearts of all men."

Viśvakarmā received this command with great respect and then departed. Thereafter, he began to carefully construct the body of the most beautiful woman in the entire universe. When it was finished, that form did not possess even the smallest part which was incapable of attracting the attention of the beholder. Lord Brahmā then infused the body with life and gave her the name Tilottamā. Tilottamā bowed down before Lord Brahmā and then said, "O Lord, please inform me of the purpose for which I have been created."

Lord Brahmā then commanded, "Go at once to Sunda and Upasunda, who are staying at Kurukṣetra, and captivate them by means of your exquisite beauty. First of all, bring them completely under your control, and then act in such a way that the two demons will quarrel with one another."

Tilottamā accepted Lord Brahmā's order and then circumambulated all of the assembled demigods and ṛṣis. Only Indra and Lord Śiva even tried to pretend that they were undisturbed in mind, and thus they did not turn their heads. However, since Lord Śiva was actually very anxious to see the girl, four more faces became manifested upon his shoulders as she
moved from his right side to his back, around to his left side, and then again to his front. Indra was also very eager to see Tilottamā, and as a result, 1,000 eyes appeared all over his body as she moved around him. Unlike Lord Śiva and Indra, all of the other demigods turned their faces as Tilottamā circumambulated them, except Lord Brahmā, who did not glance at her body at all. Then, as Tilottamā set out for the abode of the demons, the demigods considered their mission to be already accomplished.

After Sunda and Upasunda had conquered the entire three worlds and thus had no more rival, they considered that there was nothing left for them to achieve. Taking all of the wealth which they had amassed from their conquests, Sunda and Upasunda began to enjoy life just like demigods by passing their time in the company of beautiful women who sang of their glories. Then, one day, Tilottamā appeared before Sunda and Upasunda as they were seated in a heavenly garden. Wearing only a single piece of red silk which amply exposed her abundant wealth of feminine allurements, Tilottamā entered the garden as if she intended to pick some flowers. Sunda and Upasunda were intoxicated from drinking wine, and when Tilottamā approached nearby, they immediately became captivated by her beauty. Under the sway of insatiable lust, the two asuras quickly got up from their seats, each hoping to possess the girl for himself. Then, even though Sunda was quicker and grabbed Tilottamā by the right hand, both brothers began to claim her as their own. Being overly proud of their excessive strength and wealth, and having become overpowered by a burning lust, Sunda and Upasunda became highly enraged, and in this way, they lost all reason and completely forgot their brotherly love. While shouting, "It is I who saw her first," and, "This girl belongs to me alone," they angrily picked up heavy clubs and began to violently strike each other. Thus, before long, both brothers fell down mortally wounded onto the ground, bathed in their own blood. The other asuras and their consorts then ran away in fear and later on took shelter in other regions.

After the death of Sunda and Upasunda, Lord Brahmā was very pleased with Tilottamā, and so he gave her a benediction by saying, "You may now take up permanent residence in heaven, and because you are so splendid, no one will be able to gaze upon you for any length of time."
Lord Brahmä then returned the sovereignty of the thiee worlds to Indra and after doing so he departed for his own abode.
In conclusion, Nārada advised the Pāṇḍavas, "You must make some arrangement to insure that you never quarrel over Draupadī like Sunda and Upasunda."
Thereafter, the five brothers consulted with each other. Then, after coming up with a plan for avoiding any misunderstanding among themselves, Yudhiṣṭhira went and informed Nārada, "O best of the devarśis, we have made the following rule: As long as anyone of us is sitting with Draupadī, the others must not see him in that situation. If any of us happens to see one of his brothers sitting with Draupadī, then he must retire to the forest for twelve years, living a life of brahmacarya."
Nārada approved of this arrangement and thereafter, he departed in order to continue wandering at his own will. From Indraprastha, the Pāṇḍavas gradually brought many kings under their sovereignty, and because of their pious rule, the entire Kuru dynasty became very prosperous and happy. Then, one day, a band of thieves stole some cows from a brāhmaṇa. Giving vent to his uncontrolled rage, the brāhmaṇa came to the royal palace at Indraprastha and began to reproach the Pāṇḍavas as follows:
"The so-called kings extract one-sixth of the citizens' production as taxes, and yet they do not even make a show of giving them protection. My cows have been stolen, and so it is the duty of the rulers to pursue the thieves and recover my property."
After hearing this, Arjuna replied, "O brāhmaṇa, please restrain your grief. Rest assured that I will punish the thieves without delay and then return your cows. I can promise you this because when I am mounted upon my chariot with my bow in hand, there is no one who can escape my wrath."
When Arjuna went to get his bow, however, he realized that Yudhiṣṭhira was sitting along with Draupadī in the room where the weapons were being stored. Thus, Arjuna was put into a dilemma, and so he thought as follows:
"If I enter the room, it will be an offense against my elder brother, and as a result, I will have to go into exile for twelve years. On the other hand, if I do not fulfill my vow of protection to the brāhmaṇa, this will cause
both myself and Yudhiṣṭhira to incur sin for our negligence, and this irreligiousness will be broadcast throughout the entire kingdom."

Finally, Arjuna concluded that service to the brāhmaṇas is much more important than bodily comfort, and thus he entered the room. Then, after briefly explaining the situation to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, he came out with his bow in hand and mounted upon his chariot. Arjuna soon intercepted the thieves, and after piercing them with his arrows, he returned the cows to the brāhmaṇa. Thereafter, when Arjuna returned to Indraprastha, all of the citizens praised him highly for his unflinching execution of the royal duties. However, coming before Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna said, "My dear brother, please give me your permission so that I may depart for the forest at once in order to fulfill my vow."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira felt exceedingly pained at heart upon hearing these unpalatable words. In order to convince Arjuna to give up the idea of going to the forest, the king said, "My dear brother, you had entered my room for the purpose of executing your religious duty. Therefore, I am not at all displeased with you for having done so. And besides, there is no fault when a younger brother enters a room where his elder brother is sitting with his wife, although it is certainly faulty for an elder brother to enter a room where his younger brother is similarly engaged."

Arjuna then replied, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, you yourself always say that in regards to truth and duty, there can be no compromise. Therefore, please grant me the permission which I request."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could not argue with this, and so, soon thereafter, Arjuna set out for the forest, accompanied by a large number of brāhmaṇas. After passing through many territories, he arrived at the banks of the Gaṅgā and decided to reside there for some time. Thereafter, Arjuna began to pass his time happily while the brāhmaṇas engaged themselves in sacrificial performances. Then, one day, after taking his bath and offering water to his departed ancestors, as Arjuna was just about to come out of the Gaṅgā to take part in the sacrificial performances, he was forcibly dragged down to the bottom of the river. What had happened was that Ulūpī, the daughter of the Nāga king, Kauravya, had become inflamed with lusty desires after seeing Arjuna,
and so she forcibly carried him to her father's palace. There, Arjuna saw that a sacrificial fire had been ignited for his use, and so he sat down to complete his morning religious duties. Arjuna then inquired from his captor, "Who are you, and why did you perform such a rash act? Where have you brought me?"

In response, Ulûpî introduced herself and then explained, "O Hero, as I watched you bathe in the Gaṅgā, I immediately fell in love with you. Therefore, I beg you to fulfill my desire by marrying me."

Arjuna replied, "I have taken a vow of brahmacarya for twelve years. O lovely girl, if there is some way whereby I can satisfy your desire and at the same time keep my vow, then I will be most happy to do so." Ulûpî then said, "My dear Arjuna, I know all about your forest exile. As you very well understand, it is the duty of a kṣatriya to accept a woman who approaches him out of lust. Therefore, I am sure that the slight diminution of your virtue that will be brought about by breaking your vow will be amply offset by the great piety you will achieve for accepting me. O best of all males, please do not refuse me, for I shall not be able to go on living if I am rejected by you."

Arjuna became won over by Ulûpî's ardent appeal, and so he fulfilled her desires by spending the night with her. The next morning, Arjuna arose at sunrise and then returned with Ulûpî to the place where the Gaṅgā flows down onto the plains. Before taking her leave, Ulûpî granted Arjuna the benediction of being able to defeat all creatures that live in the water. Thereafter, Arjuna described to the brähmaṇas all that had happened to him, and then he started out for the Himālayas. On the way, Arjuna came to many sacred places, and he bathed in many holy rivers. In these places he gave away thousands of cows in charity to the brähmaṇas. Then, after descending from the Himālayas, Arjuna toured other regions, and when he reached the kingdom of Kaliṅga, all of the brähmaṇas took their leave and departed. Thus, with only a few attendants, Arjuna continued his travels to numerous holy places. Then, after some days, he reached the state of Maṇipura.

Arjuna entered the palace of Mahārāja Citravāhana, and there, he happened to see the king's beautiful daughter, Citrāṅgadā, roaming about at her pleasure. As soon as he saw Citrāṅgadā, Arjuna desired to have her as his wife, and so he went to the king and submitted his
request. Mahārāja Citravāhana inquired about his guest's lineage, and in
reply, Arjuna explained that he was the son of Kuntī. Then, after
hearing this from Arjuna, Citravāhana described his own dynasty as
follows:
"My ancestor, Prabhaṇjana happened to be childless, and he therefore
began to worship Lord Śiva in the hopes of receiving a son. After some
time, when Śiva became pleased, he granted Prabhaṇjana his wish, but
so at the same time he informed the king that all of his descendants
would also be destined to have only one child.
"Since that time, everyone in Prabhaṇjana's line had a son to perpetuate
the dynasty, but unfortunately, I have received a daughter. Because of
this, O Prince, I shall agree to give Citrāṅgadā to you only on the
condition that her son will become the inheritor of my kingdom, and
not your other sons."

Arjuna gave his consent and then continued to reside at the capital of
Manipura for three years along with Citrāṅgadā. Finally, when she gave
birth to a son, Arjuna embraced his wife fondly and then went to
Mahārāja Citravāhana in order to take his leave. Thus, Arjuna
continued his wanderings, and after some time, he arrived at the
Southern ocean, where there were five sacred lakes bearing the names of
great ṛṣis. Much to his surprise, Arjuna saw that even though many
ascetics lived in the area, all of them avoided the immediate vicinity of
the lakes. Arjuna curiously inquired from the ṛṣis about this, and in
response, they explained how that within the waters of the lakes, there
lived five large crocodiles that would seize anyone who dared to bathe
there.

Although the ṛṣis tried to dissuade him, Arjuna went to the first lake
and boldly plunged into the water in order to take his bath. However, as
soon as Arjuna entered the water, one of the crocodiles forcibly seized
him by the leg. The powerful crocodile tried to pull Arjuna further into
the water, but the heroic son of Kuntī dragged the beast onto the shore
instead. As soon as the crocodile came out of the water, it miraculously
transformed into a beautiful young girl who was decorated with costly
ornaments. With great surprise, Arjuna inquired, "Who are you? What
sin did you commit so that you were forced to fall down into this most
abominable condition of life?"
The girl replied, "O magnanimous hero, I am the Apsarā named Varga. One day, as I was going to the abode of Kuvera along with four of my friends, we happened to see a very handsome brāhmaṇa studying the Vedas in a secluded place. He seemed to illuminate the entire region with his splendor, and because we were very attracted to him, we tried to catch his attention by singing and playing nearby. Instead of being attracted, the brāhmaṇa glanced upon us with great anger and then cursed us to become crocodiles for 100 years. We humbly begged for the rśi's pardon, admitting to our false pride caused by our youthful beauty. The brāhmaṇa refused to withdraw his curse, although he did inform us, 'You will be delivered when an exalted person comes and drags you out of the water. Thereafter, the lakes in which you had resided will be considered sacred places, and they will be called by your names.' "After hearing this, we offered our obeisances unto the rśi and circumambulated him before departing. Thereafter, all we could think about was the brāhmaṇa's curse, and while we were going along, we happened to meet the great sage Nārada Muni. He inquired about the cause of our sorrow, and so we told him all that had happened. Nārada then assured us that a person named Arjuna would soon deliver us from our curse. Therefore, O Hero, the person whom Nārada referred to must be you. Now, kindly deliver my four friends as well." Arjuna cheerfully consented, and thereafter, when he dragged the other four crocodiles out of the water, they also regained their original forms as Apsarās. Finally, after taking permission from Arjuna, the five Apsarās left that place in order to return to their heavenly abode. After some time, Arjuna became eager to see Citrāṅgadā once again, and so he quickly returned to Maṇipura. Upon entering the royal palace, Arjuna saw that his son, Babhruvāhana was now sitting upon the throne. After a brief stay with his wife, Arjuna again left Maṇipura in order to travel to the holy places on the shore of the western ocean. In this way, he finally came to Prabhāsa. When Lord Kṛṣṇa heard that His dear friend was at Prabhāsa, He immediately went there in order to meet him. When they met, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna embraced each other with great fraternal love, and they then sat down together so that Arjuna could tell all about his travels. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna remained together at Prabhāsa for some days. Then, they traveled to the Raivataka Mountain, which
had been gorgeously decorated and stocked with all kinds of enjoyable articles under the instruction of Kṛṣṇa.
Krṣṇa and Arjuna sat down together in order to watch the actors and dancers who had been brought there to perform. That night, the two dear friends lay down on the same bed together, and as Arjuna described the sacred places he had seen, they drifted off to sleep. The next morning, Krṣṇa and Arjuna were awakened by professional singers. Then, later on that day, Krṣṇa took Arjuna upon His golden chariot and set out for Dvārakā.
The city had been especially decorated in Arjuna's honor, and upon his arrival, hundreds of thousands of citizens thronged the streets, being very eager to see him. In this way, Arjuna felt great transcendental ecstasy while witnessing the incomparable mercy of his friend, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna offered his respects unto all of the elder members of the Vṛṣṇi, Bhoja and Andhaka dynasties, and then he took up residence in Lord Kṛṣṇa's own palace.

Arjuna passed many days in great happiness in the association of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Then, a grand festival was organized at Raivataka Hill by the members of the Vṛṣṇi dynasty, and so thousands of citizens went there along with their wives. The whole area had been provided with palaces and gardens, and amidst the music and other festivities, profuse charity was distributed to the brāhmaṇas. Baladeva also came there with His consort Revatī, and Ugrasena next arrived along with his 1,000 wives. All the other leading Yādavas, such as Uddhava and Sātyaki, also attended. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna spent their time wandering here and there, never leaving each other's company for a moment. In this way, they happened to come where Subhadrā, Kṛṣṇa's younger sister, was seated surrounded by her maidservants. As soon as Arjuna saw her, he became completely enamored.

Lord Kṛṣṇa could see how Arjuna's gaze was longingly fixed upon His sister, and so He smilingly addressed His friend as follows: "O son of Kuntī, how is this? Can the heart of such a great warrior become pierced by the arrows of Cupid? My dear Arjuna, if you so desire, then I will ask my father for Subhadrā's hand in marriage on your behalf."
Arjuna replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, being endowed with such beauty, whom could
this girl not captivate? Now, please tell me, by what means will I be able to achieve Subhadrā's hand without fail? I am ready to accomplish anything humanly possible in order to obtain her as my wife."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Arjuna, the holding of a svayaṁvara is customary for kṣatriyas like us. In this case, however, the outcome would be uncertain for the girl's inclination is not yet known. On the other-hand, it is also customary for very heroic kṣatriyas to kidnap the girl he desires, and this is also considered to be virtuous. Therefore, I advise you to abduct Subhadrā, since it is uncertain whether she would select you if the choice is left up to her."

Thereafter, a speedy messenger was sent to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira in order to inform him of Arjuna's intention. After receiving the message that his younger brother was going to kidnap Subhadrā, Yudhiṣṭhira unhesitatingly gave his approval because the suggestion had come from Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. Vasudeva, the father of Kṛṣṇa and Subhadrā, also gave his consent, and so, with Lord Kṛṣṇa's blessings, Arjuna put on his armor and then mounted upon a chariot that was fully equipped with weapons. He then set out, and whoever happened to see him thought that he was on his way to the forest to hunt as usual.

Meanwhile, after having worshipped various deities at the Raivatuka Hill, Subhadrā was on her return journey to Dvārakā. Then, all of a sudden, Arjuna appeared on the scene, and after forcibly taking Subhadrā upon his chariot, he sped off toward Indraprastha. The armed guards had been helpless in this situation, and so they returned to Dvārakā and reported everything to the chief officer at the Sudharmā royal assembly house. Upon hearing this alarming news, the officer loudly blew his trumpet, which was the signal to call everyone to arms.

Thus, all of the Yādava heroes immediately left their duties and began pouring into the assembly hall. Then, after everyone was seated, the chief officer described with great agitation the nefarious deed performed by Arjuna. As a result, there was an uproar in the assembly, and without even bothering to discuss the matter, the highly enraged Yādavas called for their chariots and weapons. However, Lord Balarāma quickly stood up and restrained the assembly by shouting, "Why are all of you acting so rashly when Lord Kṛṣṇa is sitting here silently?"

Baladeva then addressed Kṛṣṇa, "My dear brother, why do you remain
silent? This rogue Arjuna was lavishly entertained at Dvārakā, and now, in order to return our hospitality, he has greatly insulted the Yadu dynasty by kidnapping our sister. This cannot be tolerated, and so, in revenge, I hereby vow to single-handedly rid the world of the entire Kuru dynasty once and for all!"

After hearing this impassioned speech, all of the Vṛṣṇis, Bhojas and Andhakas let out a roar of approval. Then, when things had quieted down a bit, Lord Kṛṣṇa began to speak as follows:

"My dear assembled heroes, in reality, Arjuna has not insulted our family. Instead, he has actually enhanced our reputation. Arjuna considered that to give away a daughter in charity is a demeaning act, like the gift of a useless animal. Therefore, because of the fault of this type of marriage, Arjuna decided to take Subhadrā away by force instead, since that is always considered to be an honorable display of valor for great heroes. Arjuna has taken birth in a dynasty of very exalted, saintly kings, and indeed, he is said to be the direct son of the heavenly king, Indra. Besides, his prowess is absolutely unparalleled, and thus only Lord Śiva can vanquish him in battle and no one else. I therefore consider the Pāṇḍava hero to be a most worthy friend and ally. Now, let us go and make peace with Arjuna and bring him back to Dvārakā so that the marriage can be celebrated with great festivity."

The Yādavas became pacified by Lord Kṛṣṇa’s speech, and so they peacefully brought Arjuna back to Dvārakā and arranged for him to be united with Subhadrā in marriage. Thereafter, Arjuna resided with Lord Kṛṣṇa for one full year, and he came to be greatly respected by all the members of the Yadu dynasty. Then Arjuna went to Puṣkara in order to pass the final year of his exile, and from there he returned to Khāṇḍavapraṣṭha. Arjuna first of all went to offered his respects to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and then to all of the brāhmaṇas. Then, when Arjuna came before Draupadī, she immediately began to reproach him as follows out of jealous anger: "Why have you come here? Why aren't you with the daughter of Vasudeva? Since I am not really qualified enough, you will surely spend all of your time with Subhadrā now, absorbed in loving affairs. What need will there be to even give me a second thought?"

Arjuna was able to pacify Draupadī however, by assuring her of his love
and by very humbly begging for her forgiveness. Arjuna then made Subhadrā approach Draupadi after taking off her royal dress and ornaments and putting on the garb of a cowherd girl. Subhadrā first of all worshipped Kuntīdevī, and in return, her mother-in-law affectionately embraced her and smelled her head. Subhadrā then approached her co-wife Draupadī and introduced herself by saying, "Please consider me to be your insignificant maidservant." Draupadī was very touched at heart by these sincere and humble words, and thus she immediately got up and embraced Subhadrā with great affection. Thus, it turned out that the five Pāṇḍavas were able to resume living together very happily and peacefully as before. When Lord Kṛṣṇa learned that Arjuna had returned to Indraprastha, He went there along with many of His sons, Balarāma, Akrūra, Uddhava and numerous other Yādava heroes. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was informed that the Yadus were approaching, he sent out Nakula and Sahadeva to greet them. Then, when Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma entered the city, all of the citizens came out of their houses in order to worship the Supreme Personalities of Godhead. Thereafter, when Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma entered the royal palace, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira hurriedly came forward and embraced Them with great ecstasy. In return, Lord Kṛṣṇa respectfully worshipped Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma because they were His elders, and He then presented innumerable gifts to Arjuna, Subhadrā and the other Pāṇḍavas. Lord Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and the other Yādava heroes continued to reside in Indraprastha for some time. They passed their days enjoying life along with the Kurus with great merriment, and thus it appeared as if they were residents of the heavenly planets. Then, after some time, Balarāma and the other Yādavas returned to Dvārakā, taking with them the innumerable gifts presented to them by the Pāṇḍavas. Only Lord Kṛṣṇa remained at Indraprastha because He wanted to stay with His dear friend, Arjuna. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna spent most of their time together roaming in the forest while practicing the kṣatriya sport of hunting. In due course of time, Subhadrā gave birth to a son who was given the name Abhimanyu. Lord Kṛṣṇa personally performed the birth ceremonies, and as Abhimanyu grew up, he became the favorite of both the Pāṇḍavas and Lord Kṛṣṇa. As a youth, Abhimanyu became highly
accomplished in the use of weapons and fully conversant with all branches of Vedic knowledge. Thereafter, Draupadī gave birth to five sons, one year after another, begotten by each of her five husbands. Because Yudhiṣṭhira's son would be able in the future to bear like the Vindhya mountains the weapons showered upon him by his enemies, the brāhmaṇas named him Prativindhya. Since Bhīma's son was born after his father had performed 1,000 Soma-yajñas, he was given the name Sutasoma. Arjuna's son was conceived after the Pāṇḍava hero had performed many wonderful feats while in exile, and thus he was given the name Śrutakarmā. Nakula named his son Śatānika after one of his Kuru ancestors. Because Sahadeva's son was born under the constellation Kṛittikā, he was called Śrutasena, one of the names of Kārttikeya. Dhaumya performed the birth ceremonies for all five children, and he also executed the other religious functions, such as the giving of the sacred thread. Then, after studying the Vedas under the direction of their family priest, the sons of Draupadī learned the science of weapons from Arjuna.

The Pāṇḍavas became very joyful after receiving so many exceptional sons. Thereafter, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira continued to rule from Indraprastha while his brothers went out and subjugated other kings so that their empire gradually expanded more and more. Because Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was as good as his father, Dharmarāja, being an emblem of religious principles, all of his subjects lived very happily under his protection and guidance. Indeed, it appeared as if dharma, artha and kāma (virtue, profit and pleasure), the three major pursuits of ordinary human beings, were personally residing within Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's kingdom. It is a well-known fact that whatever a great man does, others will follow. Thus, due to the influence of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, all other kings who were subordinate to his rule became highly virtuous and fixed in devotion to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa. Because of their great affection for their king, the citizens always took great pleasure in seeing Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and he also always tried to do what was most agreeable to his subjects, provided that it was not contrary to religious principles. Even in his speech, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira never acted in such a way that would insult or displease anyone, for his words were always truthful, meaningful and palatable as
One day, after summer had arrived, Arjuna suggested to Lord Kṛṣṇa that they go to the banks of the River Yamunā in order to enjoy themselves along with their friends. Taking Draupadī, Subhadrā and many other beautiful women, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna went to a palace in the forest where pleasure-palaces had been constructed and furnished with all kinds of enjoyable objects such as food, drinks, jewels and perfumes. After arriving there, everyone began to enjoy themselves by singing and dancing with great merriment. Then, after some time, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna slipped away in order to spend some time alone together. Going to a secluded part of the forest, they sat down and began talking together in a very pleasing mood of intimate friendship.

While Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were thus sitting together, a certain brāhmaṇa suddenly appeared before them. Tall and handsome, having a golden complexion and eyes like lotus petals, the brāhmaṇa looked very splendid, in spite of his being dressed in rags and having matted hair. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna immediately got up from their seats in order to welcome the unknown guest. Then, in response to their inquiries, the brāhmaṇa explained, "I reside here in the forest nearby. Being an extremely voracious eater, I have taken the opportunity to approach you great souls in the hopes that you will give me enough food so that I can eat to my full satisfaction."

Arjuna then said, "O brāhmaṇa, if it is within our power, we shall certainly satisfy you in all respects. Now, kindly tell us, what sort of food do you desire?"

At this, the brāhmaṇa disclosed, "O foremost of heroes, it is not ordinary food that I want. To tell you the truth, I am Agni, the god of fire, and I desire to devour the entire Khāṇḍava forest. This forest is under the protection of Indra, and I have already tried to consume it with my flames on numerous occasions. However, since Takṣaka is a dear friend of Indra and lives in that forest along with his family, the king of heaven has always foiled my attempts. Now, if you kindly prevent Indra from pouring down rain, and also stop the living entities who reside within the Khāṇḍava forest from escaping, I shall be able to attain my desired goal."
At this point, King Janamejaya became very curious to know why Agni was so eager to devour the Khāṇḍava forest. Thus, he questioned Vaiśampāyana about this and so, in reply, the ṛṣī narrated the following story:

There was once a powerful king named Śvetaki, whose heart was always inclined toward the performance of sacrifices. Indeed, with the assistance of his brāhmaṇa priests, Śvetaki performed sacrifices continually for many years at a time. Finally, however, the priests had to leave the sacrificial arena because their eyes had become almost blind due to the smoke, and besides this, they were about ready to collapse out of exhaustion. Still, Mahārāja Śvetaki was so enthusiastic in the matter of performing sacrifices that, in spite of all this, he repeatedly begged the priests to return. Then, when those priests remained adamant, the king engaged some other brāhmaṇas, and in this way, he was able to finish his great series of sacrifices.

And yet, even then Mahārāja Śvetaki was not satiated. Thus, just a few days later he again got the strong urge to perform another sacrifice that would go on continually for 100 years. However, in spite of trying to woo the brāhmaṇas with sweet words and promises of fabulous gifts, Mahārāja Śvetaki could not find anyone who was willing to become his priest. At last, Śvetaki became highly enraged due to frustration, and so he went to the ṛṣis who were sitting in their āśramas and said, "If I were fallen or else disrespectful towards the brāhmaṇas, then your refusal would certainly be justified. However, since this is not the case, it is your duty to assist me, for after all, I am the ruler of this land."

Unfortunately, the brāhmaṇas were too exhausted to even consider helping Mahārāja Śvetaki. Thus, in order to extricate themselves from the obligation that was hanging over their heads, they pretended to become very angry with the king in turn and then criticized him by saying, "You are too impatient and demanding and thus we do not tolerate working with you. O King, take our good advice and try to gain Lord Śiva's favor for he is the most easily pleased, and he can award all kinds of benedictions."

When Mahārāja Śvetaki saw how the brāhmaṇas were very irritated with him, he departed for Kailāsa in an angry mood. Then, after arriving at Kailāsa, the king began to worship Lord Śiva with unwavering
attention and great determination, standing all the while with his arms upraised. Finally, after six months, Lord Śiva became very pleased with Śvetaki and so came before the king in order to grant him his desired boon. Being overwhelmed with joy, Mahārāja Śvetaki offered profuse obeisances unto Lord Śiva. Then, when the lord requested him to disclose his mind, the king said, "O Lord, I wish that you assist me in my sacrificial performances for I can find no one else who is willing to do so."

Lord Śiva then smilingly replied, "O King, I never assist in the performance of sacrifices. However, in order to reward you for your severe austerities, I agree to do so just this one time. First of all, though, you must continuously pour oblations of ghee into the sacrificial fire for a period of twelve years. There must not be any interruption, and all the while you must live a life of strict brahmaça. Only thereafter shall I help you perform your intended sacrifices."

Mahārāja Śvetaki obediently followed Lord Śiva's instructions. Then, when the twelve year period came to an end, he once again petitioned Lord Śiva's help. Lord Śiva was certainly very satisfied with Mahārāja Śvetaki, but still, he informed him, "O King, the work of assisting at a sacrifice is the duty of a brāhmaṇa, and thus I shall not accept that position. However, there is a brāhmaṇa on the earth named Durvāsā who is a partial incarnation of myself. At my command, he will assist you in your sacrificial performance. Now, go and make all of the necessary arrangements and then return here to me."

Thereafter, when Śvetaki returned, Lord Śiva summoned Durvāsā Muni and ordered him to assist the king in his sacrifice. Thus, the great 100-year sacrifice was successfully executed, and after its completion, Durvāsā Muni and the other assistant priests departed for their respective abodes.

Since Agni had to drink ghee continuously for twelve years as Mahārāja Śvetaki had offered oblations, he became over-satiated. As a result, Agni became seriously ill and due to loss of appetite, he could no longer accept the offerings of ghee from any more sacrifices. He became very pale and thus his power of radiation was greatly diminished. Finally, Agni approached Lord Brahmā and said, "O Lord, because of Śvetaki's sacrifice, I have eaten too much ghee, and thus I have become seriously
ill. My energy has diminished greatly, and so please do something that will enable me to regain my normal healthy condition."

After hearing Agni’s plea, Lord Brahmā smilingly assured him, "Do not worry, for you will certainly regain your original luster. Once, long ago, you had eaten the Khāṇḍava forest at the request of the demigods. Since that time, however, the forest has once again flourished, and now it serves as the residence of numerous enemies of the demigods. If you can devour the Khāṇḍava forest, you will become cured of your disease by eating the fat of all of the living creatures who reside there."

After receiving this instruction from Lord Brahmā, Agni directly went to the Khāṇḍava forest along with Vāyu, the god of wind, so that soon the entire area was set ablaze. However, the inhabitants of the forest made an all-out effort to put out the fire, and so, for this purpose, hundreds of thousands of elephants were dispatched to bring water in their trunks. Thus, along with the aid of other creatures who helped according to their capacity, the elephants soon extinguished the fire. Thereafter, Agni made six more attempts to devour the Khāṇḍava forest, but each time the fires were somehow put out. Finally, out of frustration, Agni returned to Lord Brahmā and explained how he had failed in his attempts to cure his illness. Then, after reflecting for a moment, Lord Brahmā advised Agni to approach Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna since at that time they were residing near the Khāṇḍava forest.

Without delay, Agni approached Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the guise of a brāhmaṇa. Then, after hearing Agni’s request, Arjuna said, "Since I have promised to feed you to your full satisfaction, I am prepared to fight with even the leaders of the demigods in order to do so. O Agni, if you wish for me to fight to the fullest extent of my abilities, however, then you should know that I do not have a bow that can match my great strength. Also, in order to fully utilize the deftness of my hands, I require a quiver of inexhaustible arrows. I also need a better chariot drawn by celestial horses, for my present one is incapable of carrying the required load of weapons. O god of fire, I also think that it would be very befitting if Lord Kṛṣṇa were to be given a weapon that would match His unlimited strength. If you can give me adequate means for doing so, then I will happily enable you to devour the Khāṇḍava forest."

After hearing Arjuna’s statement, Agni began to meditate upon Varuṇa
with a concentrated mind. Varuṇa could understand that he was being summoned by Agni and so he came there at once. Then, after showing Varuṇa great respect, Agni said, "O lord of the waters, please give me the Gāṇḍīva bow, two inexhaustible quivers and the celestial chariot which you had formerly received from Soma. In addition, I request you to give Lord Kṛṣṇa the Sudarśana-cakra so that He can assist Arjuna in the great task which I have put before him."

Varuṇa happily consented and first of all he handed over the Gāṇḍīva bow to Agni. This bow is considered to be the chief of all weapons, and it is equal to 100,000 ordinary bows. Varuṇa next gave Agni two inexhaustible quivers and then called for a wonderful chariot that had been constructed by Viṣvakarmā and which was so dazzling that one could not gaze upon it for long. Arjuna respectfully circumambulated the celestial chariot and then, with the Gāṇḍīva bow in hand, he joyfully mounted upon it, considering himself to be now capable of engaging in battle against anyone within the three worlds.

Agni then presented the Sudarśana-cakra to Lord Kṛṣṇa along with the Kaumodakī club, which roars like thunder upon being hurled. Even though, in reality, these two weapons are His eternal paraphernalia, Lord Kṛṣṇa was very pleased to accept them, and from that time on, the Sudarśana-cakra became His favorite.

Arjuna then gave Agni the go-ahead, and so the fire god immediately assumed his all-consuming feature and began to encompass the entire Khāṇḍava forest with his flames. When they saw that there was a great conflagration from all sides, the forest creatures panicked, and as they tried to escape a fiery death, they were pierced by the arrows of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, who had placed themselves on opposite sides. Indeed, as the forest became more and more engulfed in flames, many thousands of panic-stricken creatures were seen running here and there. Some of them simply clasped hold of their elderly parents or infant children. Being thus unwilling to leave without their helpless relatives, they died in the blazing forestfire. Innumerable creatures could be seen rolling on the ground in great agony, as their limbs were being burnt by the fire. The ponds within the forest began to boil because of the extreme heat, and so even the fish and tortoises perished. The birds that tried to fly away from the conflagration were pierced by Arjuna’s arrows, and
thus they fell back into the blazing forest. In this way, a tumultuous uproar was created by all those living beings as they were either pierced by arrows or burnt within the fire. The flames finally rose up so high that even the demigods became alarmed, and so they hastily approached King Indra in order to inform him of the situation. Indra then sent forth dark masses of clouds to extinguish the fire. However, when the clouds showered down torrents of rain, the water evaporated before reaching the ground due to the intense heat of the raging fire. Upon seeing this, Indra became highly enraged and he next sent forth more powerful clouds. Thereafter, as lightning flashed from above and smoke billowed forth below because of water contacting the fire, the combined effect created a ghastly scene. Arjuna then employed his celestial weapons to create an impenetrable umbrella of arrows above the entire forest and thus, from above, the rain could not touch the fire and from below no living entity could escape from the blazing inferno.

Takṣaka was at Kurukṣetra while Agni engaged in devouring the Khāṇḍava forest, although his wife and son Aśvasena were within the blazing conflagration. When Aśvasena tried to escape, Arjuna drove him back with a shower of arrows. Then, in order to save Aśvasena, Takṣaka's wife swallowed him, beginning with his head, and as her son's tail still protruded from her mouth, she suddenly rose up into the sky. Arjuna saw Aśvasena's mother, and so he quickly severed her head with a sharp arrow. Indra witnessed this, and so, in order to save Aśvasena, he suddenly jolted Arjuna with a violent wind, making him momentarily fall unconscious. Taking advantage of this, Aśvasena fled to safety, and when Arjuna came to his senses and understood what had happened, he became highly enraged at Indra. Then, as a challenge to the king of heaven, Arjuna began to shower his arrows into the sky. Indra also desired to fight, and so, in retaliation, he released a weapon which created torrents of rain, fierce winds, and violent lightning and thunder. However, Arjuna released a Vāyavya weapon that dispelled the clouds created by Indra, and thus, within moments, the sky became clear, and gentle cooling breezes began to blow. Agni, who was completely covered with the fat of the burning living beings, was very satisfied with Arjuna for enabling him to devour the
Khāṇḍava forest without being impeded. Thereafter, numerous birds of the Garuḍa species appeared in the sky along with hosts of Nāgas, and they began to attack Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. However, Arjuna cut them all to pieces with his arrows, and thus they fell down dead into the forest fire. Then, numerous asuras, Yākṣas, Rākṣasas and Nāgas rushed forward while profusely showering their weapons. Lord Kṛṣṇa then employed His Sudarśana-cakra in order to augment Arjuna’s counter-attack of arrows, and thus all of these demons were soon deprived of their heads. Meanwhile, Indra had taken up his thunderbolt and at this time he came there, riding upon Airāvata and accompanied by all of the other chief demigods. Yamarāja wielded his huge mace and Varuṇa carried his noose. Kuvera held a club and Skanda brandished a gigantic lance. The Āśvinī-kumāras carried effulgent plants to be used as weapons, Sūrya held a fierce dart, and Mṛtyu came there with a dreadful battle-ax. In addition, there were the Rudras, Vasus, Maruts, Viśvadevas and Sādhyas, and all together they rushed at Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, who calmly waited with their bows in hand.

Then, when the demigods came within range, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna released a shower of unlimited arrows that quickly drove their adversaries away from the battlefield. Indra then retaliated by discharging torrents of stones, but Arjuna easily cut them all into fragments with his arrows. At this, the king of heaven became highly enraged, and with a desire to kill Arjuna, he tore off a peak from Mount Mandara and then hurled it at him. Arjuna smashed the mountain peak to pieces with his arrows, and as the falling rocks fell into the burning forest, innumerable living beings were killed. Indeed, because of the hail of the falling stones, all of the Dānavas, Rākṣasas, Nāgas and forest animals began running here and there in the hopes of saving themselves. However, when they found that the fire was blazing on all sides, and that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were ready to kill them if they attempted to escape, they simply stood motionless and wailed aloud as if bereft of reason.

Lord Kṛṣṇa then released His Sudarśana-cakra, and as all of the Dānavas, Rākṣasas, Nāgas and animals were being cut to pieces, they fell into the blazing mouth of Agni. Indeed, as Lord Kṛṣṇa was engaged in repeatedly dispatching His cakra, His face assumed such a ferocious
feature that even the demigods became too afraid to approach Him. When Indra thus saw how the demigods were fearfully fleeing from the scene of battle, he became struck with wonder at the prowess of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Then, a voice from the sky declared, "O Indra, you need not worry about your friend Takṣaka, for he is now residing at Kurukṣetra. You should know that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna cannot be defeated because they are directly Nara and Nārāyaṇa, the Supieme Personality of Godhead and the worshipable Lord of the universe. O king of heaven, give up your attempt to protect the Khāṇḍava forest, for its destruction has been ordained by Destiny."

Indra considered this voice to be that of a superior authority, and so he gave up his enmity and returned to heaven along with the other demigods. When they saw their assailants' retreat, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna began to roar with great joy like lions, and thereafter, they continued to kill all of the residents of the Khāṇḍava forest without impediment. Thus, all of the creatures were burnt in the fire so that its flames rose higher and higher. And by eating such a large quantity of flesh, blood and fat, Agni became highly gratified. Then, Kṛṣṇa saw that Maya Dānava was trying to escape while Agni pursued him on a chariot driven by Vāyu. When Lord Kṛṣṇa took up His Sudarśana-cakra in order to kill Maya, the Dānava gave up all hopes of saving his life, and at last, he took shelter of Arjuna for protection. As the demon fearfully pleaded for mercy, Arjuna gave him assurances of safety, and when Lord Kṛṣṇa heard this, He restrained Himself, as did Agni.

Agni continued to burn the Khāṇḍava forest for fifteen days, and except for six living beings, all were consumed in the all-devouring fire. These six survivors were Aśvasena, Maya Dānava, and four birds called sarngakas. There was once a great ṛṣi named Mandapāla who attained to the Pitṛloka after executing great austerities. However, when Mandapāla arrived there, he was denied entrance and thus, with great surprise, he inquired about this from the demigods residing there. In reply, the pitṛs explained, "O brāhmaṇa, everyone is born a debtor to his forefathers. Because you were a life-long brahmacārī, you did not beget any children to repay this debt. Now, it is for this reason alone that you are being denied entrance into heaven. Therefore, we advise you to beget children, and thereafter, you will be able to enjoy your ample rewards."
After hearing this, Mandapāla tried to think of how he could produce the maximum number of children in the minimum amount of time. He at last concluded that the form of a bird was the best for this purpose. Thus, Mandapāla accepted the body of a sārṅgakā bird and thereafter, he had union with a female of the same species named Jarita. As a result, Mandapāla soon begot four sons. Before these offspring had even hatched from their eggs, Mandapāla left Jarita in order to sport with another female named Lapita. Thus, Jarita was left alone to take care of the four eggs, inside of which were the embryos of four rṣis. While roaming through the Khāṇḍava forest in the company of Lapita, Mandapāla suddenly saw Agni come there with the intention of consuming everything in his fiery mouth. Becoming very afraid for the safety of his four infant sons, Mandapāla managed to gratify Agni by offering him nice prayers in his glorification. Then, when Agni asked Mandapāla what he wanted, the rṣi in the form of a sārṅgakā bird replied, "O lord of fire, please spare my four sons when you consume the Khāṇḍava forest."

Agni gave his consent and thereafter, he began to burn the Khāṇḍava forest. By this time, Mandapāla's sons had come out of their eggs, and they became very much afraid upon seeing the raging fire. Jarita also became highly mortified, for her sons had not yet learned to fly, and she was not able to carry them all to safety. At last, seeing no means of escape, Jarita began to weep out loud. The baby birds then advised her, "O Mother, why should you become overwhelmed with grief? Simply leave us behind and escape with your life. Later on, you can always produce more children to perpetuate your family line."

Jarita then saw a hole in the ground that belonged to a mouse and so she told her sons, "Quickly enter this hole. I will cover over the entrance and then, later on, when the forest fire dies out, I will uncover it so that you can come out."

The children objected, saying, "We are too little to protect ourselves, and so the carnivorous mouse will surely eat us all if we enter this hole. O Mother, we would rather die a noble death by means of fire rather than be eaten by a lowly predator."

Jarita then replied, "You have nothing to fear, because today I saw a big hawk carry away the mouse after it had come out of its hole in search of
food. Therefore, go quickly and enter the vacant hole while there is still time."
Still, the tiny birds argued, "There may very well be other mice inside this hole. And besides, it appears that the wind is blowing the fire away from us so that there is a good chance that we will be saved." In this way, Jarita's sons continued to urge their mother to escape while she kept trying to convince them to enter the hole. Finally, the tiny birds said, "O foolish woman, why do you care so much for us? We have never done anything to benefit you, nor do you know who we really are."
After hearing these words of superior wisdom, the mother bird reluctantly flew to safety. Thereafter, when Agni approached the place where Mandapāla's sons were staying, the first born, Jaritari, said, "An enlightened person is never afraid of death."
The second son, Sariśrikka, replied, "Oh, you are very brave. It is rarely seen that someone is not afraid to die!"
The third and fourth sons, Stamvamitra and Droṇa, then said, "We are completely helpless because there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Therefore, let us offer prayers in glorification of Agni, since this is our only hope."
When Agni heard the prayers of the four baby birds, he remembered his promise to Mandapāla. Then, Agni not only assured the rṣi's sons that they would not be consumed in the fire, but he also offered them a benediction. In reply, Droṇa requested, "O god of fire, please burn up all of the cats that reside here, for they are constantly giving us trouble."
Agni gave his consent, and meanwhile, Mandapāla became very anxious about his children, in spite of having received the fire-god's assurance of their safety. When Lapita heard Mandapāla lamenting in this way, she at last became very jealous and said, "Your sons are rṣis, and besides, Agni promised not to harm them. Therefore, there is no reason for you to worry like this. Indeed, I can only conclude that you are really concerned about your old wife, Jarita. In this way, I can understand that you love her more than you love me. If this be the case, then go back to her if you like!"
After hearing his lover speak so angrily, Mandapāla replied, "My dear Lapita, your accusation is completely false, for I am only worried about my beloved children. Please wait here for just a little while as I go and
search for my sons so that I can be assured that they are all right."
After the fire had receded from the place where she had left her sons,
Jarita went there in great haste. Upon finding that the tiny birds were
unharmed, Jarita cried out loud with great joy, and at this time,
Mandapāla also came there. Even his sons did not greet Mandapāla upon
his arrival, and even though he repeatedly addressed them and his wife,
they refused to utter a word in reply. Finally, in order to pacify his
family, Mandapāla humbly said, "I admit that I have committed a great
fault by leaving you all, and actually, I have never felt any real happiness
by doing so."
At this, Jarita angrily replied, "Why don't you go back to your young wife
Lapita? After all, it was for her sake that you left us in the first place!"
Mandapāla then morosely exclaimed, "Alas! There is nothing that
disturbs a woman more than having a co-wife or rival. Yet, it is seen that
even if a woman is without a rival, after having children, she practically
neglects her husband. What to speak of ordinary women, even
Arundhati began to mistrust Vasiṣṭha, and in this way, she insulted the
great ṛṣi."
When the four children saw how hurt their father was by their mother's
indifference, their hearts softened. With tears in their eyes, they came
and worshipped Mandapāla, and he in turn addressed them
affectionately. He explained, "My dear sons, you were saved from the fire
only because I had implored Agni to spare you. It was for the purpose of
gratifying the fire-god that I did not come earlier to rescue you.
Therefore, please do not resentment me for this."
Thus, Mandapāla became reconciled with his wife and children, and
thereafter, they all left together in order to take up residence in another
country. Agni became completely satisfied after devouring the
Khāṇḍava forest, and so he came before Arjuna in order to express his
gratitude. At this time, Indra descended from the sky, followed by the
Maruts, and he also congratulated Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna for having
accomplished such a wonderful feat. Then, when Indra offered to give
them each a benediction, Arjuna requested, "O King, please give me all
of your weapons."
Indra replied, "I will certainly grant you this boon, but only at the time
when Lord Kṛṣṇa is pleased to award these weapons to you. Rest assured
that I shall understand His desire and then act for your benefit."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then requested, "O Indra, please grant that My friendship with Arjuna will continue eternally." Indra granted this boon and then, after speaking briefly with Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, he ascended into the sky in order to return to his heavenly abode. Agni then once again expressed his gratitude for being enabled to revive his healthy condition. Then, after profusely thanking Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, Agni gave them permission to depart. Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, along with Maya Dānava, continued to wander from forest to forest, until they finally arrived at the banks of a delightful river. There, the three sat down in order to rest and refresh themselves.

Maya Dānava was extremely grateful to Arjuna for having rescued him from the wrath of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Agni. Therefore, again and again he petitioned, "O son of Kuntī, what service may I render to you in order to repay you for saving my life?"
Then, in reply, Arjuna would simply say, "Your sincere gratitude is in itself a sufficient reward for what I have done. Now, if you like, you may take your leave and go wherever you please."
However, Maya Dānava was very determined to reward Arjuna, and so, at last, he explained, "I am considered to be the Viśvakarmā of the Dānava because I can accomplish wonders in the engineering field. O descendent of Bhārata, kindly allow me to utilize my abilities in order to create something spectacular, according to your desire."
Upon seeing the Dānava's genuine eagerness, Arjuna then suggested, "If you wish to render some service, then do something as an offering unto Lord Kṛṣṇa. In this way the abilities which you have been endowed with will be utilized to the fulfillment of their purpose."
Maya then turned to Kṛṣṇa and said, "My dear Lord, please order me. What shall I do to please you?"
Lord Kṛṣṇa then reflected for a few moments and then gave the following command: "O Dānava, I want you to build an incomparable sabhā (assembly house) for King Yudhiṣṭhira. This engineering masterpiece should incorporate a synthesis of godly, human and asuric architectural styles, and it must be so grandly constructed that never before nor hereafter will anyone on this earth see such a marvel."
Maya Dānava was very happy to receive this order from the Lord, and thereafter, he returned to Indraprastha along with Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Maya Dānava became highly pleased with the honor that was given to him by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra, and without delay, he drew up the plans for the royal assembly house. Then, on an auspicious day, Maya Dānava performed the ritualistic ceremony for laying the foundation, and he measured out an area of 5,000 square cubits which constituted the length and breadth of the hall. Afterwards, sumptuous prasādam was distributed to all of the brāhmaṇas, and then Maya Dānava began to apply himself seriously to the practical details of construction.

Some time thereafter, Lord Kṛṣṇa decided to return to Dvārakā, and so He first of all went and offered His obeisances unto Kuntīdevī and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra. Then, after taking their leave, Kṛṣṇa tearfully bade farewell to His dear sister, Subhadrā, and at that time, He gave her some very meaningful brotherly advice. Lord Kṛṣṇa then went and offered His obeisances to Dhaumya, and then He also begged Draupadī for permission to depart. At last, after amply worshipping all of the brāhmaṇas and distributing profuse charity to them, Lord Kṛṣṇa mounted upon His chariot at an auspicious moment. Out of affection, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra also got up onto Kṛṣṇa’s chariot and took the reins from the hands of Dāruka. Arjuna also mounted upon the chariot and began to fan Lord Kṛṣṇa with a cāmarā. Then, as Kṛṣṇa slowly departed, the other Pāṇḍava brothers as well as all of the citizens followed Him for they were unwilling to separate themselves from their worshipable Lord.

After going about four miles, Lord Kṛṣṇa ordered Yudhiṣṭhīra to halt the chariot. The Lord offered His respects to the king and Bhīma and then He embraced Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Kṛṣṇa then begged Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra to turn back, and while doing so He bowed down to touch the king’s feet. However, Yudhiṣṭhīra quickly lifted the Lord up and embraced Him as tears came to his eyes. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then reluctantly granted Kṛṣṇa permission to depart and after doing so, he got down from the chariot along with Arjuna. Dāruka then urged the horses on and so Lord Kṛṣṇa quickly left the Pāṇḍavas behind. Out of intense affection, however, the five brothers continued to stand motionlessly as they steadily gazed at the receding chariot until at last it went out of
The Pāṇḍavas then unwillingly returned to Indraprastha, and because of feelings of intense separation from their lord and master, who had appeared in an intimate family relationship with them as their cousin, they remained silent, with downcast faces. Upon Arjuna's return to the capital, Maya Dānava approached him and said, "Please grant me permission to go to the Bindu Lake, which is located north of Kailāsa near the Maināka mountains. The Dānava king, Vṛṣaparvā had formerly resided there and once, after the performance of a great sacrifice, he left a huge quantity of jewels lying in his palace. I want to use all of these gems in the construction of your royal assembly house. In addition, within the waters of the Bindu lake there is the great club which Vṛṣaparvā had wielded, and it is equal to 100,000 ordinary clubs. O Arjuna, just as the Gāṇḍīva bow is a worthy match for your skill and prowess, I similarly feel that this club is just suitable for Bhīma. Also within the lake is a great conchshell named Devadatta, and I would like to present it to you."

After taking leave from Arjuna, Maya Dānava departed for the north and he soon arrived at the Hiraṇya-śṛṅga mountain-peak, which is composed entirely of valuable jewels. This mountain is situated on the shore of the Bindu lake, where King Bhāgīrathī had formerly performed severe austerities for the purpose of bringing the Gaṅgā down to the earth. This is also the place where Indra had performed the 100 aśvamedha-yajñas that enabled him to occupy his heavenly post. Maya Dānava took all of the jewels from King Vṛṣaparvā's palace and retrieved the club and the conchshell from the Bindu lake. Then, finally, after gathering together numerous other valuable materials, he made the return journey to Indraprastha. Upon his arrival, Maya Dānava presented Vṛṣaparvā's gigantic club to Bhīma, and he gave the Devadatta conchshell to Arjuna. Then, he began the construction of the royal assembly house from all of the materials which he had collected. Maya Dānava constructed the assembly house with columns of solid gold, and it was so effulgent due to the brilliance of the jewels that it seemed to diminish the glare of the sun. Indeed, because of its splendor, that great hall appeared to be on fire. As a newly-arrived mass of dark clouds in the sky exhibits great prominence, the assembly hall
constructed by Maya Dānava rose up magnificently to capture the attention of all. In the middle of the great hall was placed a lotus pond where exotic birds sported in its crystal clear water. Surrounding this pond was marble flooring studded with jewels, and crystal stairways led down to the water. Everything about the assembly hall was so well constructed and refreshing to behold. It was exceedingly intricate in design and opulent in decoration and since gorgeous paintings were placed everywhere, its beauty ever-astonished the beholder.

Maya Dānava then summoned 8,000 fierce Rākṣasas called Kiṅkarās to guard the royal assembly hall, and when it was finally completed after fourteen months of hard labor, he went and informed Mahārāja Yudhiśthīra. The king immediately sent out invitations to 10,000 brāhmaṇas, and after feeding them sumptuously, he entered the royal assembly hall, as musicians played and professional reciters praised his achievements. In that assembly of his brothers, great ṛṣis, and kings from other lands, Mahārāja Yudhiśthīra took his seat upon the royal throne. When he was thus surrounded by all of these great personalities, Mahārāja Yudhiśthīra looked just like Lord Brahmā being waited upon by hosts of demigods.

At this time, Nārada Muni suddenly appeared at the Pāṇḍavas' royal assembly hall. As the foremost of celestial ṛṣis approached Mahārāja Yudhiśthīra while offering his respects and blessings, all of the Pāṇḍavas stood up in order to receive him. Nārada Muni was immediately offered an exquisite throne and water for washing his feet. Then, as the ṛṣi was being worshipped with presentations of arghya and other paraphernalia, Mahārāja Yudhiśthīra had many cows and countless jewels brought there to be given in charity. In this way, Nārada Muni became very pleased with the hospitality that was reverently offered by the Pāṇḍavas.

Nārada Muni is the foremost spiritual master of all branches of Vedic knowledge and his specific hobby is to cut down the false pride of the demigods and the asuras by- causing them to quarrel among themselves. Nārada is very fond of music and he is fully conversant with the military science as well. He is a master at reconciling contradictory texts and he is extremely expert in applying general principles to specific cases. Indeed, due to his unimpaired spiritual vision, Nārada Muni is the knower of the entire universe, as if the whole cosmic manifestation were
all right before his eyes.

After being very respectfully welcomed by the Pāṇḍavas, Nārada Muni began to put a series of questions before Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, just to teach him the real duties of a qualified king. Among many, many other instructive questions, Nārada Muni asked, "O King, do you always take the council of many wise and experienced men and never settle a matter simply by your own discretion? Do you prefer to obtain a single learned person, even by the exchange of 1,000 ignorant men? Do you give your soldiers their salaries promptly at the appointed time and never oppress them by withholding their rightful dues? It is one of the king's greatest faults if he deprives his soldiers of their earnings or supplies their rations irregularly, for this will certainly drive them to mutiny.

"O King, has any servant, who has accomplished a difficult task on your behalf by employing his special abilities, been disappointed by you due to not receiving a little more respect, food and payment? Persons who are possessed of learning and humility should be amply rewarded with wealth and honor, according to their qualifications, for such persons are the most, valuable members of human society. Are the wives and children of those men who have dedicated their lives to you, or who are suffering on your account, being properly supported? Are you equal toward all men and is everyone able to approach you without fear, as if you were their own mother or father?"

"O King, do you employ any persons who are thieves, who are open to temptation, who are hostile, or who are minor in age? Are the works of agriculture, trade, cow protection and banking being done by honest men? This must be carefully insured because the happiness of the people in general depends upon these activities. Are the women living in your kingdom being properly protected and consoled? Do you keep yourself free from the fourteen vices that are commonly found in kings: atheism, untruthfulness, anger, lack of caution, procrastination, failure to consult the wise, idleness, restlessness of mind, the taking of council of only one person, consulting with unqualified persons, abandoning a settled plan, divulgence of council, failure to accomplish beneficial projects, and the undertaking of things without first giving them due consideration?

"O King, has your study of the ritualistic portions of the Vēdas, your knowledge of the philosophical portions of the śāstra, your acquisition of
wealth, and your married life proven to be fruitful?"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O great sage Nārada, how can a person understand if these four things have born fruit?"
Nārada replied, "Study of the Vedas bears fruit when one performs abundant sacrifices. Knowledge of the śāstra bears fruit when it results in humility and good behavior. Wealth bears fruit when one enjoys it or gives it away in charity, and a wife bears fruit when she produces children."
Yudhiṣṭhira then bowed his head down in order to worship the lotus feet of Nārada Muni, and while doing so, he promised to act as he had been directed. The king then took his seat next to Nārada, and at that time, the ṛṣi paused awhile, as if absorbed in deep thought. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then took the opportunity to ask something of great curiosity to him: "O foremost of all ṛṣis, in the course of your perpetual wanderings, have you even seen another assembly house which is equal to or superior to this one which has been built by Maya Dānava?"
Upon hearing this, Nārada humorously smiled and then replied, "My dear king. I have certainly never seen such an opulent royal assembly hall upon this earth. However, in other planetary systems, there are far more superior ones which I shall now describe to you."
The Pāṇḍavas were very eager to hear what Nārada Muni would have to say, and so they all leaned forward to the edge of their seats and awaited his words with folded hands. Nārada then said, "The assembly house of Indra, named Puṣkaramālinī, was built by the king of heaven himself, and it is 150 yojanas long, 100 yojanas wide and five yojanas high. It moves according to Indra's will, and anyone who enters it finds that all influences due to old age, grief and fear are immediately dispelled. When Indra sits upon his royal throne in that assembly house, he is surrounded by all of the demigods and celestial ṛṣis, who worship him and await his every command. The Gandharvas and Apsarās are also always in attendance to sing and dance for the pleasure of the heavenly king, and great rājarṣis, such as Hariścandra, can be seen there as well."
"The assembly house of Yamarāja was built by Viśvakarmā, and it covers an area of more than 100 yojanas in all directions. Within this assembly house, grief, the weakness of old age, hunger, thirst, and the presence of evil are never even felt. All of the great past rājarṣis wait upon
Yamarāja, and some of the prominent ones are Yayāti, Nāhuṣa, Pūru, as well as Rāmacandra and Lākṣmaṇa, the sons of Daśaratha. Mahārāja Śantana and Pāṇdu are also there, and factually, the number of kings is indescribable. As with Indra's assembly hall, this one moves at the will of Yamarāja, the lord of the pîtras.

"The assembly house of Varuṇa, which is also called Puṣkaramālinī, has the same dimensions as that of Yamarāja's, and it was built by Viśvakarmā within the water. The Nāgas, headed by Vāsuki, wait upon Varuṇa in this pure white palace, and so do the Daityas and Dānavas, headed by Bali Mahārāja, the son of Virocanā. All of the oceans and sacred rivers also reside there in their personified forms in order to attend to the lord of the waters.

"Kuvera's assembly house is 100 yojanas by 70 yojanas, and it was built by Vaiśrāvana himself. When Kuvera sits in this assembly hall, he is surrounded by his 1,000 wives, and Lord Śiva often comes there with Pārvatī and his other associates in order to visit his friend, the lord of wealth. The great mountains, headed by Meru, worship Kuvera in their personified forms, and since this assembly hall is attached to the sky, it can go anywhere as if floating in the air.

"My dear king, once, long ago, in the Satya-yuga, I happened to meet the sun-god, Āditya. After visiting the assembly house of Lord Brahmā, Āditya had come to the earth in a human form and began to wander about in order to see what was worth seeing. It was at that time that I met the sun-god, and when he described to me the wonders of Lord Brahmā's assembly hall, I became very curious to see it for myself. Then, when I asked Śūrya to tell me what I would have to do in order to behold Lord Brahmā's assembly house, he informed me that I must first execute the Brahma vow for 1,000 years. Thus, I went to the Himālayas in order to execute the required austerity, and upon its completion, Śūrya once again appeared before me.

"The sun-god then escorted me to Brahmāloka and took me on a guided tour of the assembly house there. Factually, the assembly hall of Lord Brahmā is indescribable because as soon as one attempts to say something about it, it changes form. This self-effulgent assembly hall is not supported by pillars, and since it is almost eternal, it knows no deterioration. While seated within the assembly hall, Lord Brahmā is
worshipped by the eight elements, the five sense objects, and the
greatest of ṛṣis, such as Kaśyapa, Bhṛgu, Vasiṣṭha and Kardama. The
three modes of material nature and the Vedas personified remain there
in their personified forms, as do the sun, moon and all other
constellations. Indeed, Lord Brahmā is attended to by Dharma, Artha,
Kāma, Gāyatrī, Intelligence, Fame, Forgiveness, the Wheel of Time,
Days and Moments, as well as the Lokapālas, all in their personified
forms, and so what to speak of the lesser demigods! O King, just as your
assembly house is unrivaled in the world of men, the assembly house of
Lord Brahmā is unparalleled anywhere within the universe."

After hearing this awesome description, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next
asked, "O Nārada, while speaking about the assembly house of Yamarāja,
you mentioned the names of almost all the great kings that had formerly
ruled the earth. However, while describing the assembly of Indra, you
mentioned only the name of an earthly king, Mahārāja Hariścandra.
What did Hariścandra do in order to achieve such a distinction? Also,
you mentioned that you had seen my father Pāṇḍu in the assembly of
Yamarāja. How did you happen to meet him? Did he say anything to you
about me?"

In order to reply to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira’s inquiries, Nārada Muni first
of all related the history of Hariścandra, who had formerly been the
emperor of the entire earth with its seven islands. After bringing the
whole planet under his sway, Mahārāja Hariścandra began preparations
for the performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice. Thus, at his command, all
of the kings of the earth voluntarily provided vast amounts of wealth to
be utilized for the great sacrificial performance. Indeed, all of these
rulers came in order to personally assist Mahārāja Hariścandra by
carrying out different duties such as the distribution of prasādam and the
giving of charity to the brāhmaṇas. Then, at the completion of the
Rājasūya sacrifice, Hariścandra gave away five times more wealth than
was requested by each person, and by dint of this accomplishment, he
outshone all other kings."

Nārada then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, any king who is able to
successfully perform the Rājasūya sacrifice can attain the planet of
Indra. Similarly, warriors who give up their lives on the battlefield
without turning away from their enemy, and persons who die while
engaged in performing great austerities, also can ascend to Indra's abode. O descendent of Bhārata, when I had met your father, Pāṇḍu, he asked me to convey the following message to you: 'My dear son, if you and your brothers can conquer over all other kings of the earth, then perform the Rājasūya sacrifice, for it will enable me to be promoted to the planet of Indra.'

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, if you like, I can convey your reply to Pāṇḍu. My advice is that you endeavor to fulfill his wish. In this way you will become elevated to Indraloka along with all of your ancestors. I must warn you, however, that there are obstacles on the path of performing the Rājasūya-yajña. There are Brahma-rākṣasas who scrutinizingly look for any slight fault in the sacrificial performance. If they find out such a flaw, these Brahma-rākṣasas can utilize that opportunity to cause war or even the destruction of the entire earth."

Thereafter, Nārada took permission from Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and then departed for Dvārakā in order to see Lord Kṛṣṇa. After hearing Nārada's words, all that Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers could think about was the Rājasūya sacrifice and nothing else, and thus they lost all peace of mind. The Pāṇḍavas discussed the possibility of performing the Rājasūya sacrifice with their ministers and other members of the royal assembly, and the more they considered the proposal, the more inclined they became toward it. Still, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, who is also known as Ajātaśatru (one who is loved by all), thought about the welfare of everyone and not just his own aggrandizement. Thus, once again he approached his ministers and priests and begged them to tell him frankly whether they considered him to be actually qualified to perform the great sacrifice or not.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira always treated his subjects as if they were members of his own family. Bhīma's unique ruling quality was the fairness he displayed in all of his dealings. Arjuna specialized in protecting the citizens from all kinds of external enemies. Nakula was noted for his humility in dealing with others, and Sahadeva was famous for administering justice impartially. Because the Pāṇḍavas exhibited these exalted qualities, the entire kingdom was free from fear and quarrel, and everyone was very attentive to performing his occupational duties properly. As a result of the king's virtue, the rains came in
abundance and at proper times, and thus the entire kingdom became endowed with great prosperity.

All of the ministers and priests assured Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira that he had the makings of a great and pious emperor and thus they encouraged him to begin preparations for the Rājasūya sacrifice. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira consulted with Dhaumya and Śrīla Vyāsadeva, they also gave him similar assurances. Being very cautious, however, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira repeatedly calculated his strength and means, for he knew that the wise never come to grief due to their acting only after long deliberation. Since any mistake in the sacrificial performance could have very grave consequences, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira did not like the weight of decision to rest entirely upon his shoulders. Thus, he at last began to take shelter of Lord Kṛṣṇa by meditating upon His lotus feet with a concentrated mind. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was confident that since Kṛṣṇa was the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent Supreme Personality of Godhead, He would be the fit person to make the final decision. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira thus sent a messenger to Lord Kṛṣṇa at Dvārakā, inviting Him to come to Indraprastha.

Upon receiving Yudhiṣṭhira's message, Lord Kṛṣṇa immediately mounted upon His chariot and set out. When the Lord arrived at Indraprastha, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira received Him with great joy and affection. Lord Kṛṣṇa first of all went to visit His aunt, Queen Kuntī, and then He had a very jovial conversation with His intimate friend, Arjuna. Thereafter, as Lord Kṛṣṇa relaxed at His leisure, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira took the opportunity of approaching Him in order to express his cherished desire as follows:

"My dear Lord, I wish to perform the Rājasūya sacrifice. However, at the same time, I am hesitant because I know that this sacrifice can be successfully performed only by a ruler who is worshipped all over the earth and who is able to bring all opposition under control. My ministers have already encouraged me in this matter, but I know that such persons often flatter the king out of a sense of friendship or self-interest. Therefore, my dear Lord, I want to leave the decision up to You, for You give the ultimate sanction of all types of undertakings."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, rest assured that you are fully qualified to perform the Rājasūya sacrifice. However, you can
successfully do so only after becoming truly worthy of the title 'emperor' by conquering over all other rulers of the world. The powerful king of Māgadha named Jarāsandha has also conquered many kings and he is being supported by Śīśupāla, the king of Karuṣa, Dantavakra, Bhagadatta and Paunḍraka. Since he has become so powerful, Jarāsandha always tries to create disunion among the Yādavas and their allies. Indeed, out of fear of Jarāsandha, many kings of the Bhoja, Pañcāla, and Kośala dynasties have either taken shelter in other kingdoms or have surrendered to him. Our great enemy, Kaṁsa, had married two of Jarāsandha's daughters; Asti and Prāpti. Being strengthened by that alliance, he also began to persecute the kings of the Bhoja, Vṛṣṇi and Andhaka dynasties. Finally, I killed King Kaṁsa, but as a result, Jarāsandha has become my determined enemy.

"There were two other friends of Jarāsandha as well, named Haṁsa and Ṭibhaka. Because of their acquired benedictions, Haṁsa and Ṭibhaka were incapable of being slain by any weapon and so, under their protection, Jarāsandha became virtually unconquerable as well. Then, once, Balarāma killed a king who also happened to have the name Haṁsa after battling with him for eighteen days. Thereafter, when Ṭibhaka heard the people saying that Haṁsa had been killed, he became overwhelmed with grief. Indeed, since he considered himself to be incapable of living without his dear brother, Ṭibhaka finally drowned himself in the River Yamunā. Then, when Haṁsa heard that Ṭibhaka had committed suicide, he made up his mind to follow the path of his elder brother and so he also gave up his life in the same way. Then, when Jarāsandha heard about the deaths of his two powerful friends, he lost all enthusiasm for fighting with Me and returned to his capital with a dejected heart.

"I was very glad to see that My great enemy had given up his attack upon Mathurā, and so I continued to reside there quite happily. Then, when Kaṁsa's widows returned home to their father, they incited him to take revenge for the death of their husband. I knew of this, and since I considered Jarāsandha to be unconquerable, I left Mathurā along with the other members of the Yadu dynasty. Thereafter, I established the city of Dvārakā, which was built at a place near the Raivatāka Hill where the town of Kuśasthali lay in disrepair. Since then, I have
fortified the city so strongly that from within it even the women could defend themselves from an attack from the demigods of heaven."

After explaining all this, Lord Kṛṣṇa concluded, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhīra, although you are certainly qualified to become the emperor of the entire world, you cannot perform the Rājasūya sacrifice as long as Jarāsandha lives. This powerful king has defeated and captured numerous other rulers and is imprisoning them within his dungeon. When the number of captured kings reaches 100, he plans to offer them all in a ghastly human sacrifice to please Lord Śiva. Therefore, you must first of all kill Jarāsandha and release these kings. Then only can you think of performing the Rājasūya sacrifice."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, how will we ever be able to kill Jarāsandha?"

Bhīma was standing nearby and at this point he suggested, "My dear brother, let Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and myself attack Jarāsandha. Even if we are not powerful enough to defeat him, I believe with Kṛṣṇa’s mercy and intelligence we will still come out victorious."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "Since eighty-six kings are already being imprisoned by Jarāsandha, we should immediately go and fight with him out of a sense of duty. In this way, even if we are defeated, we shall gain tremendous pious credit, and if we come out victorious, Yudhiṣṭhīra will become the emperor of the entire world."

However, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra became very distressed upon hearing Kṛṣṇa mention the possibility of defeat. Thus, he said, "O my Lord, I could never bear to go on living without You, Bhīma, or Arjuna. Therefore, let us give up the whole idea of fighting with Jarāsandha and performing the Rājasūya sacrifice because it is too difficult and risky."

Arjuna then said, "My dear brother, do not think that we are all impotent eunuchs! Heroism is the foremost quality of a kṣatriya and thus we must not hesitate to fight with Jarāsandha and thus become cowards."

Lord Kṛṣṇa was very pleased to hear this and so he praised Arjuna by saying, "This statement is actually suitable for one who has been born in the line of Bhārata! After all, death may come at any time. Therefore, we should act in such a way as to become glorious. Of course, one should never directly attack such a powerful enemy, but we can adopt some
clever means for engaging him in a single-combat."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O Kṛṣṇa, how is it that Jarāsandha has become so powerful that he can even fight with You and remain alive?"
In reply, Lord Kṛṣṇa then narrated the following history:
Once, there was a great king named Bṛhadratha, whose prowess was unexcelled on earth. He married the twin daughters of the king of Kāśī, and yet, even though he enjoyed conjugal relations with them continually until his youth had passed away, he did not receive a single offspring. Then, one day, the king heard that a great rṣi named Caṇḍakauśika had arrived at his capital city. Mahārāja Bṛhadratha then went out of his palace along with his wives and worshipped Caṇḍakauśika. The rṣi became highly pleased by this reception and so, in turn, he offered the king a benediction. Mahārāja Bṛhadratha then explained, "O great sage, I am very morose because I have not received a son to perpetuate my dynasty. Now, I have become old and so it is time for me to retire to the forest in order to execute a life of penances. However, without having produced a son, I feel that my life has been a failure!"
After hearing this, Caṇḍakauśika sat down beneath a mango tree and went into a trance of meditation. Then, while the rṣi remained deeply absorbed in samādhi, it so happened that a ripe and juicy mango fell upon his lap. Upon coming to his external consciousness, Caṇḍakauśika picked up the mango and then pronounced some mantras. After doing this, he handed the mango to the king and then said, "If you give this to your wife to eat then you will soon be blessed with an incomparable son."
Thereafter, as Mahārāja Bṛhadratha returned home, he remembered how he had formerly promised to always love his wives equally. Thus, it so happened that the king gave each of his queens half of the mango, and so in due course of time, both of them became pregnant. Bṛhadratha was overjoyed at the prospect of receiving a son. However, when the time came, both queens delivered only half of a baby, each part having one leg, half of an anus, one arm and half a face. Upon seeing this ghastly misfortune, the queens had their midwives throw the lifeless halves outside in the forest.
Soon thereafter, a rākṣasi named Jara happened to find the two pieces
lying upon the ground. As if impelled by Fate, she joined the two parts together out of curiosity, and as a result, the baby immediately came to life, and his body became as hard as a thunderbolt. Indeed, the child became so heavy that the wonder-struck Jara could not even carry him in order to devour him. Then, the baby put his fists into his mouth and began to roar so ferociously that all of the palace residents became alarmed upon hearing the sound. Mahārāja Bṛhadratha then rushed out to see what was going on, and the queens and other palace residents followed him. When she saw Bṛhadratha approaching, Jara thought, "This king has always desired to have a son, and since I also dwell within his kingdom, I should do something for his benefit."

After coming to this conclusion, Jara took a human form and then presented the wonderful child to the king. Bṛhadratha was very pleased to see that his newborn son was alive, and he then inquired from Jara about her identity. In response, she explained, "O King, I am a rākṣasi named Jara. Originally, I was a creation of Lord Brahmā named Gṛhadevi, and I possessed exceptional beauty. As the demigoddess who presides over the households of human beings, I give great prosperity to those who paint my picture on the wall and then worship me with great devotion along with their family members. However, those who neglect to worship me soon find that their prosperity at home has dwindled. O King, because you engaged in my worship within the palace temple, I am inclined to favor you. When I found the two halves of this child, I joined them together out of curiosity, and immediately the baby came to life. I would ordinarily have eaten such juicy, tender flesh, but since you worship me, I spared the child so that your long cherished desire might become fulfilled."

After saying this, Jara suddenly disappeared from that place. Mahārāja Bṛhadratha then returned to his palace, and thereafter, the birth ceremonies were performed for his son. The king ordered the citizens to celebrate the occasion by having a grand festival in honor of Jara. Then, he named his son Jarāsandha since the boy had been joined together by the hands of the rākṣasi, Jara. Soon, Jarāsandha grew up to become a very powerful youth, and thus he gave his parents great joy.

Some time later on, Caṇḍakausīka returned to Māgadha. Out of a profound sense of gratitude, Mahārāja Bṛhadratha worshipped the ṛṣi
with reverence and then offered him his entire kingdom in charity with
great satisfaction. At that time, Čaṇḍakauśika informed Bṛhadṛatha, "O
King, your son will develop unrivaled prowess and thus he will become
the subjugator of all of his enemies."
After saying this, the ṛṣi departed and soon thereafter, Bṛhadṛatha
installed Jarāsandha upon the royal throne so that he could retire to the
forest along with his two wives. Having gained a distaste for worldly
pleasures and sense gratification, the king’s mind had become intent
upon the performance of austerities. After ascending the throne,
Jarāsandha began to conquer over numerous kings. Since he was
supported by his two unslayable friends, Haṁsa and Dibhaka, the kings
of the Bhoja, Andhaka and Vṛṣṇi dynasties wisely chose to avoid
fighting with him.
Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, now that Haṁsa and
Dibhaka are dead, the time is ripe for us to fight with Jarāsandha. Since
he is practically unconquerable while situated on the battlefield, even by
the demigods of heaven, I recommend that we challenge Jarāsandha to a
single-combat with bare hands. For this reason, I would like Bhīma and
Arjuna to accompany Me to the kingdom of Māgadha. I am sure that if
Bhīma fights with Jarāsandha, he will come out victorious by My mercy."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had full faith in Lord Kṛṣṇa and so he
unhesitatingly gave his assent to this plan. Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and
Arjuna set out to meet Jarāsandha after disguising themselves as
brāhmaṇas. When they arrived at Girivraja, the capital city of Māgadha,
with their mighty arms Kṛṣṇa and the two Pāṇḍavas broke off the
Caityaka mountain peak, which majestically towered over the city and
which was practically worshipped by the citizens. Then, as they entered
the city gate that was reserved for the king, Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma, and Arjuna
saw three great drums which had been placed there by Mahārāja
Bṛhadṛatha. Indeed, these drums had been made by the king from the
skin of a Rākṣasa named Rishava whom he had slain, and upon being
played, they would go on resounding for one entire month.
As they walked through the city streets, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna
boldly snatched some garlands from a flower shop and then decorated
themselves very nicely. The people of Māgadha wondered much about
these three heroes and meanwhile, the local brāhmaṇas observed many
inauspicious omens and so rushed to inform the king. The chief priest then caused Jarāsandha to perform certain rituals to ward off the evil influence and thereafter, Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna entered the royal palace and went right up to where the king was seated upon his royal throne. Being a great follower of the Vedic principles and a staunch worshiper of the brāhmaṇas, Jarāsandha immediately rose up from his seat in order to welcome the three mendicants. As was customary, the king of Māgadha had water brought so that the brāhmaṇas could wash their feet, and then he very respectfully presented them with arghya and cows in charity. Lord Kṛṣṇa then informed him, "O King, my two companions are observing a vow of silence today and so they will only be able to speak with you after midnight."

Jarāsandha provided his guests with a room and then, at midnight, he went there since it was his well-known vow to give brāhmaṇas his audience no matter what the hour, day or night. As soon as Jarāsandha saw the three so-called brāhmaṇas, however, he noted their extraordinarily powerful bodily features and the calluses on their hands which were obviously caused by the constant hitting of a bowstring. Upon seeing Jarāsandha before Him, Lord Kṛṣṇa greeted him by saying, "O King, may salvation be attained by you without difficulty."

Then, in reply, Jarāsandha said, "The power of brāhmaṇas lies in their speech whereas the prowess of kṣatriyas is their physical strength. By destroying the Caityaka peak and then entering my city through an improper gate without any fear, you have certainly exhibited qualities that pertain to the kṣatriya class. You claim to be following certain vows of austerity, but such brāhmaṇas would never decorate themselves lavishly with flower garlands and sandalwood paste, as you three have. Therefore, from your appearance as well as your behavior, I can understand that you are actually kṣatriyas. Now, please disclose your real identities and tell me your purpose in coming here, for truthfulness is also a great virtue for kings."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then replied in a grave and calm voice, "It is ordained that a friend's abode should be entered through the proper gate but not a foe's. Therefore, you should understand that we have come here out of enmity toward you."

With great surprise, Jarāsandha responded, "How could this be? I have
never acted inimically toward any brāhmaṇa. Indeed, after carefully scrutinizing my memory I cannot recall a single instance where I displeased them in any respect."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "We have been sent here by a certain virtuous king. O Jarāsandha, how can you consider yourself to be innocent when you are holding other kings captive with the intention of offering them in a human sacrifice to Lord Śiva? Who else could perform such an abominable act? Such human sacrifices are never seen except among the most degraded persons. How can you be so puffed-up as to consider members of your own order to be animals fit for sacrifice? Being ourselves virtuous, we have come here to slay you with a view of upholding righteousness and benefiting others. O foolish king, you consider yourself to be unrivaled in prowess but this is only due to your arrogance for there are many who are your equals or superiors. Know that I am your old enemy Kṛṣṇa, and these two companions of mine are the sons of Pandu, Bhīma and Arjuna! We challenge you to release all of the imprisoned kings or else fight!"

Jarāsandha happily accepted this challenge and he chose to fight with Bhīma, considering him to be superior in strength to Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. First of all, Jarāsandha had his priest perform some propitiatory rites in order to invoke his good fortune. Then, when these were completed, he rushed at Bhīma with great eagerness to fight, carrying only his two massive arms as weapons.

A fierce battle ensued and soon all of the citizens came out of the city in order to witness the contest. While violently pushing and dragging one another about, Bhīma and Jarāsandha struck each other with their fists and kicked with their feet. From time to time, Bhīma would pick up Jarāsandha and hurl him a great distance. Then, Jarāsandha would do the same to Bhīma and thus gradually, they exhibited all the arts of wrestling.

Beginning from the first day of the month of Kārtika, the two colossal heroes fought continuously, day and night, without food or sleep, until at last, on the fourteenth night, Jarāsandha became fatigued and so stopped momentarily to catch his breath. Lord Kṛṣṇa then took this opportunity to prod Bhīma by saying, "Now that Jarāsandha has become weakened, you should fight with him mildly."
Bhīma replied, "I am not going to spare Jarāsandha now that I have finally gained the advantage after so many days of fighting."

Lord Kṛṣṇa knew the mystery of Jarāsandha's birth and so, by means of various signs, He communicated to Bhīma the method for encompassing his death. After doing so, Kṛṣṇa said, "O son of Kuṇṭī, now is the time to put forward all of your strength in order to slay the one who was joined together by Jara."

Understanding the Lord's intention, Bhīma picked up Jarāsandha in his arms. Then, while holding the king of Māgadha over his head, Bhīma whirled him around 100 times and then smashed him onto the ground with all of this strength. Bhīma then caught hold of Jarāsandha and, after pressing his knee against the king's back, he proceeded to pull apart his legs. As a result, Jarāsandha's entire body split right up the middle along the line where it had been formerly joined together at the time of his birth. While splitting Jarāsandha in half, Bhīma roared so ferociously that many of the women who were there had miscarriages. Then, after killing Jarāsandha, Bhīma placed his dead body next to the city gate while Lord Kṛṣṇa went and released all of the imprisoned kings.

After this, Lord Kṛṣṇa got ready Jarāsandha's chariot so that they could use it for the return to Indraprastha. This wonderful chariot had formerly been used by Indra while battling against the asuras and it was later on given by the king of heaven to Mahārāja Vasu. Bṛhadṛatha had received the chariot from Vasu and thus Jarāsandha had inherited it from his father. Kṛṣṇa took up the reins of the chariot and then, as He came out of the city along with Bhīma and Arjuna, the Lord thought of Garuḍa. At once, the son of Vinatā came there along with many other frightfully roaring creatures and sat down with them upon the chariot's flagpole. Then, as all of the citizens came out of Girivraja in order to worship Him, Lord Kṛṣṇa stopped the chariot for some time. The eighty-six imprisoned kings also arrived there and they offered their prayers to Lord Kṛṣṇa, expressing their eternal gratitude for His having saved them from a ghastly fate. Lord Kṛṣṇa then instructed the kings to take part in assisting Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra in the performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice. The son of Jarāsandha named Sahadeva then came out of the city, accompanied by his ministers and priests. After the prince offered his heartfelt obeisances and worship, Lord Kṛṣṇa installed him as the
king of Māgadha.
Upon His return to Indraprastha, Lord Kṛṣṇa related to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra all that had happened. As he listened to the narration of Bhīma's victory, the king felt transcendentally blissful and then, with great devotion, he worshipped Lord Kṛṣṇa and heartily embraced his two brothers. All of the kings who had been imprisoned by Jarāśandha had accompanied the Lord to Indraprastha and after receiving a royal reception from Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra, they returned to their own kingdoms. Thereafter, since His mission had been accomplished, Lord Kṛṣṇa also took His leave and departed for Dvārakā.

The killing of Jarāśandha greatly enhanced the Pāṇḍavas' prestige and they continued to pass their days very happily together at Indraprastha. Then, one day, Arjuna approached Yudhiṣṭhīra and said, "My dear brother, now that I have received the Gāṇḍīva bow, inexhaustible quivers and a celestial chariot, I think that it is time for us to go out and conquer over all directions. In this way, we can make all of the subordinate kings pay tribute to you in order to swell the royal treasury." Yudhiṣṭhīra agreed to this proposal and soon thereafter, he dispatched Arjuna to the North, Bhīma to the East, Sahadeva to the South and Nakula to the West, providing them with large armies for support. As Arjuna traveled to the North, all of the kings who witnessed his incomparable prowess considered him to be unconquerable and thus, they voluntarily offered him vast amounts of wealth in order to establish an alliance of friendship. In this way, innumerable kings admitted their subordination to the rule of the Emperor Yudhiṣṭhīra. Arjuna conquered all the kings of the Himalayan region and then, after crossing over the White Mountains, he came to the Mānasa-sarovara and other lakes where great ṛṣis resided. There, Arjuna conquered the Gandharvas and then, after going further to the North, he came to the border of Harivarṣa, the realm of the Northern Kurus. At this point, Arjuna was confronted by frontier guards having huge, powerful bodies who offered him all respect but then said, "You will never be able to conquer over this country. Indeed, if any human being were to enter this region he would immediately perish. My dear Arjuna, human eyes are not even capable of seeing in this land for it is more subtle than Bhāratavarṣa."
Still, if you have come here with a purpose, then please inform us and we shall satisfy you to the best of our capacity."

Arjuna then smilingly replied, "My only desire is that King Yudhishthira may be recognized by all as the emperor of the entire world. I shall obey your command and not enter Harivarsha but still, I request you to give something valuable as tribute to my elder brother."

The guards then happily brought forth many valuable gifts of celestial origin and after receiving them, Arjuna started out for Indraprastha. Upon his arrival, Arjuna presented everything that he had received to Mahärāja Yudhishthira, including some wonderful horses of parrot-green and peacock-blue complexion which he had received from the Gandharvas.

Bhéma also conquered numerous kings while traveling toward the East, and at last he came to the kingdom of Cedi. When he heard of Bhéma's arrival, Śiśupāla immediately came out and in a spirit of great friendship, he offered his entire kingdom. Bhéma then spent thirty days with Śiśupāla, and he was lavishly entertained by the Cedi ruler. From there, Bhéma continued his tour and although he had to fight with and conquer many of the kings he encountered, others, such as Jarāsandha's son Sahadeva, approached him peacefully in order to pay the required tribute. Finally, upon his return to Indraprastha, Bhéma went and offered all of the wealth he had acquired to his elder brother.

While going toward the South, Sahadeva defeated Dantavakra and thus forced him to pay tribute. Then, when he approached the kingdom ruled over by Kuntibhoja, his father-law came out and voluntarily admitted his subordination to Mahärāja Yudhishthira. Thereafter, Sahadeva defeated Vinda and Anuvinda, the kings of the Avanti province. Then, going further south, he came to the caves of Kiṣkindhyā, where he fought with Mainda and Dwivida for seven days. Although the monkey sons of the twin Aśvins did not tire, they became very satisfied with Sahadeva and so willingly paid their taxes. Then, upon coming to Māhiśmati, Sahadeva encountered Nīla in a very fierce battle. Agni came to Nīla's assistance and when it thus appeared as if the armor, chariots and elephants of the Pāṇḍava army were all ablaze, Sahadeva became very anxious.

When he heard this, King Janamejaya inquired, "Why is it that Agni
came to oppose Sahadeva? After all, it was the god of fire who was going to be gratified by the performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice."

In reply, Vaiśampāyana narrated the following story:

Taking the form of the sacrificial fire, Agni used to reside within the king's palace at Māhiṣmatī. Mahārāja Nīla had a daughter who always liked to stay near to the sacrificial fire, and since she was exceptionally beautiful, it was actually seen that the flames would blaze up more brightly in her presence. Indeed, the sacrificial fire would never blaze up if simply fanned, but it would readily do so when blown by the girl's fair lips. Thus, it was understood that Agni desired to have Nīla's daughter as his wife.

One day, Agni came to the royal palace at Māhiṣmatī in the guise of a brāhmaṇa. Then, when Mahārāja Nīla happened to see the brāhmaṇa sitting intimately with his daughter, he ordered him to be punished according to law. As soon as he heard this, the brāhmaṇa angrily blazed up with a terrible and all-encompassing effulgence. Understanding the situation, Nīla fearfully bowed down his head before Agni and then bestowed his beautiful daughter upon him. Because of this, Agni thereafter became very favorably disposed toward Nīla and even requested him to accept a benediction. In response, Nīla then begged, "O Lord, please grant that my soldiers may never panic while engaged in battle."

Agni not only gave this boon, but ever since that time, whoever ignorantly attacked Mahārāja Nīla was consumed by fire. And, in addition, Agni gave all of the girls at Māhiṣmatī sexual liberty so that they could roam at will without being tied down to any particular husband. When Sahadeva saw that his army was afflicted with fear due to being surrounded by fire, he first of all purified himself by touching water. Then, Sahadeva offered prayers to Agni, pleading that it was not proper for him to impede a sacrificial performance. After finishing his prayers, Sahadeva spread kuṣa-grass upon the ground and then sat down in order to wait for the approaching fire. Upon seeing this brave act of submission, Agni refrained from burning Sahadeva. Indeed, the god of fire came before him in his personal form and then said, "Get up, my dear Sahadeva, for I was only testing you. I had no intention of impeding the Rājasūya sacrifice. Indeed, you can rest assured that all of your
desires will be fulfilled in this connection."
Sahadeva then stood up with folded hands and worshipped the god of fire. Thereafter, Agni disappeared from that spot and then, under his order, Nila came forward. By offering Sahadeva great respect and handing over to him a share of the taxes, Nila admitted his subordination to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. After continuing his travels, when Sahadeva arrived at the country of Bhojakata, he sent an ambassador to meet King Bhīṣmaka and his son Rukmī. In consideration of his intimate relationship with Lord Kṛṣṇa, Bhīṣmaka gladly accepted the sovereignty of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and handed over a vast amount of wealth to Sahadeva. Thereafter, when Sahadeva reached the Southern Ocean, he sent messengers to Vibhīṣaṇa, and in response, the king of the Rākṣasas willingly accepted the Pāṇḍavas' supremacy and sent out immense wealth as tribute. Sahadeva then returned to Indraprastha and upon his arrival, he presented everything that he had acquired to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira.
Nakula traveled to the West, and after conquering numerous kings, he arrived at the precincts of Dvārakā. When Nakula sent a messenger to Lord Kṛṣṇa and other Yādavaś there, all of them happily accepted the sovereignty of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Thereafter, Nakula approached his uncle Śalya, and out of affection he also voluntarily accepted his subordination to the Pāṇḍavas. Finally, after being entertained in Śalya's palace for quite some time, Nakula continued his conquests. Then, at last, he returned to Indraprastha in order to offer to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira all of the tribute which he had collected.
In this way, the treasury of the Pāṇḍavas became enormous, and upon beholding this vast wealth, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to seriously think about performing the Rājasūya sacrifice. All of the king's friends and ministers also encouraged him repeatedly to begin preparations, and then Lord Kṛṣṇa arrived at Indraprastha, bearing cartloads of valuable presents for his elder cousin-brother. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gave Lord Kṛṣṇa a royal reception. Then, when all of the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa sat down along with the sacrificial priests, such as Dhaumya and Vyāsadeva, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira took the opportunity of expressing his pure devotion unto the Lord as follows: "My dear Kṛṣṇa, we have endeavored
to bring the entire world under my rule just to please You, and I know that it is only due to Your mercy that we have come out successful. Now, with Your permission, we can begin preparations for the Rājasūya sacrifice. You can be installed for the sacrificial performance and thereafter rule the world as its emperor. Or, if You so desire, then You may allow us to take on that responsibility."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you are most qualified for becoming the Emperor. Thus it is you who should be installed for the performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice and I shall be glad to assist you."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then commanded the Pāṇḍavas to collect all of the paraphernalia needed to perform the sacrifice. Thereafter, Sahadeva supplied everything which was required by the priests. Arjuna collected all of the food, and the chief priest, Śrila Vyāsadeva, appointed the required assistant priests.

First of all, preliminary worship of the sacrificial arena was conducted and then workmen began its construction under the direction of qualified brāhmaṇas. Being Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's right-hand man, Sahadeva sent out messengers to invite all classes of men within the kingdom. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then sent Nakula to Hastināpura in order to personally invite Bhīma, Droṇa, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vidura, Kṛpa and any of his cousin-brothers who might be well-disposed toward the Pāṇḍavas. Thus, the chieftains of the Kuru dynasty soon set out for Indraprastha, keeping the brāhmaṇas in front. Duryodhana accompanied them, as did all of his brothers, and so did Śakuni, Karṇa and Aśvatthāmā.

Great kings from all over the world were also invited, and before long, Jayadratha, Śalya, Paunḍraka, Kuntibhoja, Bhagadatta, Virāṭa, Śiśupāla, Balarāma and many other Yādavas arrived at Indraprastha. Opulent palaces were assigned for the residence of these kings, and all kinds of enjoyable articles were lavishly provided for their use. Thousands of brāhmaṇas also poured in from different lands, and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira accommodated them in the special quarters that had been constructed for them. All of the brāhmaṇas were fed sumptuously each and every day, and vast amounts of charity were given to them as well.

Finally, when everyone had assembled, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was
ceremoniously installed for the performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice. The king then approached the elders of the Kuru dynasty, and after offering all of his wealth unto them, he requested them to guide him in the execution of the sacrifice. At their urging, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then appointed various members of the Kuru dynasty to head up different departments so that they could assist him in the management of the great undertaking. Duḥśāsana was put in charge of the food supplies. Aśvatthāmā was assigned to look after all of the needs of the brāhmaṇas. Bhīṣma and Droṇa were appointed to carefully scrutinize everything in case there was any oversight. Kṛpa took charge of the precious jewels, and he also managed the distribution of charity to the brāhmaṇas. Vidura became the treasurer, and Duryodhana was put in charge of receiving all of the gifts which were presented by the visiting kings. By His own choice, Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, took charge of personally washing the feet of all of the brāhmaṇas, just to show by example how important it is to worship the devotees of the Lord.

All of the kings who came to see Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira perform the Rājasūya sacrifice presented lavish gifts to him. Indeed, they brought everything in such great quantity that no one gave less than 1,000 of any particular item. Each king brought so much wealth that everyone of them thought, "It is only due to my generosity that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira is able to perform this sacrifice so opulently."

In return, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira highly gratified everyone by giving them presents of immeasurable value and supplying them with every sort of royal comfort for the duration of their stay. Thereafter, when the Rājasūya sacrifice commenced, all of the demigods filled the sky with their celestial chariots in order to witness the historic event. The sacrifice was then performed to everyone's complete satisfaction, for not even a tiny detail nor a single person was neglected.

On the last day of the sacrifice, there was an intermission, and so all of the rṣis and kings who were seated in the arena began to discuss among themselves about various topics of religious understanding. At this time, Nārada Muni, who is the leader of all the rṣis, thought to himself as follows: "Although Lord Kṛṣṇa is acting just like an ordinary human being, He is actually the one Who is worshipped by all such sacrificial
Indeed, Narak Muni was struck with wonder just to think about how the Lord of all sacrifices, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, had personally appeared in the sacrificial arena of Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira. Just then, Bhīṣma addressed Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira by saying, "O King, I think that arghya should now be presented just to honor all of the sages and kings who are present here. Let the first presentation be given to the foremost personality in the assembly."

Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira then asked, "O Grandsire, whom do you consider to be the greatest personality present here?"

Bhīṣma then confidentially declared, "There is no doubt that Kṛṣṇa is not only the foremost person who is present here, but He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself, having descended upon the earth just to execute the mission of the demigods, who are all His obedient servants. Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Lord-of all creation, for He possesses all opulence to all unlimited degree and He is the origin of everything."

After saying this, Bhīṣma ordered Sahadeva to first of all present arghya to Lord Kṛṣṇa. However, when the Lord graciously accepted the offering, Śiśuñala could not tolerate it and he began to rant at Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira just like a madman. "Kṛṣṇa is completely unworthy of this honor," Śiśuñala said. "O Bhīṣma, how could you mislead Sahadeva, who is but a mere child, by ordering him to give the first offering of arghya to Kṛṣṇa? On what basis did you select Kṛṣṇa, passing by other, more important personalities? If seniority has been the criterion for selection, then certainly Kṛṣṇa’s father Vasudeva is elderly. If you consider that one's guru should be given preference, then why was not Droṇa or Kṛṣṇa chosen instead of Kṛṣṇa? Then again, if the distinction is to be given to a saintly personality, how could you choose Kṛṣṇa instead of Vyāsadeva, Nārada or one of the other great rṣis present here? O King, if your choice was intended to honor your allies, then is not Drupada just as great a supporter of the Pāṇḍavas and senior as well? Kṛṣṇa is neither a preceptor, a priest or even a king. Indeed, He is not even pious, and so what to speak of saintly, for He acts immorally without even a sense of shame, as in the deceitful killing of Jarāsandha. O Yudhiṣṭhira, if you had intended to offer the finest worship to Kṛṣṇa, then why did you invite all of these exalted kings to come here and be performances."
insulted?"
Then, turning to Kṛṣṇa, Śiśupāla said, "O Vasudeva, even if it is granted that the others had foolishly acted out of ignorance, still, how could You dare to accept the first offering of arghya? At least You should be enlightened enough to understand that You are unworthy of such worship. However, by shamelessly accepting the honor You have acted no better than a dog who licks up the sacrificial ghee in a secluded place!"
After saying this, Śiśupāla got up from his seat and stormed out of the assembly, followed by many other kings. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira got up from his throne and hastily ran after Śiśupāla while trying to pacify him with sweet words. However, as Yudhiṣṭhira begged Śiśupāla to refrain from insulting Lord Kṛṣṇa, Bhīṣma restrained him by saying, "O King, anyone who does not approve of the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa does not deserve words of conciliation."
Then, addressing the entire assembly, Bhīṣma declared, "It is not only myself, but all of the great authorities who confirm that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and is thus worshipable by all. Kṛṣṇa is not merely the wisest person present here and the strongest as well. He is the origin of the entire universe and the refuge of everyone and everything. Therefore, I advise all of you not to make the grave mistake of considering Lord Kṛṣṇa to be undeserving of the highest respect. Even as a child Kṛṣṇa acted in superhuman fashion that is possible only for the Supreme Lord and no one else. This Śiśupāla is a mere child, and therefore he cannot understand the transcendental glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa."
Sahadeva then announced in a very grave voice, "If there is anyone in this assembly who objects to the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa, then I am prepared to place my foot upon that person's head. I challenge all of you present here to give me a reply if you feel that my words are faulty."
After saying this, Sahadeva actually lifted his foot and pointed it at the assembly. However, no one dared to say anything by way of objection. Then, suddenly, flowers showered down upon Sahadeva's head while an unseen voice in the sky declared, "This excellent speech is just suitable as a response to persons who blaspheme the Supreme Lord or His pure devotees!"
Närada Muni then stood up and loudly declared, "Anyone who does not worship Lord Kṛṣṇa should be considered a dead body, even though moving, and he should never be seen or talked to on any occasion for that is the injunction of the śāstra."

After this, the assembly settled down, and thus Sahadeva was able to peacefully complete the offering of arghya to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śiśupāla was observing everything from a distance, and now, when he witnessed Lord Kṛṣṇa receiving the foremost worship, he became actually mad with rage. After rushing forward into the assembly, Śiśupāla once again addressed all of the kings with great agitation as follows: "Why should we tolerate the Pāṇḍavas' insults and passively accept this rascal Kṛṣṇa? Let us take up our weapons and fight with the Pāṇḍavas and Vṛṣṇis! Accept me as your commander-in-chief so that we can disrupt this sacrifice before the final rituals are successfully completed."

Upon hearing these envious words of Śiśupāla, a wave of agitation spread throughout the assembly of kings. Since they were already very proud of their strength and influence, the minds of these kings became further polluted when Śiśupāla led them to believe that they were being insulted by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira.

When he saw that the assembled kings had come under the sway of Śiśupāla and were discussing among themselves how to disrupt the sacrifice, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired from Bhīṣma, "O Grandsire, it appears as if the great kings have lost all reason and are about to fall upon us. What can be done to save the situation?"

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, do not fear, for a dog can never slay a lion. Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is acting just like a sleeping lion, will give you protection from these kings, who are all not better than barking dogs."

Śiśupāla could hear Bhīṣma's remarks, and he replied as follows with very harsh words, "This Kṛṣṇa is a mere cowherd boy, and so it is very painful to hear how His insignificant achievements are being glorified completely out of proportion. So what if He killed a duck (Bakāsura) when He was a child? So what if Kṛṣṇa kicked over a rickety old handcart (while killing Śakaṭāsura)? So what if He lifted up an ant hill called Govardhana and defeated a little water snake (Kāliya) in the River
Yamunā? Kṛṣṇa is the most sinful wretch who killed a poor innocent woman (Pūtana) and then ruthlessly killed the ruler of His own kingdom (Kamsa).

"Bhīṣma, you are also a despicable person. Not only are you glorifying Kṛṣṇa falsely, but you have yourself performed many sinful acts. For example, you cruelly tried to force Ambā, the daughter of Kāśīrāja, to marry Vicitravīrya even though she was unwilling. Due to either impotency or ignorance, you have vowed to live a life of celibacy. However, this act is simply vain and futile, for the austerities performed by a childless person never bear fruit. Thus, all in all, you are simply a senile propounder of false morality, and I predict that you will die at the hands of your relatives just as the swan did in the following history:

"There was once an old swan who lived by the seaside. This swan used to preach the principles of morality to the other birds, but he himself did not act accordingly. The other birds innocently regarded him as being virtuous, however, and they used to bring him offerings of food. Indeed, the birds foolishly placed their faith in the old swan to such an extent that they would entrust their eggs to him when they went fishing. The sinful old swan would then eat the eggs to his heart's content. Finally, when the older and wiser birds saw how that number of eggs was steadily diminishing, they became suspicious of the swan. One day, these wise birds hid themselves in order to witness the activities of the old swan. In this way, they saw with their own eyes how the swan ate their eggs, and thus they sorrowfully went and informed the other birds of the situation. Upon hearing of the old swan's wicked behavior, the birds became so enraged that they immediately went and killed that false preacher of morality."

Śiśupāla then declared, "O Bhīṣma, you are just like this old, wicked swan. Therefore, you should be slain by the assembled kings for acting sinfully while simultaneously preaching morality to them!"

When Bhīma heard this blasphemy, his eyes became as red as copper, and he began to grind his teeth in anger. Indeed, everyone in the assembly saw that Bhīma's face resembled that of Death personified at the end of the millenium when he engaged in devouring all creatures. Then, just as Bhīma was about to impetuously rush at Śiśupāla, Bhīṣma went and restrained him while pacifying him with words of reason.
Astonishingly, even in the face of Bhīma's terrifying wrath, Śiśupāla did not tremble with fear. To the contrary, since he was foolishly confident of his own strength, Śiśupāla simply laughed and declared, "My dear kings, just wait here a moment so that you can see Bhīma scorched by my superior prowess as if he were a moth falling into the fire!"

Then, as Śiśupāla went on raving like a madman, Bhīṣma narrated to Bhīma the history of the Cedi ruler's birth as follows: Śiśupāla was born with four arms and three eyes, and immediately upon coming out of his mother's womb, he began to bray just like an ass. Being very afraid of these inauspicious signs, the parents wanted to abandon their newborn baby, but then, a voice from the sky announced, "This son of Damaghoṣa will become very fortunate, and he will be endowed with superior strength. Although the slayer of this child has also taken birth elsewhere upon the earth, he should be raised without any fear or regret."

The mother inquired, "Who is it that will kill my child?" In response, the voice from the sky explained, "That person who, while placing your son upon his lap, witnesses the fall of the child's superfluous arms and the disappearance of his third eye, will later on become his slayer."

When news of this wonderful prophecy spread, all the kings of the earth came to see the little baby Śiśupāla. And yet, even though thousands of men had placed the child upon their laps, one after the other, that which had been predicted did not occur. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma also heard the news, and so They left Dvārakā, desiring to see Śiśupāla's mother, who also happened to be their paternal aunt. After Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma had arrived at the royal palace of King Damaghoṣa and were comfortably seated, the mother herself came and happily placed baby Śiśupāla upon Lord Kṛṣṇa's lap. As soon as this was done, Śiśupāla's two extra arms fell down upon the ground and the eye located on his forehead disappeared. At this, the queen became very alarmed, and so she begged Kṛṣṇa, "O Lord, please favor me by always pardoning any offenses which my son may commit in the future."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear aunt, I can assure you that even if Śiśupāla deserves to be killed, I shall nevertheless pardon up to 100 of his offenses."

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Bhīma, I can assure you that Śiśupāla's audacity in challenging us is actually inspired from within by the will of
Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, please be patient, knowing that his death will soon be accomplished."

When Śiśupāla heard this, his anger once again flared up, and like a deranged man, he continued to speak as follows:

"O Bhīṣma, how dare you pass over the heads of such great heroes as Aśvatthāmā, Karṇa, Duryodhana and Jayadratha, in order to praise this cowherd boy as being the Lord of the universe? You are just like the Bhūliṅga bird which lives north of the Himalayas. On the one hand, this foolish creature always advises the lion to be cautious. And yet, at the same time, the Bhūliṅga bird rashly picks out the pieces of meat which stick between the lion's teeth as it eats. In the same way, you are advising these lionlike kings, upon whose mercy you depend, to worship someone else who is not at all worthy."

Bhīṣma then replied, "I do not consider the kings who are present here to be any better than the straw in the street!"

At this, pandemonium broke out as all the assembled kings began to heatedly discuss among themselves about how Bhīṣma should be chastised. Bhīṣma then challenged, "There is no more need for further discussion because words can endlessly be countered by more words. Whether I be killed by you, or you slain by me, I am ready to end all talks by placing my foot upon your heads. However, if you desire more speedy deaths, then I advise you to pass me by and directly fight with Lord Kṛṣṇa."

Upon hearing this, Śiśupāla challenged, "O Kṛṣṇa, let us end our battle of words. I am ready to kill You and Your foolish admirers, the Pāṇḍavas!"

After saying this, Śiśupāla paused, and so Kṛṣṇa took the opportunity of addressing the entire assembly as follows in a soft and calm voice. "O Kings, because Śiśupāla's mother is My father's sister, I have always treated him with extreme tolerance, in spite of his enmity toward the Yadu dynasty. Now, please hear from Me some of the sinful acts Śiśupāla has committed. Once, when I was away at Prāgjyotisapura, Śiśupāla attacked Dvārakā and managed to burn down a portion of the city. Then, later on, as My father was engaged in performing the aśvamedha-yajña, Śiśupāla came and stole the horse in order to obstruct the sacrifice. On another occasion, he raped Akrūra's wife while she was
traveling from Dvārakā to Sauvīra. Then, Śīşupāla disguised himself as the king of Karūṣa in order to rape the king's intended bride, Bhadrā, the princess of Viṣāla. And yet, in spite of Śīşupāla's having performed so many acts of aggression against My dynasty, I overlooked them all because of the boon which I had granted his mother. Indeed, Śīşupāla has always been My enemy, and he even tried to marry Rukmīṇī just to give Me pain. Now, it is very fortunate that all of you who are assembled here can see Śīşupāla's real character, because I want to kill him without incurring public censure."

After hearing Kṛṣṇa's speech, all of the kings began to harshly reproach Śīşupāla. However, Śīşupāla simply laughed and then asked, "O Kṛṣṇa, how could You be so shameless as to mention in public that Your wife was actually intended for another?"

Śīşupāla foolishly thought that he was so powerful that Kṛṣṇa could do nothing to him in retaliation. Nonetheless, as Śīşupāla stood before Him, Lord Kṛṣṇa thought of His Sudarśana-cakra, and thus that blazing weapon immediately appeared in His hand. Lord Kṛṣṇa then announced, "O Śīşupāla, up until now, I have always excused you on account of having promised your mother that I would overlook 100 of your offenses. However, you have now exceeded that limit, and so I am going to kill you without further delay!"

After saying this, Lord Kṛṣṇa released His effulgent disc, and within a second, the severed head of Śīşupāla fell down upon the floor. Then, as all those who were present looked on in astonishment, a dazzling spark of light came out of Śīşupāla's body. While stationed in the air, that purified soul worshipped Lord Kṛṣṇa and then suddenly entered His transcendental body. Everyone was struck with wonder to see this, and at this time, even though the sky had been cloudless, rain began to shower profusely. As lightning flashed and thunder boomed, the entire earth trembled so that the combined effect was awesome.

Some of the assembled kings were pleased that Śīşupāla had been killed, but others were outraged, considering Kṛṣṇa's action to be an atrocity. Still other kings became mediators between the opposing parties, but all of the brāhmaṇas and rṣis were highly delighted without reservation. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then commanded his brothers to perform Śīşupāla's funeral ceremony with great respect, and thereafter, the son of
Śiśupāla was installed as the king of Cedi. With all impediments now removed, the Rājasūya sacrifice was successfully completed under the protection of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who stood guard with His Śārṅga bow and Sudarśana-cakra in hand. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then took his avabhṛtha bath and thereafter, all of the kings came and congratulated him. At last, when the assembled kings and brāhmaṇas desired to return to their respective abodes, the Pāṇḍavas accompanied them up to the border to Indraprastha. Lord Kṛṣṇa then approached Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira in order to take permission to depart, and at that time, the king lovingly acknowledged the great mercy which the Lord had bestowed upon him so that the Rājasūya sacrifice could be successfully performed. After Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira very reluctantly granted permission for Lord Kṛṣṇa to depart, the Lord went to take leave of Kuntidevi, Draupadi and Subhadra. Then, after mounting the chariot which bore the flag of Garuḍa, Lord Kṛṣṇa set out for Dvāraku, followed by the Pāṇḍavas. Then, after going some distance, the Lord stopped His chariot and very affectionately caused His unalloyed devotees to turn back toward their own capital.

After the departure of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Duryodhana and Śakuni continued to reside at Yudhiṣṭhira's royal assembly house for some time. When Śrīla Vyāsa approached Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira to take his leave, all of the Pāṇḍavas worshipped him with great reverence and devotion. Then, as they were all seated together, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira took the opportunity to inquire about something of great curiosity, "O greatest of sages, as I was seated with Nārada Muni in the arena of the Rājasūya sacrifice, he had mentioned that he could observe three kinds of evil omens; celestial, terrestrial and atmospheric. Would you kindly explain to us clearly what these signs indicate?"

Śrīla Vyāsa then gravely replied, "My dear grandson, soon you will have to undergo thirteen years of hardship. Then, at the end of that period, there will be a great destruction of practically all the kṣatriyas on earth. All of this misfortune will be brought about simply because of all of Duryodhana's sins, and for your sake only, Bhīma and Arjuna will exhibit their devastating prowess. O Yudhiṣṭhira, this very night you will dream of Lord Śiva. While seated upon his bull-carrier and gazing toward the abode of Yamarāja, Lord Śiva will be seen drinking the
contents of a human skull. You should not be disturbed by this dream, for everything is being enacted as a result of Destiny, under the direction of eternal time."

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then took his leave and departed for Mount Kailāsa, accompanied by his disciples. After this, however, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became filled with intense grief and anxiety while constantly thinking of his grandfather's words. At last, the king found his anguish unbearable, and so he announced to his brothers: "I would rather die than become the cause of so much destruction!"

In an attempt to encourage his elder brother, Arjuna replied, "Do not yield to depression, for it corrodes one's good intelligence. O King, you should be courageous for then you shall always be able to act in a way that will prove beneficial."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became somewhat consoled by his brothers. Then, after considering the matter deeply, he vowed, "For the next thirteen years, I shall never speak one harsh word to any kṣatriya. I will remain firmly under the guidance of my elders, and I will make no distinction between my relatives and so-called outsiders. In this way, I shall leave no room for disagreement to arise, since it is the root cause of all wars. I will pass my time by practicing virtue, and I shall always do that which is agreeable to others."

After hearing this declaration, Yudhiṣṭhira's brothers praised him highly, and thereafter, the king became a little more hopeful of avoiding the impending misfortunes indicated by Śrīla Vyāsadeva. As they continued to reside within the assembly house that was built by Maya Dānava, Duryodhana and Śakuni spent much of their time minutely examining every detail of the wonderful construction. Thus, they discovered many architectural designs that were not to be seen anywhere in their own capital city, Hastināpura. Then, one day, as he leisurely walked through the palace, Duryodhana came to a crystal floor that looked just like water. After pulling up his garment as a precaution, Duryodhana stepped onto a dry surface, and when he thus found that he had been mistaken, he felt ashamed and embarrassed. Then, a little while later, Duryodhana came to a crystal pool filled with lotuses. Thinking that this was like the dry floor which he had encountered
previously, Duryodhana stepped ahead confidently. As a result, he unwittingly fell into the pool with all of his clothes on. Bhīma happened to be present there, and when he saw his cousin-brother soaking wet, he laughed heartily, as did the servants who were standing nearby. The other Pāṇḍavas soon came there, and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira immediately ordered that new clothes be brought for Duryodhana. Although the king did not take pleasure in seeing Duryodhana's plight, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva joined Bhīma in the hilarity.

Duryodhana was not accustomed to being insulted like this, and so the laughter was certainly unbearable for him. Still, Duryodhana carefully concealed his emotions, and he did not even once glance at the Pāṇḍavas the whole time. Then, after putting on his fresh clothes, Duryodhana angrily walked away from the scene of his humiliation, and he once again mistook a crystal floor to be water. Thus, he pulled up his garment as before, and upon seeing his mistake, the Pāṇḍavas once more laughed heartily. In this way, Duryodhana's humiliation became practically unendurable, and it was with great relief that he finally entered his own quarters.

Another day soon thereafter, as he was walking at his leisure, Duryodhana came to a crystal door so transparent that he thought it was open. Thus, while attempting to pass through the supposed open door, Duryodhana bumped his head with great force so that his brain reeled, and it took him a moment to recover his balance. Then, a little later, Duryodhana came to a similar crystal door that was actually open. However, because of his previous mistake, Duryodhana thought that this door was closed. Thus, when he grabbed onto and pulled a door that wasn't there, he fell down backwards with his arms outstretched. Then, while vividly remembering this bad experience, Duryodhana once again came to an open door. Being afraid that it might be actually closed, however, Duryodhana quickly proceeded in another direction just to avoid the door and possible embarrassment.

When, at last, Duryodhana returned to Hastināpura, his heart was overwhelmed with grief and envy due to witnessing the incomparable opulence of the Pāṇḍavas and their grand success in performing the Rājasūya sacrifice. Whenever Duryodhana would remember the
mistakes he had committed while residing in the Pāṇḍavas' royal assembly house, his face would become flushed with embarrassment and a terrible rage would well up in his heart. In this way, Duryodhana's mind became sinfully contaminated and all he could do throughout the entire day and night was think about the Pāṇḍava's wonderful assembly hall, their unlimited opulence, how all the other kings had paid homage unto Yudhiṣṭhira, and how the Pāṇḍavas were living so happily by superseding their cousin-brothers in all respects. Indeed, Duryodhana became so absorbed in such thoughts that he completely neglected to speak to his companion, Śakuni, even though the latter addressed him repeatedly. Then, as Śakuni persisted to inquire about the cause of his grief, Duryodhana finally revealed his heart as follows:

"My dear uncle, I am burning day and night in the fire of envy after beholding the opulence of the Pāṇḍavas. I cannot bear to even think of their prosperity and thus my whole existence has dried up. In one sense, I know that there is no reason for me to be jealous of my cousins. After all, I possess more wealth than I could ever hope to enjoy. Still, when I saw how all of the earth's great kings came and paid tribute to Yudhiṣṭhira as if they were vaiśyās, I could not help but envy his position. Then, when the abominable killing of my good friend Śiśupāla was excused, a burning rage flared up in my heart.

"My dear uncle, what hero could bear to see his enemies attain such influence and prosperity while he himself glides down into obscurity? I can no longer bear to go on living like this, and so I shall commit suicide by drinking poison, or by entering the fire, or by drowning myself. So many times in the past I tried to do away with the Pāṇḍavas, but every attempt failed. Indeed, in spite of my determined efforts, I have obtained the opposite result because the Pāṇḍavas have flourished more and more. In this way, I have come to understand that Destiny is supreme, and personal endeavor is useless. My heart is burning with anguish and since I cannot see anyone who is capable of helping me, my only recourse is to end my miserable existence!"

The evil-minded Śakuni was an expert psychologist and a first-class diplomat. In order to further incite Duryodhana toward accomplishing his sinister plans, Śakuni replied as follows in a duplicitous way: "O King,
the Pāṇḍavas have certainly performed many wonderful and superhuman feats which have caused them to brilliantly outshine all other rulers of the earth. The winning of Draupadi, the enabling of Agni to devour the Khāṇḍava forest and the subsequent acquisition of the Gāṇḍiva bow and other celestial weapons, the building of their assembly house by Maya Dānava, and their subjugation of the entire earth and performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice have certainly made the Pāṇḍavas' fame eclipse that of you and your brothers. Still, you should not be envious of the Pāṇḍavas, for they are simply enjoying what is rightfully theirs."

After saying this, Śakuni paused for a moment. Then, with a devilish smile and a twinkle in his eyes, he said unto his despondent friend, "On the other hand, my dear nephew, if you do feel unhappy on account of the Pāṇḍavas' prosperity, you should not think that you are impotent and helpless. After all, myself, your brothers, Karna, Droṇa, Kṛpa and many other powerful warriors are ready to support you in conquering over the world if you so desire."

Since Duryodhana was desperate, Śakuni's optimism gave him renewed hope. The enlivened Duryodhana then suggested, "Let us attack the Pāṇḍavas without delay! After defeating them in battle I can occupy their royal assembly house and thus enjoy all of their opulence myself." Śakuni then replied, "It would never be possible for us to defeat the Pāṇḍavas in a direct conflict. Because of their allies, Kṛṣṇa and Drupada, the Pāṇḍavas are now too powerful. However, there is another way by which they can be vanquished."

Duryodhana was very curious to find out what Śakuni was hinting at. Then, in response to the king's eager inquiries, Śakuni revealed his plan as follows: "My dear Duryodhana, it is a well-known fact that Yudhiṣṭhira is very fond of playing with dice, even though he is not at all an expert gambler. O King, if you challenge Yudhiṣṭhira to a game of dice, as a staunch kṣatriya he will not be able to refuse, and then I can play on your behalf. I am unequaled within the three worlds in the art of throwing dice and thus, by playing on your behalf, I can easily win Yudhiṣṭhira's entire kingdom and then hand it over to you. Therefore, you should immediately go and ask your father to give his sanction to this clever scheme."
Duryodhana's heart beat with excitement as he listened to Śakuni unfold this nefarious plan. However, he replied, "I would never dare say all of this in front of my father. My dear uncle, why don't you approach Dhṛtarāṣṭra and present the whole thing in such a way that he will become sympathetic toward my plight?"

Soon thereafter, Śakuni took Duryodhana and approached Dhṛtarāṣṭra as he was seated upon his royal throne. Śakuni first of all said, "My dear king, your eldest son has become very pale and anxious after having witnessed the prosperity and influence of his enemies."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said in a voice that was laden with great concern, "My son, please speak for yourself about the cause of your present depression. I am very surprised to hear that you are morose. My dear Duryodhana, the entire wealth and opulence of the Kuru kingdom is at your disposal, and all of your relatives are quite agreeable toward you. At your command is the best of food, the finest clothing, the most beautiful girls and numerous palaces that are filled to the brim with treasures. How is it that you are so unhappy?"

Duryodhana replied, "My dear father, after witnessing the superior opulence of the Pāṇḍavas, I can no longer take pleasure in my paltry possessions. King Yudhiṣṭhira is personally maintaining 88,000 qualified brāhmaṇas, and he has supplied each one with thirty maidservants. Every day he feeds 1,000 of these brāhmaṇas sumptuously on gold plates and awards them charity lavishly. At the time of the Rājasūya sacrifice, kings from all over the world came and presented Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira with heaps of jewels and numbers of elephants, the likes of which I have never seen. Indeed, the wealth of the Pāṇḍavas has become indescribable, and just the thought of it makes my heart burn with envy."

Śakuni noticed that Dhṛtarāṣṭra's face had a very pained expression as he listened to his son describe his unbearable grief. Taking advantage of this good opportunity, Śakuni then explained his evil plan to Duryodhana so that it was within the king's hearing:

"We should invite Yudhiṣṭhira to Hastināpura for the purpose of taking part in a game of dice. In this way, I can employ the art of cheating and after winning all of Yudhiṣṭhira's wealth, I will hand it over to you."

Duryodhana then pleaded, "O my dear Father, please give us permission
to execute Śakuni's wonderful plan. In this way, I am sure that my life's goal will finally be achieved."

However, Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "My dear son, you know that in all matters I must first consult with Vidura, for his advice is always given just according to moral principles. Let me talk with Vidura, and then, if he approves, you can go ahead and challenge Yudhiṣṭhira."

Duryodhana then bitterly responded, "Vidura will never give his sanction! O Father, if you do not grant me your permission, then I will kill myself out of desperation!"

Dhṛtarāṣṭra had always been overly partial to his pet son. Now, after hearing of Duryodhana's suicide threat, he immediately ordered that a palatial hall having 1,000 columns and 100 doors be constructed in order to serve as an arena for the gambling match. After thus pacifying Duryodhana by giving him many assurances, Dhṛtarāṣṭra dismissed him and then called for Vidura. Meanwhile, Vidura had been informed of all that had been taking place. Thus, after being summoned, as Vidura rushed to the royal palace, he thought, "Kali has now appeared upon the earth, and thus destruction is surely near at hand!"

Vidura then bowed his head before Dhṛtarāṣṭra and then immediately said, "O King, I will never approve of the proposed gambling match, for it will surely cause a dispute between your sons and the sons of Pandu."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra had already made up his mind, however, and thus he was not very interested in hearing Vidura's advice. The king then replied, "O Vidura, I can assure you that this friendly game of dice will never result in a quarrel. Besides, I believe that whatever happens is predestined by insurmountable Fate. Now, please go at once to Khaṇḍavapraṣṭha and bring Yudhiṣṭhira here at my invitation. Certainly with myself, Bhīṣma and Droṇa overseeing the event, there will be no room for any mischief."

After receiving the command of his elder brother, Vidura considered the Kurus to be already doomed. Thus, it was with a heavy heart that he approached Bhīṣma in order to inform him of the situation. Meanwhile, Dhṛtarāṣṭra was having second thoughts, and so he again called for his son and spoke to him as follows: "My dear Duryodhana, I have consulted with Vidura, and he has vividly described to me the faultiness of your plans. It is a fact that gambling always leads to dissension. Therefore, my son, you should remain satisfied with your own kingdom, which is quite
prosperous in its own right."
Duryodhana replied, "O Father, you should not speak like this! It is natural for a kṣatriya to become jealous upon seeing his enemies flourish. During the Rājasūya sacrifice, I was put in charge of receiving the gifts which all of the kings presented to Yudhiṣṭhira. The amount of jewels was so vast that I soon became exhausted just by carrying them. Thus, I had to take some rest and because of this, the other kings were forced to wait for me to resume my work."

"Thereafter, as I continued to reside at the Pāṇḍavas' royal assembly house, I became so bedazzled by all of the opulence that I mistook land for water and thus lifted up my garment. When Bhima saw this foolish mistake, he laughed at me without restraint. Then, on another occasion, I mistook a pond to be a crystal surface and as a result, I fell right into the water. At that time, not only Bhima and Arjuna laughed at me, but Draupadī and her female companions as well. Then, another day, I tried to pass through what appeared to be a doorway but was in reality a piece of solid, transparent stone. I bumped my head so hard that I reeled with dizziness so that Nakula and Sahadeva had to come and support me with their arms. Then, as they smilingly showed me the real doorway, Bhima came there and said in a mocking voice, 'My dear cousin, please come this way.'"

Duryodhana then described to his father in detail all of the kings who had come to the Rājasūya sacrifice and the unfathomable riches which they had presented to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Duryodhana then said, "Some of these kings were immediately allowed to enter the palace and present their gifts to Yudhiṣṭhira. However, many others were denied entry, and so they had to wait for a long time at the gate. After witnessing this unprecedented manifestation of opulence, my heart began to ache so grievously that my very desire to live completely vanished. Not only did these kings give immense presentations of wealth, but they also waited upon Yudhiṣṭhira just like menial servants. "Then, when Yudhiṣṭhira took his avabhṛtha bath at the end of the sacrificial performance, many great kings personally carried jars of sacred water while others stood ready with garlands, shoes and the emperor's chariot. The bathing ceremony was performed by Dhaumya, Vyāsadeva, Nārada Muni and Devala, and at that time, Sātyaki held a
royal umbrella over Yudhiṣṭhira's head while Bhīma and Arjuna fanned him with cāmaras. The Ocean personified then appeared there, bearing a golden conchshell which had been made by Viśvakarmā. This conchshell was formerly presented to Indra by Lord Brahmā, and with it Lord Kṛṣṇa personally performed the final bathing of Yudhiṣṭhira. When I saw how my cousin-brother was receiving so much honor, I nearly fainted due to the shock.

"O Father, the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom not only extends all the way to the Southern, Western and Eastern oceans, but even to the Northern ocean, which can generally be approached only by birds. There were innumerable splendid conchshells which Arjuna had brought from the Northern ocean and at the end of the Rājasūya sacrifice they were all sounded simultaneously. When I heard that tumultuous roaring sound, the hair on my body stood on end, and I became so stunned that I could not even move. Weaker men fell to the ground unconscious, and only eight persons in the entire assembly remained undisturbed. These were Dhrṣṭadyumna, Sātyaki, the five Pāṇḍavas, and Lord Kṛṣṇa, and they all laughed at those of us who had become so disturbed. After thus beholding the Pāṇḍavas' opulence and influence, I no longer desire to go on living, unless I can do something to reverse the situation."

In response, Dhrṣṭarāṣṭra tried to encourage Duryodhana by saying, "My dear son, you should give up your enviousness! Just be satisfied with your own kingdom, for a jealous person can never become happy. Actually, it is very abominable to covet the property of others. Instead of crying about the wealth of your fortunate cousin-brother, I suggest that you also perform a great sacrifice. Invite all the great kings of the world and in this way you will also obtain fabulous wealth and renown."

However, Duryodhana simply became more irritated upon hearing this unpalatable advice, and so he responded, "My dear Father, you are foolishly neglecting your own interest and thus your behavior is most unsuitable for a kṣatriya! The great authority Śrīhaṁpati has said, 'The ways of kṣatriyas are distinct from all others in the sense that they should act for their self-interest by any means available, be they pious or sinful.' In other words, the attainment of success is the only criterion for a true kṣatriya.

"O Father, considering this, why are you trying to frustrate all of my
desires? Actually, no one is intrinsically a friend or an enemy. One who has a common interest becomes a competitor and all such enemies should be destroyed, for even the small white ants at the base of a tree can cause it to fall down by eating away at its roots. Indra killed Namuci after making a pact of friendship with him. Thus, we can clearly see that for kings there is no consideration of morality when dealing with enemies. I am fully determined to either take away Yudhiṣṭhira's wealth or else lie down dead upon the battlefield while attempting to do so. Because of the envy that burns my heart, my life is not even worth living unless I can achieve my cherished goal."

Śakuni then spoke as follows with a desire to alleviate Duryodhana's grief: "My dear nephew, do not worry, for I shall single-handedly vanquish all of the Pāṇḍavas and then deliver their wealth unto you. Gambling is my bow and the dice are my sharp arrows. The numbers on the dice are the bow-string and the dice-board is my chariot. When I enter the battlefield of the gambling arena, no one in the three worlds can remain undefeated by me."

Duryodhana then repeatedly begged his father to allow Śakuni to cheat Yudhiṣṭhira out of his kingdom. However, Dhṛtarāṣṭra adamantly replied, "I must act according to the advice of Vidura, and thus I will make my decision only after consulting with him first."

Duryodhana objected, however, saying, "Vidura is partial to the Pāṇḍavas and so he will never sanction this gambling match."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then warned, "My dear son, don't you realize that this game of dice will surely bring on a terrible war, causing your destruction?"

Duryodhana replied, "O Father, since we are only using dice for weapons, there is no possibility of bodily injury. Therefore, you should give us your consent so that we can employ such peaceful means to vanquish the enemy."

At last, Dhṛtarāṣṭra relented, even though he knew that the results would be disastrous since immoral means never bring on lasting prosperity. Dhṛtarāṣṭra thus told his son, "You may do as you like. However, it is my prediction that your nefarious deeds will ultimately result in a great calamity that will claim the lives of all the kṣatriyas."

Although Dhṛtarāṣṭra had genuinely tried to discourage his evil-minded son, he regarded Destiny to be supreme and unavoidable. Therefore, the
blind monarch ordered the construction of a great assembly hall, two miles in length and two miles in breadth, and thus thousands of craftsmen were engaged in order to quickly accomplish the task. Vidura was then once again summoned and he tried his best to dissuade Dhṛtarāṣṭra from his disastrous course of action. However, the king simply said, "My dear brother, this is all the inevitable will of Fate. I want you to go to Indraprastha at once and bring Yudhiṣṭhira here so that he can take part in the gambling match with my son."

Thus being commanded against his will, Vidura reluctantly set out and soon thereafter he came to Indraprastha. When they met, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could immediately detect the sadness in Vidura's face and so he inquired, "My dear Uncle, I can understand that you have not come here on a very pleasant mission. Still, whatever it may be, please disclose what it is that brings you here."

Vidura then explained, "Being bent upon the aggrandizement of his evil-minded son, Mahārāja Dhṛtarāṣṭra invites you and your brothers to come to Hastināpura in order to enjoy a friendly game of dice in their newly constructed gambling hall."

Yudhiṣṭhira could immediately understand the unpalatable consequences of this proposal and so he replied, "O Uncle, I am very surprised to receive this order from Dhṛtarāṣṭra because such a game of dice could easily lead to a quarrel between us and his own sons. My dear Vidura, do you think that I should follow this instruction of my old blind uncle?"

Vidura replied, "I tried my best to dissuade my elder brother, but since I was unsuccessful, it is now up to you to decide whether you want to obey him or not."

Yudhiṣṭhira then asked, "With whom will I have to compete at the dice board?" and so Vidura explained, "Śakuni has been selected to play on behalf of Duryodhana."

Yudhiṣṭhira knew very well of Śakuni's unparalleled skill at dice and his wickedness as well. Considering all this, combined with Dhṛtarāṣṭra's partiality toward Duryodhana, Yudhiṣṭhira then decided, "I will not voluntarily play with Śakuni, even if Dhṛtarāṣṭra orders me to do so. However, if Śakuni himself personally challenges me, then I shall not be
able to refuse."
After saying this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gave orders so that preparations were immediately begun for his departure. Then, early the next morning, he set out along with his brothers and Draupadī. Thereafter, as Yudhiṣṭhira sat upon his chariot while en route to Hastināpura, he braced himself for all eventualities by thinking, "Destiny is certainly unavoidable. Therefore, I must be prepared for the worst."
Upon his arrival at Hastināpura, Yudhiṣṭhira first of all went to see Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and other worshipable elders. Then, he met with Duryodhana and his brothers, Śakuni, Śalya and Jayadratha. Finally, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira came before his blind old uncle, who was seated upon the royal throne with Gāndhārī. Along with his four brothers, Yudhiṣṭhira offered his obeisances and Dhātarāṇya in turn affectionately smelled the heads of the Pāṇḍavas. Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas were escorted to palatial rooms which had been made ready for them, and there, they were served a royal feast. As beautiful women sang and danced for their pleasure, the Pāṇḍavas thus enjoyed themselves for some time before taking rest.
Then, the next morning, after performing their customary religious duties, the Pāṇḍavas entered the newly-constructed assembly hall. While approaching all of the assembled kings, the Pāṇḍavas worshipped some and greeted others according to the proper etiquette. Then finally, after the Pāṇḍavas were seated, Śakuni said to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "My dear king, please fix the rules for the friendly game of dice-that we are now about to commence."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "Gambling is a very low and evil pursuit and it is meant for the baser class of men. Therefore, I request that you do not attempt to defeat me by such deceitful means."
Ignoring this, Śakuni simply urged, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, gambling is a great art like anything else and so let us begin the play without further ado."
However, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira continued to decry gambling as a means for one kṣatriya to conquer over another especially when deceitful tactics are employed.
Śakuni then cleverly argued, "My dear king, you must admit that the base motive of gaining victory over another is present in all types of
challenges, not just gambling. Indeed, even when great scholars challenge each other to debate, the same selfish motive is seen. Therefore, there is really no difference between gambling or fighting on the battlefield. However, if you think that our motive is dishonest, or if you are afraid to accept our challenge, then you are free to abstain from the gambling match."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "Since you have challenged me to a game of dice, it is my duty as a kṣatriya to play. In any case, the outcome of this match is fully in the hands of Fate. Now, please tell me, who is going to match my stakes, and who will be the one to throw the dice?"

Duryodhana then answered, "I am going to put up the stakes, and Śakuni will roll the dice."

Yudhiṣṭhira then commented, "My dear cousin, it is highly improper to have someone else play on your behalf. Still, since you are determined to play in that way, you can let the game begin at once."

Many great kings were seated in that assembly, with Dhṛtarāṣṭra at their head, and Vidura, Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Kṛpa sat behind them with cheerless faces. Yudhiṣṭhira began the match by betting some beautiful pearls that were decorated with gold and which had been produced long ago by the churning of the milk ocean. Duryodhana matched the stake by putting forward a large quantity of jewels. Meanwhile, Śakuni picked up the dice, and with a devilish air, he rolled them, and when they came to rest, he gleefully declared, "Behold, I have won!"

Yudhiṣṭhira mildly objected by saying, "It is by cheating that you have won, O Śakuni. Be not so proud!" Since he already considered himself to be in the grips of Fate, Yudhiṣṭhira still put forward another wager consisting of heaps of silver and gold. Duryodhana matched the stake by putting forward a large quantity of jewels. Meanwhile, Śakuni then once again rolled the dice and declared, "Just see, I have won again!"

Yudhiṣṭhira knew that Śakuni was employing unfair means, and yet, without even pausing, he next staked his royal chariot, which was equal to 1,000 ordinary chariots. Again, however, Śakuni artfully rolled the dice and then gleefully proclaimed his victory. Yudhiṣṭhira then wagered 100,000 beautiful young maidservants who were fully decorated with valuable ornaments, and who were adept in the sixty-four arts, especially in dancing and singing. Śakuni eagerly picked up the dice, and while
hardly even trying to cover up his cheating tactics, he rolled them and declared, "I have won!"

Next, Yudhiṣṭhira wagered thousands of male servants who were very expert in ministering to the needs of guests. Again, Śakuni rolled the dice and joyfully proclaimed his victory. Yudhiṣṭhira then bet 1,000 gigantic elephants, each having the mark of a lotus flower on their forehead and accompanied by eight female elephants. As Śakuni cast the dice, he laughed heartily aloud and then declared, "Look, I have won again!"

Yudhiṣṭhira next put forward a bet of 1,000 chariots and their warriors; and again Śakuni cheated and won. Then Yudhiṣṭhira bet the celestial horses that had been given to Arjuna by the Gandharva king, Citraratha. As usual, Śakuni came out victorious, and so this time, Yudhiṣṭhira wagered 60,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 ox-carts. Once again, Śakuni declared, "Behold, I have won!" and so Yudhiṣṭhira next put forth large piles of jewels. In this way, the eldest son of Kuntī lost more and more of his royal wealth, giving Duryodhana and his friends great joy.

As Yudhiṣṭhira continued on the course of complete destruction, Vidura leaned forward and advised Dhṛtarāṣṭra as follows: "My dear brother, you should allow Arjuna to kill your wicked son! Remember how, at his birth, Duryodhana had brayed just like a jackal, indicating his future role in destroying the Kuru dynasty? O King, in order to save a family, one of its members can be sacrificed; to save a village, one family can be renounced; to save a kingdom, one village can be sacrificed; and to save one's soul, one can renounce the entire universe. This advice had been given to the demons by Śukrācārya while trying to convince them to abandon Jambha at the time of his birth.

"My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you should be willing to exchange one crow-like son in order to gain five peacocks like the Pāṇḍavas! You should take advantage of your glorious nephews just as the gardener takes flowers daily from a valuable tree. Don't be like the fire-producing wind that reduces the precious tree to ashes! Your greedy son is just like an inexperienced and rash gatherer of honey who climbs up a high mountain in order to approach the bee-hives, but then falls down to his death. The foolish Duryodhana does not realize the dire consequences of
his sinful attempt to usurp the Pāṇḍavas' wealth. You should not be uselessly attached to such a wicked son! Kamsa was rejected by the other members of the Bhoja dynasty, and when Lord Kṛṣṇa killed him, everyone was overjoyed."

Duryodhana overheard all this and so he angrily responded as follows by criticizing Vidura with harsh words: "You have always favored the sons of Pāṇḍu and slighted us, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Thus, we have been keeping a venomous serpent upon our laps all of these years! O Vidura, even though you have been pampered by us, you still desire to do us harm. You are simply a parasite who has lived off your elder brother and so there is no need for you to give such unwanted advice. Why should you always criticize me? There is only one supreme controller, who guides even the baby within the mother's womb. He is the supplier of intelligence and since everyone must follow His will, I am also acting under His direction. You are just like an unchaste wife who forsakes her husband in spite of being very well treated by him. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, you are no longer wanted here! You are free to go wherever you choose!"

Vidura then replied, "O Duryodhana, you consider yourself to be very wise, but, like a child, you are rejecting someone who maintained you for so long, simply because of his giving unpalatable advice. The agreeable words which are uttered by foolish flatterers are easily had. On the other hand, sound advice, even though disagreeable, is very rare and valuable. If all that you seek is pleasing words, regardless of good or evil, then take the advice of idiots and cripples! O Nephew, if this be the desire of Dhṛtarāṣṭra as well, then I am quite prepared to take my leave of this fool's paradise!"

All the while, the gambling match had continued to take its toll. Finally, after having won time and time again, Śākuni asked Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, is there anything else remaining in your possession which you would like to wager?" Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My remaining wealth is almost unlimited! Now, I shall stake all of my cows, the other domestic animals, and numerous other articles of immense value."

Once again, Śākuni rolled the dice, and by cheating he was able to claim, "Just see! The victory is mine!" At last, one after another, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira wagered his capital city, Indraprastha, then his
kingdom with all of its villages and agricultural lands; then, the
possessions of all of the citizens, except the brāhmaṇas; and finally, the
subjects themselves! Each time, Śakuni won, and although Yudhiṣṭhira
continued to lose everything, he became more and more obsessed with
increasing the stakes until they reached insane proportions. Indeed,
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira appeared to be practically delirious and then,
since all of his other possessions had been lost, he next wagered the five
sons of Draupadī. Again, Śakuni rolled the dice and proclaimed, "Look, I
have won!"
At last, having nothing else, Yudhiṣṭhira put forward Nakula and then
Sahadeva as his stakes. With the roll of the dice, however, both brothers
were lost and so Śakuni next suggested, "My dear king, these two that
have been won by me were certainly very dear to you. However, it seems
that Bhīma and Arjuna must be even more highly regarded and so they
should be wagered next!"
At this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira flared up with rage and harshly
reproached Śakuni by saying, "You wretch! By sinful means you are
hoping to cause disunion amongst us who are of one heart!" With false
humility, Śakuni replied, "O King, I excuse your piercing words, for it is
not unusual for someone who is under the intoxicating influence of
gambling to rave like a madman."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then went ahead and offered Arjuna as his next
stake. Śakuni rolled the dice and after declaring his victory, he
encouraged the king to wager Bhīma next. Yudhiṣṭhira agreed, and once
again, with the roll of the dice, he lost. Śakuni then said, "My dear king,
you have lost much wealth. Is there anything remaining in your
possession so that the game can continue?"
Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "The only thing I have left is myself. Theifieoie, I
shall become the next wager!"
Again, Śakuni cheated and won, and after doing so he tauntingly said,
"My dear king, you have acted very sinfully by betting yourself when you
still had something very valuable in your possession. Next, you should
wager Draupadi, and if you win, then I shall let you take back possession
of your self."
Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "I shall now stake the princess of Pañcāla, who is
like Lakṣmī herself and who is possessed of all virtues. Forgoing all
pleasures, she is the first to rise up from bed and then the last to retire at night. Having a compassionate nature and sweet in speech; possessed of curly bluish hair, eyes like lotus petals, reddish lips, a waist as slim as that of a wasp, and a body which is devoid of excessive bodily hair, she is exactly the woman a man desires for his wife. Making Draupādī the stake, I shall now continue to play!

At this, a great wave of agitation passed through the assembly as everyone condemned Yudhiṣṭhira while giving way to intense grief. Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Kṛpa were covered with perspiration, and Vidura held his head between his hands like a deranged man. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was happy, however, and being unable to conceal his emotions, he asked again and again, "Has the stake been won?" Karṇa and Duḥśāsana laughed with great relish, while tears flowed from the eyes of all others in the assembly. Śakuni then picked up the dice and while practically trembling with excitement, he cast them and declared, "Behold, I have won everything!"

Duryodhana then ordered Vidura, "Bring out Draupādī so that she can take up the work of being our sweeping maid!" Vidura replied, "O wretch, don't you know that by speaking such harsh words you are like a deer that provokes angry tigers or a man who places a poisonous snake upon his head! In my opinion, Draupādī has not become your slave. The king had already lost himself, and thus he was not in a position to wager Draupādī or anything else. O Duryodhana, your cruel words are most abominable and they will lead you to hell. Rest assured that your offenses will bring disaster not only down upon your own head, but upon the heads of all of those who are following you!"

Being intoxicated with pride, Duryodhana curtly replied, "To hell with Vidura!" and then called for the Pratikamin servant of the sūta class, and ordered him to bring forth Draupādī. After coming before Draupādī, the Pratikamin said, "Your husband has wagered you in the gambling match and lost. Therefore, you must now accompany me in order to take up some menial work in the service of your new masters."

Being exceedingly surprised upon receiving this news, Draupādī inquired, "How could Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira dare to wager me in a gambling match?"

The sūta then explained, "The king was certainly very reluctant to wager
you, because he did so only after losing everything else, including his very self."

After hearing this, the intelligent Draupadī ordered the Pratikamin, "Go back to the assembly and ascertain for certain who was lost first, Yudhīṣṭhira or myself."

Upon his return to the gambling arena, the sūta informed Yudhīṣṭhira, "O King, your mistress wishes to know who was lost in the match first, she or you?"

Having become completely bereft of his reason, Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhira simply sat down upon the ground without even making a reply. Upon seeing this, Duryodhana ordered, "O Pratikamin, let Draupadī be brought here so that she can put her question directly to her husband."

The sūta felt horribly distressed on account of the thankless task that had been forced upon him. Still, he went back to Draupadī and said, "Duryodhana wants you to come before the assembly and put your question directly to Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhira. Alas! By this rash act, I am sure that Dhātarāṇīra's son is bringing ruination down upon himself!"

Draupadī replied, "Please go and make an appeal to all of the elders in the assembly on my behalf. Tell them that I will follow whatever they ascertain to be the truthful and moral path."

When the Pratikamin once again returned to the assembly and relayed the words of Draupadī, everyone remained silent with their heads lowered in shame. They knew very well the determination of Duryodhana and thus they were afraid to contradict him. Yudhīṣṭhira then ordered a trusted messenger, "Go quickly and tell Draupadī that she should come before the assembly and, with tears in her eyes, make an appeal to Mahārāja Dhṛtarāṣṭra."

At this time, the other Pāṇḍavas could not decide what to do since they were exceedingly overwhelmed with grief and duty-bound to follow their eldest brother. While glancing at the forlorn sons of Pāṇḍu, Duryodhana then once again ordered the Pratikamin to bring Draupadī into the assembly so that she could directly hear her elders reply to her question. However, the sūta could not bear to approach Draupadī again, and so he turned to the assembly and asked, "What shall I say to her?" When
Duryodhana saw that the messenger was afraid of incurring Draupadi's displeasure, he derided him for being a coward and then commanded Duhsasana to bring Draupadi by force. Duhsasana received this order with great delight and, after coming before Draupadi, he said, "You have been won by the Kauravas, and so now you must come out and appear before the assembly."

Because it was the time of her menstrual period, Draupadi was dressed in but a single piece of cloth. It was unbearable for Draupadi to see Duhsasana stand before her, and so, all at once, she got up from her seat and ran toward where the ladies of Dhrtarasrita's household were sitting. This angered Duhsasana, and he ran after Draupadi while roaring loudly with rage. Then, after grabbing Draupadi by her long black curly hair, Duhsasana began to forcibly drag her toward the assembly of kings. Draupadi was trembling due to fear, and with a faint voice she cried out, "You wretch, it is not proper for you to drag me into this assembly, for I am dressed in only a single piece of cloth."

Duhsasana replied, "Now that you have been won by us, you are our slave. Therefore, it does not matter whether you are dressed in a single cloth or even naked. From now on you will live with our maidservants, and so there is no more need for you to worry about what is proper or not."

Her hair disheveled and her garment loosened, Draupadi was all the while being dragged by Duhsasana. Then, in a faint voice, she said, "O wretch, how can I appear before my superiors in such a state? And yet, I cannot hear anyone rebuking you for your base action. This must mean that all who are present here are like-minded. Obviously, all virtue has disappeared from the dynasty of Bhartara! Otherwise, how could Bhishma, Droña, Dhrtarashtra and Vidura silently witness this great crime?"

The Panchavas were already burning with rage, and thereafter, when Draupadi's glance happened to fall upon them, their wrath became even more inflamed. When Duhsasana saw that Draupadi was looking at her husbands, he began to drag her more forcibly while repeatedly addressing her as 'slave' and laughing demonically. Karna also took great pleasure in seeing Draupadi being insulted, and so he laughed aloud as well, as did Sakuni. Everyone else, however, was greatly pained to see how the beautiful queen of faultless character was being abused by the
wicked son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

Bhīṣma then replied to Draupadī, "O blessed one, the ways of morality are very subtle, and thus I am unable to definitively decide what the outcome of this gambling match should be. It is a fact that one cannot stake wealth that he no longer possesses, but on the other hand, it is always seen that wives are under the control of their husbands in all circumstances. Everyone knew that Śakuni was cheating, but Yudhiṣṭhira never complained. Instead, he always admitted his defeat. Thus, I cannot decide whether you have actually been won by the Kauravas or not."

Draupadī was crying very piteously, and after hearing Bhīṣma's statement, she begged the other members of the assembly to consider how her husbands had been cheated by the wicked Śakuni. At last, Bhima could no longer bear to see how Duḥśāsana was holding onto Draupadī and abusing her with harsh words, and so he gave vent to his rage by addressing Yudhiṣṭhira as follows: "O my brother, how could you have staked Draupadī in this crooked game of dice? Out of a sense of compassion, even professional gamblers never wager the prostitutes whom they keep and so what to speak of their wives? It is your fault alone that the innocent Draupadī is now being tormented by the despicable, cruel and evil-minded Kauravas. Therefore, I am going to burn those hands which have caused her great suffering!"

After saying this, Bhīma ordered Sahadeva to bring him some fire. Arjuna then said, "My dear brother, never before have I heard you utter such words as these! As a kṣatriya, our elder brother was forced to accept Śakuni's challenge. Do not become overwhelmed by anger, for that would only fulfill the desires of the Kauravas. They would only be too glad to see dissension created amongst us."

Bhīma then replied, "O Arjuna, if I had not taken into account a kṣatriya's obligation, I would have actually burnt Yudhiṣṭhira's hands rather than simply threatening to do so."

Vikarna was no longer able to bear the plight of the Pāṇḍavas and their wife, and so he suddenly spoke up as follows: "O Kings, you should answer Draupadī's question. Otherwise, if we do not judge the matter, due to our indifference we shall become eligible for going to hell at once! How is it that Bhīṣma, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura have all remained silent?
Why do the preceptors Droṇa and Kṛpa not speak? Let all of the kings who are assembled here give their opinions without motivations of gain or the influence of anger."
In this way, Vikarṇa repeatedly appealed to the assembly. And yet, no one uttered a word in reply. Then, at last, while breathing heavily like a trampled serpent and rubbing his hands together with great agitation, Vikarṇa angrily declared, "Irrespective of whether others speak or not, my opinion is that Draupādi was not won by Śakuni. It is said that the four vices of kings are hunting, drinking, over-indulgence with women, and gambling. When one is overly addicted to these sinful practices, he must be considered fallen and can no longer be accepted as an authority. Yudhiṣṭhira had become so engrossed in the dice game that he lost all good sense. For this reason, Yudhiṣṭhira had no right to wager Draupādi, who, after all, is not only his wife, but the common wife of all the five brothers. And besides this, since Yudhiṣṭhira had lost himself first, he no longer had the right to make another wager and had done so only at the urging of Śakuni. Taking into account all of these points, it can only be concluded that Draupādi was not lost in the gambling match and thus she cannot be considered the property of the Kauravas."
A loud uproar arose from the assembly after this noble speech as everyone applauded Vikarṇa and condemned Śakuni. Karna became enraged, however, and while waving his arms about in anger, he replied, "O Vikarṇa, you are just a mere boy who is ignorant of morality and yet you dare to speak like an elderly wise man. Draupādi was fairly won and thus everyone in the assembly has ignored her plea except you. And why should there be any objection that Draupādi has been dragged into the assembly during her menstrual period? Since she is the wife of five men, she can hardly be considered a chaste woman! Therefore, even if Draupādi had been brought in naked, there would have been no fault on our part."
After saying this, Karna turned to Duḥśasana and said, "Take off the Pāṇḍavas' royal dress and then remove Draupādi's cloth as well so that we can see her naked." Upon hearing this, the Pāṇḍavas voluntarily took off their royal upper garments and threw them down upon the ground with disgust. At the same time, Duḥśasana grabbed Draupādi's cloth and began to tear it from her body. Up until this time, Draupādi had tried to
defend herself by one means or another. Now, as the powerful Duḥṣāsana assailed her without restraint, she gave up all hopes of rescuing herself by personal endeavor or being saved by the elders in the assembly. Like her husbands, the Pāṇḍavas, Draupadī was a unalloyed devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thus, having no other recourse, she at last fully surrendered herself at the lotus feet of the Lord. Then, while sobbing piteously and covering her face with her hands, Draupadī prayed to the Supreme Lord by crying out, "O Kṛṣṇa, O Govinda! O Keśava! O lover of the gopīs! O Hari! O Janārdana! O soul of the universe, cannot You see how the Kauravas are humiliating me in this assembly? Please come here quickly and rescue me, for I am sinking fast in the Kaurava ocean! O Kṛṣṇa! Lord of Vraja! O Yogēśvara, O Creator of all things! Please save me from my distress, for I am rapidly losing my senses!"

Lord Kṛṣṇa is the all-pervading Supersoul and thus He could hear Draupadī's plea. Being greatly moved by feelings of compassion, Kṛṣṇa immediately got up from His royal throne at Dvārakā and then instantly appeared on foot at the gambling arena in Hastināpura. While remaining unseen, Lord Kṛṣṇa, the supreme mystic, supplied Draupadī with a beautiful sārī of multi-colors. Thus, everyone saw that when Duḥṣāsana tore off the single dirty cloth which Draupadī had been wearing, a new sārī miraculously covered her body in its place. Lord Kṛṣṇa then continued to provide Draupadī with innumerable saris of various colors and designs. Thus, as soon as one sārī was pulled off from her body by Duḥṣāsana, another one immediately appeared in its place so that eventually, hundreds of saris lay in a heap on the floor. Upon witnessing this miracle, the assembled kings became struck with wonder, and with great agitation, they simultaneously praised Draupadī and condemned Duḥṣāsana. At this time, Bhīma was so angry that his lips were quivering with rage. Suddenly Bhīma stood up amidst the assembled kings, and while ringing his hands, he loudly declared, "O kṣatātriyas, hear these words of mine which no one has ever uttered before. If, after making this vow, I fail to accomplish it, let me never attain the regions of my forefathers. One day, you shall see that, while engaged in battle, I will tear open Duḥṣāsana's chest and drink his blood to my full satisfaction!"
When the assembled kings heard these terrible words, their hair stood on end, and they praised Bhīma highly and condemned Duḥśāsana. Meanwhile, Duḥśāsana had become exhausted after pulling off countless sārīs, and so with great shame, he sat down by the mountain of cloth as the crowd jeered him with disdain. All of the assembled kings then began to condemn Dhṛtarāṣṭra and others for failing to answer Draupadī’s question, and the clamor became uproarious.

Finally, Vidura stood up, and while waving his arms, he brought some order into the assembly. Then, Vidura urged, "My dear rulers of the earth, you cannot remain silent any longer. You must make the proper judgment, for it is the duty of a learned person to give moral instructions to one who has requested them. Vikarna has already given his judgment, and now all of you should do so as well. If one remains silent after being approached by a person in distress, then he incurs half of the reaction for telling a lie. What then to speak of a person who knows the science of morality and yet, due to ill-motives, gives false instructions! In order to illustrate this point, I shall now narrate to you a very instructive ancient history.

"Once, there was a quarrel between Virocanā, the son of Prahlāda, and Sudhanva, the son of Aṅgirā. Desiring to marry the same girl, both of them claimed to be superior to the other and thus more deserving of her hand. Finally, the quarrel became so heated that Virocanā and Sudhanva wagered their very lives as to who was the better man. It was decided that Prahlāda became the arbitrator of this dispute, and so Virocanā and Sudhanva approached the king of the asuras and inquired, ‘Between us, who is superior?’

"This put Prahlāda in a very awkward position, for he was afraid of the consequences that might result if he took sides. When Prahlāda thus hesitated to reply, Sudhanva became very angry and declared, 'If you refuse to answer this question or if you rely falsely, then I curse that your head will be struck by the thunderbolt of Indra and burst into 100 pieces!'

"Prahlāda then went to Kaśyapa and asked, 'What will be my destination if I do not answer Sudhanva's question, or if I answer it falsely?'

"Kaśyapa replied, 'If one knows the truth but does not disclose it upon being questioned, or if, out of anger, fear or some other motive, one gives
a false reply, then he is bound up by 1,000 nooses of Varuṇa and released from one of them at the end of each full year. If someone commits a sinful act in an assembly, then it is the duty of all those who are present to chastise the wrong doer. If they fail to do so, then the perpetrator of the sin receives one-fourth of the reaction, the leader of the assembly has to accept one-half, and all others present suffer one-fourth. A witness is one who has seen, heard of, or otherwise understood a thing, and he should always tell the truth, for in that way his pious merit will never suffer diminution.'
"After hearing this, Prahlāda returned home and then informed his son, ‘Sudhanva is superior to you, just as Aṅgirā is superior to myself. Because you have wagered your life on this point, you must now become Sudhanva's slave as a consequence of your foolishness.’"
After narrating this story, Vidura once again urged the members of the assembly to give a proper reply to Draupadī, and yet, all remained silent. Karṇa then said, "O Duḥśāsana, take the maidservant Draupadī into the inner apartments."
As Duḥśāsana proceeded to drag the helpless and trembling Draupadī, she begged him with tears in her eyes, "Kindly release me for just a moment so that I can go and offer obeisances unto all of the elderly Kurus, for I had previously neglected to do so."
In response, however, the evil-hearted Duḥśāsana began to drag Draupadī more forcibly. Then, suddenly, Draupadī fell to the ground and with a voice that became choked by her tears, she addressed the assembly as follows:
"Alas! Formerly I used to be kept within the palace so that not even the sun nor wind could behold me. Only once, at my svayaṁvara, was I seen in the assembly of kings, and yet today I am being dragged by this wretch before all of you. Can you explain how it is that you remain indifferent while your own daughter-in-law is being abused in your very presence? I beseech you to decide once and for all whether I was actually won in this gambling match or not. Then, I will obediently act according to your decision."
Bhīṣma replied, "O blessed one, I have already said that the ways of morality are very subtle. Because of the intricacy and gravity of the matter at hand, it is not possible for me to properly decide the issue."
However, there is one thing that I can say with confidence. Whether you have become their slave or not, the Kauravas have become the slave of their own cruel greed and folly. As a result, it is certain that they will be destroyed in the near future."

Bhīṣma then surveyed the assembly and saw that Droṇa and the others were sitting silently with heads bent low, as if bereft of life. Therefore, he suggested, "O Princess of Pañcāla, I think that only Yudhiṣṭhira is actually qualified to answer your question. Therefore, you should ask him whether you were won by the Kauravas or not."

Duryodhana smiled upon seeing how all of the kings were afraid of him and thus remained silent. Taking a cue from Bhīṣma's suggestion, he then said to Draupadī, "It is actually up to your husband to answer your question. Yudhiṣṭhira had certainly wagered you and lost. However, if Yudhiṣṭhira's brothers renounce their connection with him on account of his foolishness, then I shall set you free so that you can rejoin these four of your husbands. I will also let you go if Yudhiṣṭhira claims that he was no longer your master when he wagered you."

The crowd applauded these words, although some of the kings uttered exclamations of apprehension. All heads turned toward Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers, for everyone was very anxious to hear what they would say. When the din of the crowd died down, Bhima first replied, "If we had rejected Yudhiṣṭhira as our lord, then we would never have forgiven the Kauravas for their offenses. If Yudhiṣṭhira regards himself as having been won by the Kauravas, then we are also won. Similarly, if Yudhiṣṭhira commands me to do so, then I am prepared to kill all of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons with my bare arms just as a lion slays so many smaller animals!"

Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Vidura then tried to pacify Bhima, and upon seeing this, Karṇa said to Draupadī, "Although they have been living at the expense of Duryodhana, these three elder personalities always manage to find fault with their master, and they appear to be highly independent. On the other hand, a slave, a wife, and a son are always dependent. Go now into the inner apartments, for, as the wife of a slave, you must act as our maid-servant. And, if you so desire, then you can select a new husband who will not be so foolish as to stake you as a wager in a gambling match. After all, it is quite common for a slave-woman to
choose her own lord."
Upon hearing these cruel words, Bhīma flared up with rage so that his
eyes appeared to burn everything within his vision. He then chastised
Yudhiṣṭhira by saying, "O Brother, since we are now slaves, I have no
right to be angry at Karna's words. But, it is only because you had
gambled, using Draupadī as your wager, that the sūta's son is able to
speak like this and thus cause us terrible pain."
Duryodhana then addressed Yudhiṣṭhira, who was sitting silently as if
bereft of his sanity, "O King, since you and your brothers have been won
by us in the gambling match, isn't it true that Draupadī has also become
our property?" Then, in order to further encourage Karna and insult
Bhīma, Duryodhana quickly uncovered his left thigh, which was as
powerful as thunder and which bore all auspicious marks, thus showing
it to Draupadī. Upon seeing this coarse behavior, Bhīma became so
inflamed with rage that sparks and fire issued forth from his eyes, ears,
nose and mouth. He then vowed, "May I not attain the regions of my
forefathers if I do not break that thigh of yours while engaged in battle!"
Vidura then warned, "O rulers of the earth, if virtue is persecuted, then
this entire assembly will become polluted! Already, due to the wicked
conspiracy of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, the destruction of the Kuru dynasty is
certainly at hand. In my opinion, if Yudhiṣṭhira had staked Draupadī
before losing himself in the game of dice, then he could still have been
considered her master. However, since he first of all relinquished the
power of possession by wagering himself, Yudhiṣṭhira obviously had no
more power to stake anything else. Thus, the Kauravas' idea that they
have won Draupadī is just like the acquisition of wealth in a dream!"
At this, Duryodhana retorted, "I am willing to abide by the decision of
Yudhiṣṭhira's younger brothers. If they declare that the king is not their
master, then I shall set Draupadī free." Arjuna then said, "Yudhiṣṭhira
was certainly our master before the gambling match began. However,
after losing himself, whose master can he be?"

Just then, a jackal began to loudly howl within the room where the
sacrificial fire was being worshipped. Then, in response, innumerable
asses started to bray, and fierce birds screeched terrifyingly. Vidura and
Gāndhārī knew very well the meaning of this omen, and while Bhīṣma,
Droṇa and Kṛpa cried out, "Svasti! Svasti!" they urged Dhṛtarāṣṭra to consider the seriousness of the situation. In this way, Dhṛtarāṣṭra also became afraid for his sons' imminent destruction, and so he severely reprimanded Duryodhana as follows: "My son, you wicked-minded wretch, from the way in which you have insulted your faultless cousins, the Pāṇḍavas, and their chaste wife, Draupadī, I can understand that your doom is at hand!"

After saying this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra endeavored to console Draupadī by saying, "O chaste and virtuous princess of Pañcāla, you are the foremost of my daughters-in-law. Please take from me now any benediction which you may desire."

Being greatly relieved on account of this fortunate turn of events, Draupadī replied, "O descendent of Bhārata, I request that Yudhiṣṭhira be freed from bondage so that my son, Prativindhyā, may not be known as the son of a slave."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra immediately gave his consent and then requested Draupadī to accept a second boon. Draupadī then asked, "May Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, along with their weapons and chariots, be given their freedom as well." Dhṛtarāṣṭra granted this request as well and then said, "O blessed daughter, you have not yet been sufficiently honored by me. Therefore, please accept a third benediction."

However, Draupadī replied, "O foremost of kings, I do not deserve three boons, for it is said that a vaiśya can ask for one benediction, a kṣatriya lady can accept two, a kṣatriya male three, and a brāhmaṇa can take 100. I have no need for further benedictions, anyway, for since my husbands are now free, all kinds of prosperity can be achieved by their own endeavor."

Karna then sarcastically remarked, "Just see how the Pāṇḍavas, who were sinking in the ocean of distress, have been rescued by the boat of their wife!"

The fire of Bhīma's rage was fanned by hearing this comment, and thus sparks, smoke and flames once again issued forth from his eyes, ears, nose and mouth. Indeed, Bhīma wanted to consume all of the kings who were present in the assembly. Then, as Arjuna tried to restrain his brother with words of reason, Yudhiṣṭhira came and embraced Bhīma, thus managing to pacify him. Yudhiṣṭhira then approached Dhṛtarāṣṭra
Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "O Ajātaśatru, just go back to Indraprasta and continue ruling over your kingdom peacefully. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you know the subtle path of morality and are possessed of great wisdom, humility, and respect for your elders. Now, please take this advice from me, for where there is intelligence there is also forgiveness and forbearance.

"Those who are the best of men do not remember the hostile acts of their enemies, but instead, they see the merits. Those who are truly good men do good unto all others without expecting good in return. My dear child, do not consider seriously Duryodhana's harsh words. Just think of poor Gāndhārī and myself, who am old and blind. I had sanctioned this gambling match just to have the opportunity of seeing old friends and examining the character of my sons. Return to Khāṇḍavaprastha, and let there be brotherly love between you and your cousins."

Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas offered all respect unto their old, blind uncle, and then, along with Draupadī, they mounted their chariots and cheerfully set out for Indraprastha. After the departure of the Pāṇḍavas, Duḥśasana approached his elder brother with great distress and lamented, "All that was gained by so much endeavor has now been thrown away by our father!"

Duryodhana then took Duḥśasana, Karna and Śakuni to where Dhṛtarāṣṭra was seated alone. Desiring to change his attitude toward the Pāṇḍavas, the four conspirators addressed the old king in such a way as to paint a false picture of how the Pāṇḍavas had departed for home with a fiercely revengeful attitude. Duryodhana then said, "My dear father, the Pāṇḍavas are carefully looking for the first opportunity to gain revenge against me. Therefore, we should take away all of the Pāṇḍavas' wealth and employ it to ally ourselves with the most powerful kings of the earth. After accomplishing this, there will be no difficulty in defeating them at war. O King, the Pāṇḍavas will never forgive us for having insulted Draupadī. Therefore, before they are able to take revenge, we should again challenge the Pāṇḍavas to play at dice. This time, they should be sent into exile for twelve years with the stipulation that one additional year must be spent incognito. During that period we
can consolidate our allies and thus become powerful enough to defeat the Pāṇḍavas if they try to challenge us upon their return from the forest."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra did not have the heart to deny his son the opportunity of fulfilling his wicked ambitions. Thus, he agreed to this plan and then ordered that the Pāṇḍavas be called back to Hastināpura in order to once again play at dice. When they heard this unfortunate reversal, Bhīṣma, Drona, Kṛpa, Vidura, Bāhlika, Somadatta, Aśvatthāmā, Yuyutsu and Bhūriśravas all tried to make Dhṛtarāṣṭra change his mind by urging that peace be fostered rather than quarrel. However, due to his partiality toward his eldest son, Dhṛtarāṣṭra simply ignored their good advice.

Gāndhārī then went to her husband and said, "O Lord, please remember what Vidura had advised at the time of Duryodhana's birth. Now, it is my opinion that you should follow this good council and abandon our wicked son. How can you allow a great forest fire to once again be kindled after it had been extinguished with so much effort?" Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "If the destruction of the Kuru dynasty is to take place, then let it happen, for no one can prevent that which has already been arranged by Destiny. Let the Pāṇḍavas be called back here so that our son can have his way."

Meanwhile, the royal messenger caught up with the Pāṇḍavas just as they were approaching the outskirts of Indraprastha. Yudhiṣṭhira then listened to the following message from Dhṛtarāṣṭra: "My dear king, you should immediately return to Hastināpura in order to continue your game of dice, for the entire assembly is waiting for you."

Upon hearing this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira certainly felt a great shock of terrible disappointment. Still, in order to control his emotions, he thought, "Certainly, all good and bad results are obtained by the will of the Supreme Lord. Thus, whether I play at dice or not, Fate will bring about that which has already been destined to occur."

Yudhiṣṭhira knew that the gambling match would prove disastrous, but since his uncle had ordered him to do so, he agreed to participate, and thus he retraced his steps back to Hastināpura. Although they knew fully well about Śākuni's cheating tactics, the Pāṇḍavas once again entered the royal assembly, as if impelled by Fate. Thus afflicting the
hearts of his well-wishers, Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra once again sat down to
play at the dice board. Śakuni then explained, "There will be only one
roll of the dice this time, and the losing party will have to retire to the
forest for twelve years in order to live the life of ascetics dressed in
deerskin. In addition, a thirteenth year must be passed unrecognized in
some inhabited region. If, during this time, the losing party is discovered,
they must spend twelve more years in exile. Then, only if they are able
to remain unrecognized for one additional year, will they be entitled to
regain their rightful share of the Kuru kingdom."
When Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra agreed to this wager, a wave of agitation
spread throughout the assembly, for everyone felt that doom was in store
for the greedy Kauravas. Śakuni eagerly picked up the dice, and after
tossing them in his deceitful way, he jubilantly declared, "Just see! I have
won!"
The vanquished Pāṇḍavas then began to prepare themselves for their
exile by casting off their royal robes and putting on garments of
deerskin. Then, as the Pāṇḍavas were departing from the gambling
arena, Duḥśāsana spoke the following harsh words within their hearing:
"Duryodhana is now the unrivaled ruler of the Kurus! It is a source of
great happiness for us to see how those who were formerly so proud of
their opulence that they dared to laugh derisively at Duryodhana are
now being forced into a miserable life by the hand of Fate."
Duḥśāsana then said to Draupādi, "You should give up your husbands
now that they are deprived of all of their possessions. Why don't you
accept one of the great Kuru heroes as your lord?"
It was unbearable for Bhīma to hear Duḥśāsana address Draupādi like
this. Thus, while suppressing his anger, Bhīma approached the wicked
Kaurava prince and vowed, "Just as you are now trying to pierce us with
sharp words, so, one day, I will pierce you with my sharp arrows on the
battlefield!"
Being bound by the codes of morality, Bhīma could not do anything to
physically retaliate. The shameless Duḥśāsana was confident of this, and
so he began to tauntingly dance in a circle around Bhīma while
repeatedly addressing him as 'cow'. At this, Bhīma repeated the former
vow saying, "O wretch, if I do not drink your blood on the battlefield
after tearing open your chest, then may I never obtain to an exalted
destination. O Duḥśāsana, I hereby promise that by killing all of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, I shall one day pacify my terribly wrath!"
Thereafter, as Bhīma continued to follow Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira out of the assembly hall, Duryodhana took the opportunity to mock his lion-like strides while laughing along with his comrades. Bhīma once again turned around and said, "O fool, do not think that by this act you have gained superiority over me. Very soon I shall slay you in battle!"
Then, as he continued to follow his elder brother, Bhīma declared, "Very soon I shall slay Duryodhana with my mace, and as he lies prostrate on the ground, I will place my foot upon his head. In addition, I will drink Duḥśāsana's blood, Arjuna will slay Karṇa, and Sahadeva will kill the wretched Śakuni."
Arjuna then assured Bhīma, "If, after spending thirteen years in exile, Duryodhana does not respectfully return us our kingdom, then I shall certainly slay Karṇa and all of the other kings who try to oppose us on the battlefield!"
His eyes red with rage, Sahadeva also made a declaration while breathing heavily in anger: "I shall certainly slay that worst of the Gāndhāra kings along with his followers upon my return from exile and thus fulfill the words of Bhīma."
Yudhiṣṭhira then approached Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the other relatives of the Kuru dynasty in order to offer his respects and bid them farewell. Being exceedingly ashamed of themselves, however, none of these venerable personalities could give the king a reply, although within their hearts they wished him well. Only Vidura responded by saying, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, because your mother is now too old for enduring a harsh forest life, I will keep her under my care. My dear son, you should not be overly aggrieved on account of this unexpected turn of events, for he who is vanquished by sinful means has not actually suffered defeat. Besides this, you can rest assured that your forest life will yield great rewards, and thus it will actually be a blessing in disguise. After passing through this period, I am confident that you will return to Hastināpura, crowned with success."
The Pāṇḍavas then bowed down before Bhīṣma, Drona and Vidura and departed. Meanwhile, Draupadi had gone to take her leave of Kuntīdevī, and after doing so, she tearfully rejoined her husbands while her
mother-in-law followed from behind. Kuntī then embraced her sons with great maternal affection and exclaimed, "If I had known that this would be the outcome, I would never have brought you from the forest to Hastināpura!"

Indeed, Kuntīdevī wept bitterly and lamented how painful it was for her to see her sons dressed in deerskin. The Pāṇḍavas consoled their mother to the best of their ability, and then, as Vidura led her back to his house, they proceeded toward the forest. Thereafter, Dhrītarāṣṭra became constantly absorbed in anxiety over the fate of his deviant sons. The blind king knew that a great danger certainly awaited them as a reaction for their wicked behavior, and thus he had not a moment's peace of mind. Dhrītarāṣṭra then called for Vidura and asked him to describe in detail the Pāṇḍavas' departure for the forest. Vidura replied, "While going out from Hastināpura, Yudhiṣṭhīra covered his face with a cloth, Bhīma had repeatedly looked at his arms, Arjuna had spread grains of sand on the ground, Sahadeva had smeared something over his face, and Nakula had covered himself all over with dust. While weeping aloud, Draupadī had attempted to cover her face with her disheveled hair, and Dhaumya had uttered the mantras of Yamarāja which are found in the Sāma Veda."

Dhrītarāṣṭra then inquired, "Why were the Pāṇḍavas doing these things while leaving for the forest? What is the hidden meaning behind these peculiar modes of behavior?"

Vidura then said, "O King, listen to the purport of these actions. Yudhiṣṭhīra is so kind that he is even the well-wisher of your envious sons. He covered his face with a cloth so that his angry eyes might not burn those persons upon whom his gaze would fall. Bhīma considers himself unrivaled in terms of physical strength, and so he was looking at his powerful arms with an intense desire to use them against your wicked sons in battle. Arjuna is the foremost of bowmen, and he is equally skilled in releasing arrows with both his left and right arms. Arjuna had scattered grains of sand upon the ground in order to symbolize that he would soon shower down his arrows upon the heads of his enemies. Sahadeva had smeared something over his face so that no one would recognize him on that unhappy occasion. The handsome Nakula had covered himself with dust so that the ladies who had come to see his
departure would not become attracted to him. Draupadī had worn but a single blood-stained cloth. By keeping disheveled hair and shedding tears, she indicated that this would be the fate of the Kauravas' wives upon the completion of her husbands' exile period. Dhaumya had held kuṣa-grass in his hand, and he was singing the prayers to Yamarāja from the Sāma Veda. This was meant to illustrate how the priests of the Kurus would have to perform such a ceremony after all of the Kauravas had been slain in battle.

"My dear brother, all of the citizens had come out of their houses to see the Pāṇḍavas, and they lamented greatly upon beholding their forest-dress. Indeed, the people bitterly condemned the elder Kurus for allowing such a tragedy to occur, and many inauspicious omens became visible at that time. The earth trembled, and lightning appeared in the cloudless sky. There was an untimely solar eclipse, and as meteors fell from the sky, carnivorous birds and jackals uttered loud cries all around. My dear king, these signs indicate that the destruction of the Kurus is at hand!"

While Vidura and Dhṛtarāṣṭra were thus conversing in the royal assembly, the foremost of the celestial rṣis suddenly appeared overhead and announced, "During the fourteenth year from the present, all of the Kauravas will be destroyed by the prowess of Bhéma and Arjuna It should be known for certain that there is no other cause for this than Duryodhana's unpardonable transgressions!"

After making this proclamation, the rṣis disappeared from sight after passing through the heavens. Duryodhana then took Karṇa and Śakuni with him and fearfully approached Droṇācārya. Considering the brāhmaṇa preceptor to be his only shelter, Duryodhana offered him his entire kingdom and then begged him to become his military commander. Droṇa accepted the position, but at the same time, he explained, "The great rṣis have declared that because of their celestial origin, the Pāṇḍavas cannot be slain. My dear Duryodhana, I am also destined to die at the hands of Dhṛṣṭadvyumna, who appeared from the sacrificial altar specifically for this purpose, encased in armor and with a bow in hand. O King, although I cannot forsake you, I must warn you that since Destiny is supreme, your period of enjoyment will be brief. Rest assured that when the Pāṇḍavas return from exile they will seek revenge and
thus all of us will be vanquished!"

When Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard these words of the preceptor, he took them very seriously and ordered Vidura, "Go at once and bring the Pāṇḍavas back from the forest. Even if they do not agree to return on account of their vow, they should be treated with all respect and every possible luxury should be supplied to them so that their exile may be passed in royal comfort."

Later on, as Dhṛtarāṣṭra was seated alone, overwhelmed by anxiety, Sañjaya approached him and inquired, "O Lord, after obtaining the entire earth, along with all of its wealth, and after having exiled the Pāṇḍavas to the forest, why is it that you appear so aggrieved?"

Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "I have become obsessed with the thought of my sons fighting with the mighty Pāṇḍavas and their allies, and for this reason, I cannot find a moment's peace."

Sañjaya then said, "My dear king, whatever has happened is the result of your own blunders, and now, the destruction of the Kurus is at hand. By allowing Draupadī to be dragged into the royal assembly and insulted by Duḥśāsana, you have brought unimaginable misfortune upon yourself, your relatives, and your friends. When someone is going to meet with defeat and disgrace, the demigods first of all deprive him of his good intelligence. Thus, the doomed person sees everything in a perverse light so that evil appears to be good and good seems to be evil. For this reason, a person who has thus become overwhelmed by impending destruction takes delight in wickedness and immorality. Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, Kaṇa and Śakuni vividly displayed all these symptoms of doom when they dragged Draupadī into the assembly of kings and thus you can just imagine their fate."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra could certainly recognize the truth of Sañjaya's words and so, in reply, he admitted, "O Sūta, after the insulting of Draupadī, the brāhmaṇas had refused to perform my agnihotra sacrifices that evening as a protest. Raging winds then began to blow and showers of meteors fell from the sky. The chariots of the Kauravas were suddenly seen to blaze up in flames, and then their flagpoles fell down upon the ground. Jackals howled menacingly in Duryodhana's sacrificial arena, and then asses brayed loudly in response. O Sañjaya, Vidura had already assured me that the Pāṇḍavas would never forget how Draupadī was insulted,
nor would their allies, the Pañcālas and Yādavas, headed by Lord Kṛṣṇa. However, in spite of being urged by Vidura to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas, I could not accept his good advice on account of my staunch affection for my eldest son!"

After leaving Hastināpura through the Vardhamāna gate, the Pāṇḍavas traveled toward the North on their chariots, taking with them Draupadī, their weapons, and fourteen servants accompanied by their wives. The citizens of Hastināpura felt themselves to be doomed now that they were under the rule of Duryodhana. Coming out of their houses, they assembled together and condemned Bhéñma, Droëa, Vidura and Krpa for allowing Duryodhana to carry out his wicked plans. Being overwhelmed by sorrow, the citizens decided that it would be better to accompany the Pāṇḍavas to the forest rather than remain at the Kuru capital. Thus, they rushed out of the city and presented themselves before the Pāṇḍavas. Then, with folded hands, they petitioned, "Where are you going, leaving us behind? Wherever it may be, we shall follow you! It is not proper for you to forsake us, who are your loving and ever-devoted subjects! We are afraid of the evil-minded Duryodhana, for the qualities of a human being are gained by association, just as cloth and water are perfumed with contact of flowers. For this reason, we wish to engage our lives in your service, for you are all pure-hearted, heroic and virtuous."

In this way, the citizens properly desired their own welfare by living in a virtuous state. Still, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O residents of Hastināpura, you have gratified us highly. Now, please honor my request by returning to the Kuru capital in order to take care of Bhéṣma, Vidura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Kuntī and our other well-wishers who are all greatly afflicted on account of our exile."

The citizens honored Yudhiṣṭhira's request and so returned home as the Pāṇḍavas continued on with their journey. Finally as the sun was setting, the sons of Kuntī and Mādrī arrived at the great banyan tree called by the name of Pramāṇa, which stood majestically on the banks of the River Gaṅgā. The Pāṇḍavas fasted that night by drinking only water, and so did the numerous brāhmaṇas who had continued to follow them out of a deep sense of loyalty and affection. In the morning, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira begged the brāhmaṇas to return home by saying,
"O best of the twice-born, I shall not be able to properly worship and maintain you in the forest, and we will certainly pass through many dangerous regions which abound with fierce animals and Rākṣasas." The brāhmaṇas were unwilling to turn back, however, and so they begged, "O King, please allow us to accompany you, because we are all your faithful followers. Do not worry, for we shall provide for our own maintenance. In addition, we will keep you entertained during your period of exile by reciting historical narrations and discussing philosophical topics."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "I always derive great pleasure in the association of brāhmaṇas. However, it will cause me too much pain to see you undergo so much trouble just for my sake. Then I would pass my time in reproaching myself for having become such a troublesome burden."

After saying this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira broke down and cried, and then sat down helplessly upon the ground. An elderly brāhmaṇa named Śaunaka then stepped forward and spoke to the king as follows in order to relieve him of his intense grief: "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, mental grief is one of the major causes of bodily illness. For this reason, a good physician always allays the mental suffering of a patient by giving good instructions and offering desirable objects before he administers any medicine. If one puts a hot iron rod into a pot of water, the water also becomes hot. In the same way, the burning of mental grief brings on innumerable bodily miseries. On the other hand, just as water can put out fire, so, mental distresses can be quickly dispelled by enlightenment of real knowledge."

"My dear king, in a higher sense, it is a fact that the mind's material affection or attachment is the root cause of all kinds of suffering. Indeed, just as a small fire that is ignited in the hollow of a tree can consume the entire tree, so even a little unwarranted material attachment can destroy all of one's accumulated virtue. Therefore, real renunciation does not mean the physical withdrawal from all material objects. Factual detachment is attained when one becomes convinced of the fault in possessing any material attachment, and such realization can be achieved even while remaining within the so-called material world. In whatever situation one finds himself in, a person should not place his
affection in so-called friends, wealth, or even in his own materially-conceived self."

"Those persons who are self-realized and who have thus attained an understanding of that which is eternal, cannot come under the sway of temporary material affection. On the other hand, those who are materially engrossed are always dragged by their desires for sense gratification, and this leads them to perform unlimited sinful activities. It is only when the thirst of material gratification is renounced that one can actually become happy. For example, it is seen that persons who strive to accumulate wealth have to undergo so many miseries not only to acquire it, but to maintain it as well. Sometimes, one has to sacrifice his own life in the pursuit of material advancement. Contentment or satisfaction is the actual cause of happiness, and thus one who is wise strives to remain contented in all conditions of life. Knowing the flickering nature of youth, beauty and company of so-called loved ones, the wise man never seeks pleasure in these things. My dear king, you should not strive for material happiness. Instead, you should simply be satisfied by keeping yourself firmly fixed on the path of righteousness and spiritual elevation."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Śaunaka, whatever desire I have for accumulating wealth is not for my personal benefit. I know that whatever I possess is meant for being employed in the service of the brāhmaṇas. As a householder, it is my duty to provide all of the necessities of life for those who follow or depend upon me. Indeed, it is the duty of a householder to always have four things at his disposal for the reception of guests; water, a sitting place, a place to take rest, and food. In addition, guests must always be received with pleasant looks, a cheerful heart, and sweet words. Every morning and evening, a householder must put out some food for the caṇḍālas, dogs and birds. Thus, the wealth which one earns with his hard labor in order to maintain such a family life is certainly virtuous. My dear Śaunaka, what do you think of this?"

Śaunaka then said, "What you have said is certainly correct, but the fault of such a householder life is this: When one lives in a life of sense enjoyment, then it is seen that as soon as he acquires an object that is agreeable to the senses, the desire to enjoy it begins to burn within the
heart. In this way, one comes under the control of his passions, and thus becomes blind to the goal of the human life, which is self-realization. As a result, the materially-engrossed householder is forced to continue revolving in the vicious circle of repeated birth and death, and thus his suffering never ends. One should therefore act without attachment. The practice of yoga, the attainment of transcendental knowledge and the performance of austerity are always superior to fruitive work."

After talking with Śaunaka, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira approached Dhaumya and said, "Being neither able to support the brāhmaṇas nor abandon them, I have become exceedingly unhappy. Please give me some instruction which will enable me to understand what I should do."

Dhaumya reflected for awhile in a meditative mood. Then, he replied, "O King, in the very beginning of the creation, all the living entities became afflicted with hunger. Savitā, the sun, took compassion upon the suffering living beings and then began to evaporate the water with his powerful rays. In this way, with the help of the moon, clouds were created, and when rainfall came as a consequence, the land began to produce plants for food. In this way, we can understand the solar energy is the inherent ingredient in all kinds of eatables which sustain our lives. My dear king, I therefore suggest that you engage in the worship of Sūrya with a vow of great austerity."

Dhaumya then taught Yudhiṣṭhira a prayer to Sūrya that was composed by Lord Brahmā and which contains 108 names of the sun-god. Then the ṛṣi assured him, "If you recite this prayer with full attention, every morning at sunrise, then all of your desires will be fulfilled."

Thereafter, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to worship the sun-god, being urged by a desire to support the brāhmaṇas. While subsiding upon only air and practicing the breathing exercises of prāṇāyama, the king would go and stand in the water of the Gaṅgā in order to recite the prayer to Sūrya with intent concentration. The sun-god Vivasvān then became very pleased with Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. After personally appearing before the king, Sūrya handed him a celestial copper vessel and then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, rest assured that I will supply you with all the food which you will require during the next twelve years. As long as
Draupadi remains in possession of this pot, the amount of food that she cooks in it will expand to become inexhaustible. Only when Draupadi herself eats, will the food which she has prepared be finished. My dear king, do not give a way to grief, for after completing your period of exile, you will once again rule over your kingdom."

After saying this, the sun-god vanished, and when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira got out of the water, his mind remained wonder-struck for some time. Feeling a profound sense of gratitude, the king went and touched the feet of Dhaumya, and thereafter, he embraced his younger brothers with great pleasure. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then took Draupadi into the kitchen, and together they cooked in the copper pot whatever little food was in their stock. Miraculously, when the cooking was finished, the food began to increase unlimitedly, enabling Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira to feed all of the brāhmaṇas. After the brāhmaṇas had eaten to their full satisfaction, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira fed his younger brothers. Then, he himself ate, and at last, Draupadi took her meal. Then, as soon as Draupadi got up to wash her hands and mouth, the rest of the food vanished, just as the sun-god had indicated. In this way, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was able to entertain the brāhmaṇas to his heart's content and thus he gave up all apprehension at the thought of allowing them to accompany him. Thereafter, Yudhiṣṭhira and Dhaumya performed some sacrifices which were meant to enhance their welfare, and then at last the Pāṇḍavas left the banks of the Gaṅgā in order to set out for the Kāmyaka forest.

Meanwhile, back at Hastināpura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra continued to consult with Vidura about the welfare of his sons, and about how the angry citizens could be won over by him. In reply, Vidura said, "O King, you should know that all kinds of success in the fields of dharmā, artha and kāma are derived from virtue alone. Therefore, you should treat your sons and the sons of Pāṇḍu equally. That is the only way that you can rectify the sinful course which you and your sons have taken. You must first give the Pāṇḍavas back their kingdom and then chastise the wicked Śakuni. If Duryodhana does not agree to this, then he should be rejected by you once and for all. Only if Duryodhana will agree to rule the kingdom peacefully along with the Pāṇḍavas can the situation be saved. Otherwise, your son should be discarded if you wish to save the rest of
the Kauravas. Karṇa, Duḥśāsana and Śakuni should engage in the service of Mahārāja Yudhiśthira after begging for his pardon, and because of his grave offense, Duḥśāsana must publicly plead for forgiveness from Bhīma and Draupadi. Under the present circumstances, my dear brother, this is the only advice I can give you." Dhṛtarāṣṭra was not at all pleased to hear this however, for he felt that Vidura's advice was meant only for the benefit of the Pāṇḍavas. Thus he replied, "I think that you are actually my enemy and therefore, you are giving such crooked advice! Up until now I had certainly respected you as a highly virtuous and learned man. From now on, however, I am not interested in hearing your council. Therefore, you may go or stay as you like!"

After uttering these harsh words, Dhṛtarāṣṭra got up in order to retire to his room. Vidura also angrily departed, having decided to join the Pāṇḍavas. Then, while leaving the royal palace, Vidura exclaimed with disgust, "The Kauravas are doomed."

Meanwhile, the Pāṇḍavas came to Kurukṣetra and they bathed in the River Sarasvatī there. Then, by traveling from forest to forest, the Pāṇḍavas finally came to Kāmyakavana, which was the abode of many rṣis and which was also situated on the bank of the Sarasvatī.

When Vidura arrived at the Kāmyaka forest on his chariot, he saw Mahārāja Yudhiśthira sitting along with Draupadī and surrounded by his brothers and the brāhmaṇas. Upon seeing Vidura approaching from a distance, Mahārāja Yudhiśthira inquired from Bhīma, "Is this a messenger from Śakuni, inviting us to once again play at dice so that he can win our weapons as well?"

Yudhiśthira was thinking like this because he knew that possession of their weapons was essential for winning back their kingdom at the end of the period of their exile. As Vidura came closer, however, the Pāṇḍavas recognized him and so they hastily got up from their seats to welcome him. Then, after seating Vidura in their midst, the Pāṇḍavas made the usual inquiries, and after doing so, they allowed him to take some rest. Later on, when the Pāṇḍavas inquired about the purpose of his visit, Vidura replied as follows: "My dear nephews, Dhṛtarāṣṭra became very anxious after your departure, for he finally realized the precarious position of his sons. Thus, he summoned me in order to take
advice. However, after hearing what I had to say, Dhṛtarāṣṭra became
angry because I had told him it was necessary for his son to beg
forgiveness from you. He did not like my words, just as a young girl does
not take pleasure in a husband who has reached his sixtieth year. Indeed,
Dhṛtarāṣṭra became so irritated that he granted me leave to depart, and
so I have come to join you. My dear king, one who can tolerate all the
insults of his enemies, while patiently utilizing his time to steadily amass
resources for the purpose of gaining adherents, will certainly come to
rule over the entire earth. One who shares his assets with his followers
in prosperity will find that such adherents stay with him even in
adversity."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear uncle, having gained the
association of such a highly intelligent person as yourself, we shall never
fail to do as you advise!"
Meanwhile, in Hastināpura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra began to repent for having so
harshly insulted his younger brother. Indeed, the old king became so
aggrieved on account of his misbehavior that he at last fell down
unconscious. After recovering his senses, Dhṛtarāṣṭra wept for some
time with bitter remorse. Then, he called for Sañjaya and ordered him,
"Go and bring back Vidura at once, for if you fail to do so I shall surely
give up my life out of despair!"
Sañjaya immediately departed for Kāmyakavana, and upon his arrival,
he saw Vidura and the Pāṇḍavas surrounded by thousands of brāhmaṇas.
Thereafter, when Vidura heard Dhṛtarāṣṭra's message of remorse, he
started out at once for Hastināpura along with Sañjaya. Then, when
Vidura came before Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind old king affectionately took
him upon his lap, and while smelling his head, he begged for forgiveness
by saying, "My dear brother, during your absence I could not even sleep
at night."
Vidura replied, "My dear king, you should know for certain that I am just
as concerned about your sons as the sons of Pāṇḍu. However, in
consideration of the Pāṇḍavas' distressed condition, I have shown them
special favor, for this is only natural."
In this way, Vidura and Dhṛtarāṣṭra were reconciled so that once again
they felt happy to be together. However, when Duryodhana learned that
Vidura had returned, he became dejected. After summoning Duhśāsana,
Karṇa and Śakuni, he said, "My dear friends, I am afraid that at any moment, Vidura might induce my father to call back the Pāṇḍavas from their exile. Therefore, please think of some plan that will alleviate my fears. If I once again have to see the Pāṇḍavas enjoying superior prosperity, it will be unbearable for me and so my only recourse will be to drink poison, enter the fire, or kill myself with my own weapons!"

Śakuni then said, "My dear Duryodhana, you can rest assured that having once vowed to live in the forest, Yudhishṭhira will never break that promise, for he considers truthfulness to be the highest virtue."

Karṇa added, "And, even if the Pāṇḍavas were to return, Śakuni could defeat them once more at the dice-board.

These words did not pacify Duryodhana, however, and he turned his morose face away from his advisors. When he saw this, Karṇa vehemently gestured in anger as he declared, "O King, you know that we are always prepared to do whatever is agreeable to you, although we are sometimes restrained by your father. Let us put on our armor and take up our weapons. We shall mount upon our chariots and go to the forest this very day in order to kill the Pāṇḍavas."

The others applauded Karṇa's proposal with great joy. Then, without wasting time, they all mounted upon their chariot and proceeded to where the Pāṇḍavas were staying in the forest. Vyāsadeva could understand everything by dint of his spiritual vision, and so he intercepted the Kauravas on the road and made them give up their wicked intention. Vyāsadeva then came before Dhṛtarāṣṭra and said, "My dear son, I am very displeased that the Pāṇḍavas have been cheated out of their kingdom and exiled to the forest. I warn you, by causing this dissension among the cousin-brothers, you are bringing the destruction of the entire Kuru dynasty."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "My dear father, I did not favor the dice match, nor did Bhīṣma, Droṇā, Kṛṣṇa or Vidura. And yet, under the guidance of Fate, I allowed my son to go ahead with his schemes, being too much bound by parental affection."

Vyāsadeva then said, "It is a fact that a good son is one's dearest possession. Just to illustrate the truth of this statement, I shall describe to you an incident that took place long ago."
Once upon a time, Indra happened to see Surabhi, the mother of the cows, weeping. Out of compassion, the king of heaven inquired from Surabhi about the cause of her sorrow. Then, in reply, Surabhi said, "O King, I am aggrieved on the account of my poor son."

While saying this, Surabhi pointed down to the earth where a cruel farmer was beating with a stick a bull that was pulling his plow. Finally, the bull became so exhausted from the hard labor that it fell down upon the ground. Indeed, it appeared that the poor animal was practically at the point of death. Surabhi then said, "O Indra, the other bull is strong, and so he can bear the hard labor. On the other hand, my son is lean and weak, and due to being afflicted by the farmer's whip, he has practically lost consciousness."

Indra then asked, "O Surabhi, since you have thousands of sons who are all engaged in hard labor, why do you feel so sorry for this particular one?"

Surabhi replied, "I certainly have affection for all of my sons. Still, my heart is naturally drawn to the one that is weak." After hearing this, Indra became convinced that a son is even more dear to a mother than her own life. Then, with a desire to please Surabhi, the king of heaven caused a sudden shower to pour down upon the earth. In this way, the farmer's work was interrupted so that Surabhi's son gained some relief for the present.

Vyäsadeva then advised, "My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, just as Surabhi had said, I am sure that you have affection for all your sons. Now, let your heart turn toward those of your sons who are afflicted. Pāṇḍu, Vidura and yourself have always been considered equally by me. However, since Pāṇḍu begot only five sons, whereas you have received 100 and because you are in a very prestigious position, I am always troubled by thoughts of how they can be protected and benefited. O King, if you wish that your own children may live, then let Duryodhana make peace with the Pāṇḍavas!"

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then admitted, "O Mahāmuni, I know very well that the advice which you are giving me is sound. Indeed, the same words have already been spoken to me on innumerable occasions by Bhīṣma and Vidura. However, if you want your council to actually bear fruit, then you had better give it to Duryodhana rather than me."
Vyäsadeva then informed his son, "Very soon, after having visited the Pāṇḍavas, Maitreya Rṣi will come here to admonish Duryodhana. I must warn you, however, that if his advice is ignored, this greatly powerful sage will curse your son in great anger."

After saying this, Vyäsadeva departed, and then, some days later, Maitreya Muni arrived at Hastināpura and was very respectfully received by Dhṛtarāśtra and Duryodhana with offerings of arghya and other articles of worship. When Dhṛtarāśtra inquired from Maitreya about the welfare of the Pāṇḍavas, the ṛṣi replied, "O King, after wandering throughout Kurujāṅgala while visiting numerous holy places, I unexpectedly came upon Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira in the Kāmyaka forest. I was very surprised to see him wearing deerskin and with matted hair, and in answer to my inquiries, he described to me all that had taken place. As soon as I heard about your eldest son's wicked behavior and the perilous situation which has been created by it, I rushed here in order to try and rectify the situation. My dear Dhṛtarāśtra, in your presence there should never have arisen a quarrel between your own sons and the sons of Pāṇḍu. After all, you are the final authority, and thus you have the power to control your sons. How could you sanction Duryodhana's devious plans without considering the calamitous effect that such a gambling match would produce? My dear king, out of affection I beg to inform you that because of your passive role in exiling the Pāṇḍavas, all of the ṛṣis now have a very low opinion of you."

Then, turning to Duryodhana, Maitreya spoke as follows in a soft and appealing voice, "My dear prince, please take heed of what I have to say. Cast off your determination to compete with the Pāṇḍavas. Instead, endeavor at all costs to make peace with your cousins. I know that you are already aware of the Pāṇḍavas' superior prowess, for they have displayed it on numerous occasions. Even as they were departing for the forest, Bhīma killed a great Rākṣasa named Kirmīra. Therefore, you should not foolishly think that the Pāṇḍavas are now impotent due to having been exiled. Now, to avoid a future disaster, you must change your attitude and try to make amends with Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira."

Although he had been very gently instructed by Maitreya Muni, Duryodhana found the ṛṣi's words intolerable. Indeed, as an expression
of his irritation and impatience, Duryodhana had slapped his thigh and repeatedly scratched the ground with his toes. As he listened to Maitreya, Duryodhana had kept his head hung down and he simply smiled while remaining silent. In this way, he visibly displayed his complete unwillingness to even consider the ṛṣī's advice. The intelligent Maitreya felt slighted on account of Duryodhana's mannerisms, and as a result, he flared up with rage. As if impelled by Fate, the great ṛṣī first of all touched water and then declared with red-hot eyes, "Because you have insulted me by disregarding my words, in the great war that will spring out of your sinful acts, this thigh of yours will be broken with a stroke of Bhīma's mace!"

Dhṛtarāṣṭra tried to pacify Maitreya Muni in the hopes that he would retract his words. However, the ṛṣī told the blind king, "I am only willing to withdraw my curse if Duryodhana makes peace with the Pāṇḍavas," Dhṛtarāṣṭra was now convinced that a battle would inevitably take place between his sons and the sons of Pāṇḍu. In order to get an idea of Bhīma's strength, he next requested Maitreya Muni to describe in detail how he had slain the Rākṣasa Kirmēra. However, Maitreya replied, "O King, I shall not speak to you any further, because whatever words I have already uttered have been disregarded. After my departure, you can hear about this incident from Vidura if you so desire."

After saying this, Maitreya Muni quickly left the royal palace, and then, Duryodhana also took his leave, for he was afraid to hear about Bhīma's heroic exploits. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then turned to Vidura and requested him to narrate the full story of how Bhīma killed Kirmēra. Vidura always maintained the desire to benefit his elder brother, and so he gladly related the entire incident as follows:

On the third day after their departure from Hastināpura, the Pāṇḍavas reached Kāmyakavana around midnight. Due to fear of the Rākṣasas, even the ṛṣīs would not dare to enter this forest after dark. When the Pāṇḍavas came there, they found that a fierce Rākṣasa was obstructing their path with outstretched arms. Carrying a torch in his hand, this gruesome creature had eight protruding teeth, glowing coppery eyes and bristly hair that stood erect all over his body. The Rākṣasa then roared so frighteningly that all of the forest animals ran away in fear while many stupefied birds dropped to the ground. A. violent wind then began to
blow so that soon a cloud of dust covered all directions. Thereafter, the Rākṣasa began to create various kinds of illusions, and so Draupadī fearfully shut her eyes. Dhaumya then dispelled all of these illusions by the power of mantras, and at this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhirā inquired, "O night-prowler, tell us what you want."
The man-eater replied, "I am Kīrmīra, the brother of Baka. Now may I ask who are you that have so kindly appeared in order to become my food for today?"
In turn Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhirā introduced himself and his brothers, and upon hearing their identities, Kīrmīra gleefully declared, "For a long time I have been searching for the killer of my brother and my friend, Hiḍimba. Now, I can free myself from the debt I owe those two great heroes."
Upon hearing this, Yudhiṣṭhirā rebuked Kinnira by saying, "This shall never be so!" Meanwhile, Bhīma had gone and torn up a tall tree by its roots. Then, after stripping off all the leaves, he approached the Rākṣasa to fight. Arjuna had strung his Gāṇḍiva bow, but Bhīma made him desist, for he was very eager to display his own prowess. Then, after tightening his belt, Bhīma rushed at Kīrmīra and while biting his lip with rage, he smashed the tree on top of the Rākṣasa's head. Kīrmīra remained unperturbed, however, and in retaliation he hurled his torch at Bhīma. Bhīma then responded with great agility by kicking the torch in such a way that it flew right back toward his assailant.
Kīrmīra then uprooted a tree, and when he rushed toward Bhīma, a fierce duel commenced. Innumerable trees were thus torn up from the ground and then smashed into innumerable pieces. Kīrmīra then picked up a huge rock and hurled it. However, even though that boulder struck him, Bhīma hardly felt the blow, and thus Kīrmīra became more enraged. The Rākṣasa then rushed at Bhīma with outstretched arms, and so a fierce wrestling match ensued.
Bhīma happened to gaze at Draupadī, and as a result, he immediately remembered their humiliation at the hands of Duryodhana. Because of this, Bhīma's energy began to swell greatly, and, taking advantage of this, he suddenly grabbed Kīrmīra and violently threw him onto the ground. Bhīma then picked up the Rākṣasa, and while holding him around the waist, he whipped him round and round over his head until he became
unconscious due to the centrifugal force. Bhīma then threw the stupefied Kirmēra violently to the ground and pressed his knee against the Rākṣasa's stomach while strangling him to death. Bhīma then victoriously dragged Kirmēra's body along the ground until he at last became satisfied by seeing the mangled corpse and thus gave up his anger.

Thus, Vidura described the prowess of Bhīma to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and after hearing about Kirmēra's death, the blind old king heaved a heavy sigh and became thoughtful.

When the members of the Vṛṣṇi, Bhoja and Andhaka dynasties learned about the Pāṇḍavas' exile, they came to visit them in the forest, as did the Pañcālas, the Kaikeya rulers, and the Cedi king Dhṛṣṭaketu. Then, after offering respects unto Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and being honored by him in return, all of these kings seated themselves comfortably in order to discuss the situation. As He heard about all of the Kauravas' misdeeds, Lord Kṛṣṇa became highly agitated with rage. At last, He solemnly declared to the assembly of kings, "The earth will drink the blood of Duryodhana, Karṇa, Duḥśāsana and the wicked Śakuni! After slaying them and their followers, we shall install the pious Yudhiṣṭhira upon the royal throne at Hastināpura! The wicked deserve to be slain, for this is an eternal principle of morality!"

Indeed, it appeared as if the Lord was about to destroy the entire creation along with all its living beings. Then, in order to pacify Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna proceeded to narrate as follows some of the glorious pastimes which He had performed in His various incarnations:

"O Kṛṣṇa, in ancient times You appeared as Nārāyaṇa Rṣi, and for 10,000 years You wandered at will throughout the Gandhamādana mountains without accepting a fixed shelter. Then, for 10,000 years You resided by the side of Lake Puṣkara, subsisting on water alone. Then, with arms upraised and while upon one leg, You passed 100 years at Badarikāśrama, maintaining Yourself on just air. Thereafter, without any upper garment, You spent twelve years on the bank of the river Sarasvati, engaged in sacrificial performance. After this, for 1,000 years of the celestials, You resided near Lake Prabhāsa, standing all the while on one leg!"
"Śrīla Vyāsadeva has told us that You are the original cause of creation, the beginning, the middle and the end of all things! After slaying all of the Daityas and Dānavas in battle and giving the kingdom of the three worlds to Indra, You have appeared on the earth in human society. Previously, by becoming the son of Aditi, You appeared as Indra’s younger brother and, even while still a child, You filled up the universe with only three steps! Indeed, in thousands of incarnations, You have slain thousands upon thousands of wicked asuras!"

"And yet, You are truly devoid of anger, envy, cruelty and untruth, for You are situated transcendently, beyond all material qualities. As the Absolute Truth, You undergo no deterioration, and all of the great demigods and rṣis come to Your shelter, seeking protection. At the end of the great yuga, all things rest in You so that only Yourself remains!"

As Arjuna became silent, being wonder-struck upon contemplating Lord Kṛṣṇa’s greatness, the Lord lovingly replied, "My dear Arjuna, you are mine and I am yours. Whatever belongs to Me is therefore yours. He who hates you simultaneously envies Me, and he who adores and follows you, worships Me automatically. You are Nara and I am Nārāyaṇa, and we have appeared on the earth in order to execute a particular mission. Practically speaking, there is no real difference that exists between us, because of your oneness in interest with Me."

In this way, Lord Kṛṣṇa also glorified Arjuna by describing the unique loving relationship which exists between Himself and His pure devotee. Then, as all the great kings sat surrounding Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas, each of them excited with anger against the Kauravas, Draupadī took the opportunity to approach the Lord. Giving vent to her pent-up anger, grief and frustration, Draupadī addressed Kṛṣṇa as follows:

"We have heard from great authorities such as Nārada Muni, Devala, Asita and Kaśyapa that You are the original Supreme Personality of Godhead, the cause of all causes and the ultimate goal of all processes of elevation. O Kṛṣṇa, it is You alone who manipulates all creatures, even up to the limit of Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva, as if they were Your play things. The entire universe is resting in You alone, and You are also omnipresent throughout the entire creation, being the Supreme Soul of all things. Because I am the wife of Your aunt Pṛthā’s sons, I know that You have great affection for me, O Lord. How then was it possible for
me to be dragged into the assembly of Kurus and insulted by our vicious enemies?
"O Kṛṣṇa, I am the daughter-in-law of Dhrtarāṣṭra and yet his wicked sons dragged me, trembling and weeping, and clad in but a single blood-stained piece of cloth, as if I had no protector! The mighty Pāṇḍavas are also to blame, for they had simply sat by silently as their wedded wife was abused in the royal assembly. To hell with the Gāṇḍiva bow of Arjuna! To hell with the strength of Bhīma, for both of these heroes allowed me to be insulted in their very presence! It is the eternal law of morality that any husband, no matter how weak, endeavors to protect his wife. Although the Pāṇḍavas previously never forsook anyone seeking protection, they were indifferent when solicited by me. O Kṛṣṇa, why did those lions among men, after making so much endeavor to win me at my svayaṁvara, cast me off when I was in distress?"
After saying this, Draupadī hid her face in her hands and began to weep bitterly. Then, after wiping away her tears, she sighed loudly and said in a choked voice, "I have no husbands, no sons, no friends, nor brothers, nor even You, Kṛṣṇa, for even though all of you knew how I was being treated so cruelly by my enemies, you continue to remain unconcerned! O, my dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, since You are my eternally worshipable Deity, as well as my relative and friend, I deserve to be protected by You."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then replied, "My dear Draupadī, please do not cry, for I can assure you that the wives of all those whom you are angry at will also weep like you. When the Kaurava ladies see their husbands lying dead on the battlefield, having been pierced by the arrows of Arjuna, they will certainly lament very bitterly. The stars may fall from the sky, the Himālayas may split open, or the ocean may one day dry up, but My words shall never prove futile. I promise to exert My full prowess on behalf of the sons of Pāṇḍu so that you may once again become the queen of queens!"
After hearing this, Draupadī gazed upon Arjuna, who also assured her by saying, "Whatever Lord Kṛṣṇa has said must come to pass without doubt. It cannot be otherwise!" Dhṛṣṭadyumna then promised Draupadī, "My dear sister, I will slay Droṇa, and Śīkhaṇḍī will kill Bhīṣma. Bhīma will vanquish the evil-minded Duryodhana, and Arjuna will slay the wicked Karna."
Then, as all faces once again turned toward Him, Lord Kṛṣṇa told Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, if I had been at Dvārakā, I would have immediately rushed to Hastināpura, and by speaking about the evils of gambling, with the help of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa and Bāhlīka, I would have stopped the game of dice. And, if Dhṛtarāṣṭra had dared to ignore my good advice, then I would have killed all of the gamblers right there on the spot! Unfortunately, I had been out of Dvārakā on some urgent business, and so it was only upon My return that I learned of your plight from Sātyaki. I was highly enraged to hear how you had been cheated out of your kingdom and exiled to the forest, and thus I came here to meet you without delay."

Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "My dear Lord, what was the urgent matter that took you away from Dvārakā?"

Kṛṣṇa replied, "O King, as I continued to reside in Indraprastha after your performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice, Śālva came to hear how I had killed his good friend Śiśupāla. In order to gain revenge, he mounted upon his wonderful airplane named Saubha, which had been created by Maya Dānava, and attacked Dvārakā. Finally, after killing many of the Yadus and destroying parts of the city, Śālva found out that I was not present there, and so he gave up the siege in order to search for Me elsewhere. Later on, when I returned to Dvārakā, I heard all about Śālva's attack on the city in hopes of killing Me as revenge for Śiśupāla's death. At this, I became highly enraged, and so I decided to kill Śālva without further delay. At last, after searching everywhere, I located him on an island in the middle of the ocean."

At this point, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira interrupted Lord Kṛṣṇa and asked Him to describe Śālva's attack on Dvārakā in greater detail. The Lord then explained, "When it was understood that Śālva was about to attack Dvārakā, Ugrasena ordered that the city's fortifications be strengthened in expectation of his arrival. Then, when the battle commenced, Śālva's army was quickly routed by My sons after Sāmba had killed the demon's commander in-chief, Kṛṣṇavrddhi.

"Śālva then personally appeared on the scene, flying in his mystical airplane, and so all of the Yādavas became greatly afflicted with fear. Pradyumna managed to rally the army however, and then he came out of the city to fight. After a fierce duel, Pradyumna pierced Śālva in the
chest with a powerful arrow, making him momentarily lose consciousness. Śālva quickly recovered himself, however, and then released an arrow which pierced Pradyumna in the neck, making him fall down onto the floor of his chariot. Śālva then continued to shower more arrows, and when Pradyumna lost consciousness, his driver, the son of Dāruka, took him away from the battlefield. Then, when Pradyumna regained consciousness, he chastised his charioteer by saying, 'O Śūta's son, what have you done? Did you become bewildered by the sight of Śālva? Tell me truthfully why you have left the battlefield, bringing disgrace down upon my head?' "The son of Dāruka replied, 'O Prince, I did not act out of fear. Because it is my duty to protect my master, I took you away from the battlefield when you lost consciousness in order to save your life. I think Śālva is more powerful than you, and his army is more powerful than ours as well. Therefore, you should desist from fighting with the demon any further.' "In response, Pradyumna ordered, 'Turn my chariot around and return to the battlefield. Never again cause me to desert the fight! What would my Father say if He learned that I had fled from the scene of battle? What would Balarāma and my brothers think of me? I, who have always been reputed for manliness, would be ridiculed by the palace ladies. O son of Dāruka, you should know that for one like myself, such taunts that I would receive would be worse than death!' "Thereafter, Pradyumna once again encountered Śālva, and after a brief but intense duel, he pierced the demon's head, face and chest with innumerable arrows, making him fall down unconscious. Pradyumna then fitted an infallible arrow to his bowstring that was specifically meant for Śālva's destruction. Upon seeing this however, the demigods who had crowded the sky in order to witness the wonderful battle, uttered exclamations of dismay. The demigods then quickly dispatched Nārada Muni and Vāyu as messengers to Pradyumna, and after coming before him they said, 'O Prince, it has already been ordained by Lord Brahmā that the death of Śālva will be encompassed by your Father, Lord Krṣṇa. Therefore please desist from fighting. Do not attempt to falsify the words of the Grandsire.' "After hearing this, Pradyumna cheerfully withdrew his arrow, and meanwhile, the disheartened Śālva quickly departed through the sky,
thinking it best not to continue the battle. After some days, I returned to Dvārakā, and then I saw how the city had been besieged, I called for Śātyaki and heard from him all that had happened. Without delay, I set out with my army determined to kill Śālva and destroy his mystical airplane, Saubha, which was actually a great city filled with Dānavas. Finally, when I arrived at the shore of the ocean, Śālva spotted me and at once challenged Me to fight.

"Thereafter, as the battle raged, Śālva's warriors showered so many arrows upon Me that My chariot became invisible. However, I immediately retaliated with My own superior arrows and as a result, many of Śālva's warriors began to drop down dead from his airplane into the water. Upon seeing this, Śālva resorted to using his own mystic powers, but I then nullified all of his illusory creations with counter-illusions. Then, Śālva pierced Dāruka with so many arrows that Dāruka's entire body was completely covered with the blood that flowed from the wounds. Being greatly afflicted, my driver regretfully informed me that he could no longer manage the horses properly, and so I had to stop fighting for awhile in order to pacify him.

"At this time, a person suddenly came to Me and claimed to be a messenger from Ugrasena, and said, 'O Kṛṣṇa, Śālva just now entered Dvārakā and killed Your father Vasudeva. Because the city is once again under siege by Śālva's army, You must return immediately to defend it.' "When I heard this, I felt such an intense shock of grief that I almost fainted! In that pained condition, I began to blame Balarāma, Pradyumna and Śātyaki, for I had left them in charge of protecting Dvārakā. The next moment, however, I concluded that it would not have been possible for Vasudeva to have been slain in the presence of those great heroes, and thus I became convinced that Baladeva, Śātyaki and Pradyumna must have also perished. This further intensified My grief and as a result, I became so overwhelmed that I could no longer determine what to do next. Then, in that confused state, I suddenly saw My father fall from Śālva's airplane. I understood that Vasudeva was dead because his hair was all disheveled, and upon seeing this horrible sight, I fainted away upon My chariot. After regaining consciousness, however, I could no longer see My father, Śālva or his airplane, and I then concluded that I must have become a victim of the demon's power
of illusion.
"Having regained My composure, I resumed showering My arrows upon the enemy so that many soldiers with severed heads began falling into the ocean. Śālva then made himself invisible, however, and while hidden he began to shower so many rocks upon My army that My soldiers could no longer see Me, and so they panicked. Then, as My army was fleeing in fear, I discharged a mighty thunderbolt which smashed all the stones to pieces. Even though the weight of the falling fragments nearly crushed My horses to death, Dāruka urged them on toward Śālva, whose airplane had once again become visible before us. Taking advantage of this golden opportunity, I ordered My favorite weapon, the Sudarśana-cakra, to destroy Śālva's airplane, which was actually a flying city inhabited by the Dānavas.

"As it rose into the sky, the Sudarśana-cakra appeared to be a second sun, and while traveling at incredible speed, it passed right through Śālva's airplane, cutting it in half so that it came crashing down to the ground. Then, when the Sudarśana-cakra returned to My hand after thus finishing its assignment, I once again released it for the destruction of Śālva. Śālva had escaped by jumping out of the crashing airplane, and then he had picked up his mace in order to renew his attack. However, just as he was about to hurl the mighty club, the Sudarśana-cakra cut him in half, ending his demoniac life.

"I then approached the city of Saubha and blew upon My Pāñcajanya conchshell. While gazing at the town, which was high as mount meru, I saw that all of the palaces and arches were destroyed and fire blazed everywhere. The surviving Dānavas then fled in fear, and thereafter, I returned to Dvārakā, much to the delight of the Yādavas."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then informed Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "So, My dear king, this is why I was away from Dvārakā and thus could not intervene in the gambling match. If I was present, however, you should know for certain that I would have either stopped the deceitful dicegame or else killed Duryodhana then and there. Now, it is all done with, however. Therefore, there is nothing that we can do at the present, because you have taken a vow to live in exile for thirteen years."

Thereafter, Lord Kṛṣṇa bid farewell to the Pāṇḍavas and then took Abhimanyu and Subhadrā with Him upon His chariot, which was driven
by the horses Šaivya and Sugrīva. After Lord Kṛṣṇa's departure, Dhṛṣṭadyumna also set out for his kingdom, accompanied by the sons of Draupadī. The other kings also set out for their respective kingdoms and thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas implored the citizens who had followed them to return to their homes as well.

Later on, as the Pāṇḍavas were sitting together at ease, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira said, "My dear brothers, we shall have to pass the next twelve years in the forest. Therefore, please select a place that is full of flowers and fruits, that abounds with deer and sweetly singing birds, and which is inhabited by ṛṣis of great piety."

After offering his respects unto his elder brother as if he were a preceptor, Arjuna replied, "O King, you know very well that which is for our benefit. However, I think that the charming lake known as Dvaitavana would be quite suitable and pleasant."

Yudhiṣṭhira immediately accepted Arjuna's proposal and thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas mounted upon their chariots and departed, taking with them all of their weapons as well as Draupadī's clothes and ornaments. Behind the Pāṇḍavas followed all of the brāhmaṇas as well as numerous attendants and maidservants. It was the end of summer when the Pāṇḍavas reached Dvaitavana, and thus the forest was full of flowering trees, and the chirping of exotic birds could be heard everywhere. Coming to the banks of the River Sarasvatī, the Pāṇḍavas saw numerous āśramas inhabited by ṛṣis, and so out of respect for the peaceful and sanctified atmosphere, they got down from their chariots. This forest also served as the abode of Siddhas and Cāraṇas, and they came along with the ṛṣis in order to welcome the Pāṇḍavas. In return, the sons of Pāṇḍu offered great respect unto all of the forest-dwellers, and then they continued to walk through the woods. At last, when the Pāṇḍavas became fatigued, they sat down beneath a large tree, and since they found the spot to be very pleasant, they decided to construct a cottage in order to reside there. Thereafter, as they continued to pass their days at Dvaitavana, Dhaumya engaged in the performance of sacrifices while Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira endeavored to please all of the ṛṣis by giving them offerings of fruits and roots.
Then, one day, Märkaṇḍeya Rṣi arrived there as an unexpected guest, and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira welcomed him with great care and attention. When Märkaṇḍeya saw how the Pāṇḍavas were living in exile, it reminded him of Lord Rāmacandra's forest life, and so he smiled at the similarity. However, without understanding this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira felt hurt to see how Märkaṇḍeya was apparently enjoying their plight, and so he said, "O Rṣi, everyone else who has come here has felt aggrieved upon seeing us in exile. How is it that you alone seem to take pleasure in our plight?"

Märkaṇḍeya replied, "My dear king, I am also very pained to see how you are passing your days in the forest. I had smiled while remembering my previous meeting with Lord Rāmacandra, Who was wandering about in the Rṣyamūka hills. Taking note of how your condition resembles His, I could not help but marvel at the coincidence. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should not allow yourself to become overly aggrieved on account of your suffering. Not only you, but everyone is working under the direction of the Supreme Controller, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and nothing can take place without His sanction. Because we are all controlled living entities, no one should become proud of his God-gifted strength or abilities, nor should one become angry at life's reverses. Our duty is just to remain on the path of virtue in all circumstances, and in that way our success is guaranteed. My dear king, I can assure you that if you act in this way, then at the end of your painful exile, the strength of your virtue will enable you to snatch back your rightful prosperity from the hands of the evilminded Kauravas!"

After giving these brief instructions, Märkaṇḍeya Rṣi departed, and thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas continued residing at Dvaitavana, surrounded by innumerable brāhmaṇas, including the great sages, Nārada, Vyāsadeva and Kaśyapa. On account of the presence of all these great rṣis, the surrounding atmosphere was always spiritually surcharged with the transcendental vibration of Vedic mantras. From time to time, Draupadī would give vent to her intolerable grief by criticizing Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira for his tolerant and forgiving nature. At such times, she would say, "O King, upon seeing us depart from Hastināpura, all but four persons had shed tears of grief: Duryodhana, Duḥśasana, Karṇa and Śakuni. Alas! You and your brothers are the most exalted of kṣatriyas"
and thus you deserve every sort of royal luxury and comfort. Indeed, from your very childhood you have been accustomed to much opulence. O King, now that you are forced to live an austere forest life due to the cunning intrigues of the Kauravas, isn't your anger at all incited? Doesn't your heart burn with rage when you see how your mighty brothers have sunk into the depths of despair? Alas! My husbands are certainly quite competent to vanquish their enemies and yet they are being forced to remain patient just to honor your vow to live a miserable life in the forest!"

While thus speaking to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Draupadī would again and again remind him of how she had been dishonored in the assembly of Kurus and yet her husbands had failed to protect her. Draupadī then said, "O King, how can you pardon the Kauravas after seeing how much your brothers and I are suffering? You are a living refutation of the old adage which says, 'There is no kṣatriya in existence who is devoid of anger!' A kṣatriya who does not forgive when suitable, and who does not show his prowess when there is need of valor, is condemned by the people in general and he meets with destruction. To illustrate this principle, I shall now relate to you a conversation between Prahlāda Mahārāja and his grandson Bali that had transpired long ago.

"One day, Bali approached Prahlāda Mahārāja and asked, 'Which is actually meritorious, forgiveness or the use of strength? My dear Grandfather, I am very puzzled by this question.'

"Prahlāda Mahārāja replied, 'Neither forgiveness nor the use of power is meritorious in all situations. If one were always to forgive, then his servants, dependents, enemies and even strangers would disrespect him. When one always forgives, then mean-minded servants gradually steal all of his wealth and fail to respond to his commands. The wife of one who always forgives comes to act as she pleases and thus, along with the servants, she Takes to all kinds of vices."

"On the other hand, one who simply punishes and never forgives, soon finds himself to be bereft of all friends. Indeed, everyone comes to hate such an unforgiving person, and when there is the slightest opportunity, they do something to harm him. Therefore, the conclusion is that prowess and forgiveness should be exhibited at the proper times.

"My dear Bali, the following persons should be forgiven: one who has
done nice service in the past, even if guilty of a grave fault; one who
offends simply due to ignorance or folly; one who is a first-time offender;
one who has committed wrong against his will; and, in addition, other
offenders may sometimes be forgiven just to create a good public image.
"The following persons should not be forgiven: one who has knowingly
offended and claims to be innocent (such a crooked person should be
punished even if his offense is slight); and, a second-offender, no matter
how small his crime has been."
Draupadī then concluded by saying, "O King, now is the time for us to
display our strength instead of wasting away here in the forest! Those
persons who are always humble and forgiving come to be disregarded by
everyone."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then replied, "My dear Draupadī, strength must be
guided by intelligence and not by blind passion. Uncontrolled anger
always leads one to ruin while the suppression of such anger enables one
to obtain prosperity. Therefore, how can you expect me to give way to
uncontrollable rage when I possess this good understanding? When a
person becomes controlled by anger, there is nothing which he is
incapable of doing and he will speak harshly even to his superiors.
Considering this, a wise man carefully controls his anger, and so will I.
"If great emphasis were not placed upon forgiveness, then all injuries
would be retaliated against so that the continual fighting would
ultimately cause the destruction of everyone. It is only due to the good
quality of forgiveness that there is any peace and prosperity at all upon
the earth. Indeed, forgiveness can be said to be the very force that holds
the universe together. Therefore, my dear Draupadī, how can you expect
me to abandon forgiveness in favor of unbridled anger? Instead, you
should also become forgiving, and then, like me, you will not suffer so
much frustration. I am confident that since Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Lord Krṣṇa,
Vidura, and many other superior personalities are urging Dhṛtarāṣṭra to
make a peaceful settlement, the old king will soon return our share of
the kingdom. Indeed, if you carefully consider the matter, you will see
that the only reason why I deserve to rule over a kingdom is because I
possess the quality of forgiveness. In the same way, Duryodhana is
actually unqualified because he lacks that essential quality."
Draupadī was hardly pleased with Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra's understanding
and so she indignantly replied, "O King, what is the use of your so-called virtue? In this world nothing is gained by gentleness, forgiveness or by being straight-forward. Just see how you are the very proof of what I say. You have always been the emblem of all virtuous qualities, and yet, the only result is that you have achieved our present suffering. Everyone says that God is the Supreme Controller and that a living being achieves happiness or distress according to the destiny which is molded by his past deeds. If this be the case, then just consider how the wicked Duryodhana is flourishing while your pious self is miserable! The only conclusion is that God must not be just and good, as He is made out to be. Instead, He appears to be more like a capricious child Who whimsically arranges the play of life by manipulating the toy-like living beings with His illusory power of māyā. Indeed, it is obvious that God is the one to blame for all of our suffering! The only other possibility would be that one simply obtains happiness and distress as a result of his own endeavor, and a so-called God and karma have nothing at all to do with it."

At this Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear Draupadī, you are speaking very eloquently. However, the only fault is that you are presenting atheistic philosophy! As for myself, I am not even concerned about whether my acts bear fruit or not. I have never acted simply for the purpose of achieving some good result or personal benefit. I have always endeavored to conduct myself piously simply because I consider it my duty to do so. Indeed, my heart is naturally inclined toward virtue and thus I have not had to deprive myself in order to execute religious principles!

"One who acts virtuously in the expectation of enjoying some good result is not a truly pious man. Indeed one who acts with such a motive or who acts virtuously while at the same time maintaining doubts about the true merit of religious principles does not gain the real result of piety. My dear Draupadī, cannot you see how such great sages as Mārkaṇḍeya, Vyāsadeva and Nārada Muni have achieved their exalted positions as a result of having acted virtuously? Therefore, you should not doubt the existence of the all-merciful Supreme Lord, nor should you criticize Him as being unjust.

"Doubts about the existence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead are
caused by māyā, the illusory potency of the Lord. Otherwise, in pure consciousness, one is able to see the Lord everywhere, either directly or indirectly. In the lower forms of life, such as plants and animals, there is no facility for understanding the existence of God. On the other hand, the human form of life is nature's special gift to the conditioned soul for enabling him to come to the platform of God consciousness. Of course, as long as one is covered by the conditioning of nature's three modes: goodness, passion and ignorance, it is not possible to directly perceive the transcendental form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Still, since the transcendentally situated Supreme Lord is the originator of this mundane cosmos, His existence can also be understood indirectly by perceiving the influence which He exerts over His creation. In other words, if one is a little thoughtful and open-minded while considering the nature of his environment, he can ascertain with firm conviction that the Supreme Lord positively exists.

"It is our common experience that matter, although dull and inert, can be manipulated by a living being in many wonderful ways. Especially the human beings, with their advanced intelligence, have arranged matter in numerous ingenious ways. Just see the great palaces, chariots and planned cities which man has built. Then, there are artistic expressions in painting, musical composition and poetry, which are arrangements of subtle matter. Now, it must be readily admitted that no such achievement could be accomplished by any species of life other than the human beings. Indeed, even ordinary men are incapable of producing engineering or artistic wonders, for these things are the work of highly exceptional geniuses. How then could it be argued that such things are produced blindly or by 'chance'? Could anyone argue that our royal assembly house at Indraprastha was assembled by a random interaction of material energies? Clearly, any sophisticated organization of matter is accomplished with the use of great intelligence, and the more complex arrangements indicates a greater degree of intelligence.

"Now, my dear Draupadī, let us examine the creations of nature which, according to your theory, have evolved by 'chance'. Let us see if, in reality, they indicate an application of superior intelligence! Maya Dānava created Śālva's wonderful flying city, but could he assemble an airplane as small as a mosquito with the navigator inside? Or two
airplanes that mate in order to reproduce many more of their kind without any external help? Therefore, whose creations are more remarkable, those made by humans or those created by nature?

"Perhaps the most remarkable of nature's creations is the human body. Even one living cell is more complex in organization than all of Hastināpura with its innumerable buildings and streets. Just see how the human body comprises various instruments and systems, all perfectly coordinated into a wonderfully functioning unit! This growing human body is assembled in the factory of the mother's womb, and yet, even if she is the most highly educated woman, she cannot understand more than slightly how it is being manufactured. My dear Draupadi, you must admit that no one can make something unless he has full knowledge of its construction and functioning. Tell me, then, who has made this body? Certainly no human being is capable of manufacturing even a single cell. How then can we conclude that the organizer of the entire body is lacking in intelligence, or, in other words, that there is no creator and the body just came about by 'chance'? The only sane and unprejudiced conclusion is that nature is working under a supremely intelligent director, for when we speak of intelligence and consciousness, we must be referring to a person. Whenever we see a conscious application of intelligence, it immediately raises the question, 'Who has made this?' For this reason, any sane man must admit that God exists without a doubt because His supremely powerful, expert, sensitive and artistic hand can be seen everywhere. Who has made these beautiful flowers and butterflies? Who is supplying us with water, heat, light, food and all other necessities of life? The only reasonable answer is God. Therefore, my dear Draupadi, please give up all your doubts in this regard.

"In the same way, O daughter of Drupada, you should not doubt the value of executing religious principles, since they are nothing but the laws of God. Only a fool considers his own speculations to be superior to the knowledge of the śāstra. Not only does such a rascal blaspheme the Vedic literatures, but he considers the great learned sages to be no better than madmen! Such misguided souls can only see the externally manifested world and thus their only engagement is sense gratification, being urged on by lust and greed. By thus acting sinfully while at the same time blaspheming the Vedas, such persons go to hell after death in
order to suffer unbearable torments. If there were no value in acting virtuously, then everyone would simply live like animals. My dear Draupādi, you should not blaspheme the Supreme Lord but surrender unto Him instead, for that is the highest principle of religion."

Draupādi then replied, "My dear king, I have never harbored even the slightest disrespect for God. It is only because of my extreme misery that I was raving like one bereft of all good sense. Now, please listen as I indulge my grief further. In this world it is seen that some people believe that destiny is the sole cause of attaining some result; others believe that chance is the cause; and still others believe that only action is the cause. However, those that believe in destiny or chance are the worst among men, whereas those who have faith in action are laudable. One who thinks that everything is obtained by chance or destiny would simply sit by idly, waiting for things to happen automatically, and in this way he would soon meet with destruction. Actually, when something is obtained without any apparent endeavor, it is not due to chance but is the result of ones previous actions.

"O Hero, dull matter is inactive but living beings are meant for action! It is everyone's practical experience that according to the quality of his actions, a good or bad result is obtained. Of course, there are certainly other factors that influence the results of our activities, but endeavor must be considered the chief cause. Therefore, one should always endeavor to the best of his ability, considering that to be his actual duty. Then, after having acted in this way, the resultant success or failure will come accordingly. For example, a farmer plows the field and then sows the seeds. Thereafter, he waits for rain, knowing that he has labored to the best of his ability and that final success or failure is in the hands of God.

"O King, the miserable condition of life which we now find ourselves in should be rectified by action. We should endeavor to the best of our abilities to regain our usurped kingdom and then, having thus fulfilled our duty, we will reap the good or bad result according to Destiny."

Bhīma then addressed Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira as follows: "O King, life in the forest is meant for cowards! What a misfortune it was that we refrained from killing the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra just so that you could keep your promise. Otherwise, no real hero who is proud of his prowess would
ever accept a life of exile. Indeed, I would rather be killed on the battlefield than live a cowardly life of forgiveness and peace. My dear brother, to tell you the truth I think that your so-called virtue is just a cover-up for your weakness. Virtue should never be practiced for its own sake, as you have foolishly recommended, just as money should never be earned for its own sake. Virtue and wealth are meant to be utilized for the purpose of gaining prosperity and pleasure. Therefore, O King, your sense of righteousness should be utilized only for regaining our kingdom and alleviating our present distress.

"Dharma, artha and kāma are all interdependent, and thus, one must allot a proportionate amount of time for the development of all three, one after the other. The pursuit of dharma, artha and kāma must be executed with great enthusiasm. Otherwise, one's life becomes wretched and miserable. In order to perform religious acts, wealth is required, and so this life of mendicancy is completely unsuitable for us. Virtue for a kṣatriya is to kill his enemies and then prosper. By deviating from our occupational duties, we are actually becoming reproachable. My dear brother, the real fact is that your sinful weakness for gambling with dice is the cause of our present distress! Therefore, give up all theoretical talks of morality, and let us mount upon our chariots at once! After vanquishing the Kauravas in battle, we shall take back what is rightfully ours!"

Mahārāja Yudhishthira had certainly become agitated while being attacked by both his wife and brother. Thus, he paused for a moment in order to regain his patience. Then, the king sarcastically replied to Bhīma by saying,

"My dear brother, what you have said is absolutely correct. My greedy desire to acquire Duryodhana's kingdom by gambling with dice is the whole cause of your present suffering. You may remember how you had wanted to burn my hands but were then restrained by Arjuna. If you had exhibited your prowess before the gambling match then this calamity might have been averted. However, after I had agreed to the wager by saying, "So be it!" how could I deviate from accepting the consequences, no matter how unpalatable? Once having made a promise, I will never break it because for me, truthfulness is more dear than life itself. My dear Bhīma, if you can be patient and wait for the proper time, then we
shall surely exert our prowess in order to regain our kingdom."
Bhima then argued, "O King, mortal beings like ourselves, whose
duration of life is very limited and uncertain, should never depend upon
achieving some goal in the future. How can one who is destined to die
wait thirteen years for the fulfillment of his ambitions? Kshatriyas who
do not immediately chastise their enemies live in vain! How lamentable
it is that our kingdom was snatched away by weaker enemies who are
wicked by nature as well. O King, do not think that only Draupadi and
myself want to immediately fight with the Kauravas in order to regain
our rightful kingdom. Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva are of the same
mind, but out of respect for you they have remained silent. My dear
brother, your determination to keep your promise is only a
manifestation of cowardice and weakness. Everyone knows that the
behavior of kṣatriyas is filled with crookedness. Your nature is like that
of a brāhmaṇa and not a kṣatriya, and thus you are avoiding your real
duty. And, suppose that we remain patient just so that you can fulfill
your vow. How do you think that we shall be able to remain for one
whole year without being recognized? So many of the kings whom we
formerly subjugated will now join the side of Duryodhana and help him
by sending out spies to find us. Therefore, you should make up your
mind to kill your enemies without delay, and in this way you will fulfill
your real duty as a kṣatriya."
After listening to Bhima, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was very agitated, and
he loudly sighed again and again. The king then reflected on the matter
for some time and finally concluded to himself, "The real truth of
morality is not easily understood and thus it cannot be forced upon
someone simply by argument."
He then replied, "My dear Bhīma, even if prowess is given the foremost
consideration, still, a well-planned use of force is certainly better than
rashness. By advocating that we immediately go and attack the
Kauravas, you are acting very impetuously. As you yourself have
admitted, many of the kings whom we had previously subjugated will
join with Duryodhana and so will Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Kṛpa. Although
these three venerable elders are by nature impartial, they have received
innumerable royal favors from the Kauravas, and thus they are obligated
to fight against us. Then, there is Karna, who has natural, impenetrable
armor, and who is the foremost wielder of the bow. Indeed, because of thinking about Karṇa's great skill and prowess, I cannot even sleep at night!"

After hearing his elder brother describe the immense prowess of the enemy, Bhīma became somewhat alarmed and so thereafter, he simply remained silent. Śrīla Vyāsadeva then suddenly arrived there, and after being worshipped by the Pāṇḍavas, he sat down along with them in order to speak to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Śrīla Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear grandson, I can understand what is in your heart by dint of my spiritual insight. Therefore, I have come here to dispel your nagging fear of the mighty warriors whom you shall have to oppose."

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then took Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira aside, and in a secluded place he said, "O King, I am now going to impart unto you the mystic powers which are known as pratismṛti. In turn, when you give this knowledge to Arjuna, it will enable him to approach the chief demigods, such as Indra, Lord Śiva, Varuṇa, Kuvera and Yamarāja, for the purpose of acquiring celestial weapons. Arjuna is competent to utilize these mystic powers for he is actually the great ṛṣi Nāra, who is the eternal associate of Lord Nārāyaṇa. After my departure, I want you to move to another forest, for to stay in one place will gradually cause you to become stagnant. Besides, this forest will soon become depleted of all natural resources because of your obligation to feed so many brāhmaṇas."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira first of all performed some rites for purification, and then he received the knowledge of pratismṛti from Śrīla Vyāsadeva by memorizing all of the mantras. The son of Parāśara then departed, and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to regularly repeat the mantras of pratismṛti just to perfectly retain them in his memory. Soon thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas returned to Kāmyakavana on the banks of the River Sarasvatī. While residing there, they passed their time practicing with the bow and hearing the Vedic literatures from the brāhmaṇas who accompanied them.

Then, one day, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira called Arjuna to a secluded place. While clasping him by the hands and smiling broadly, the king said, "My dear brother, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, Āsvatthāmā and Karṇa all possess knowledge of celestial weapons as well as earthly weapons, and they are
dedicated to the cause of Duryodhana. Since the whole world is now under the rule of the Kauravas, you are our only shelter. When Śrīla Vyāsadeva last visited us at Dvaitavana, he imparted the science of pratismṛti unto me. Now, by receiving this knowledge from me, the entire universe will become accessible so that you can receive the mercy of the greatest demigods. After becoming empowered with the pratismṛti mantras, I want you to go to the Himālayas and perform severe austerities. Encased in armor and keeping your bow and arrows at hand, you must endeavor to meet King Indra, for he is in possession of all the celestial weapons. Long ago, when the entire universe was oppressed with fear of Vṛtrāsura, the demigods had given Indra their best weapons so as to enable him to kill the great demon."

First of all, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had Arjuna undergo certain preliminary rituals, and then he gave him the mantras of pratismṛti. After memorizing the mantras, Arjuna had the brāhmaṇas perform a sacrifice for his welfare. Then, after taking the blessings of the brāhmaṇas, Arjuna circumambulated his brothers and Dhaumya and received the well-wishes of Draupadi. Finally, after encasing himself in armor and taking up his Gāṇḍīva bow and two inexhaustible quivers, Arjuna set out for the North with great enthusiasm. Thereafter, Arjuna passed over many mountains inhabited by rṣis before he arrived at the Himavat. It took Arjuna only one day to reach this abode of the demigods, for he traveled at the speed of mind by dint of his acquired mystic power. Crossing over the Himavat, Arjuna soon came to Gandhamādāna, and from there he reached Indrakila after walking day and night. As soon as he arrived at that sacred spot, however, a voice from the sky ordered Arjuna to stop. Then, when Arjuna looked around in astonishment, he saw a frail-looking rṣi seated beneath a tree, who was blazing with ascetic splendor. The rṣi then said, "O Hero, who are you that has come here? Now, you must discard your bow and arrows if you desire to reside here, for this is the abode of brāhmaṇas. By coming here you have attained to a higher platform of existence. There are no disputes in this place, and thus there is no necessity for such weapons." Although the rṣi repeatedly requested Arjuna to throwaway his bow and
arrows, the son of Kunti remained adamant by keeping in mind his mission. The rṣi was actually pleased with Arjuna's determination and so, at last, he revealed his identity by saying, "I am Indra, the king of heaven, and I am pleased that you have been able to come here. Now, please ask me for any benediction which you may desire."

Arjuna felt awe-struck at being in the presence of the celestial chief, and so he lowered his head out of respect. Then, with folded hands, he said, "O king of heaven, my aspiration is to receive all of your celestial weapons."

Indra then smilingly replied, "Since you have reached these heavenly regions, what need do you have for weapons? It would be much more intelligent for you to ask me for eternal residence in this abode of godly delights!"

However, Arjuna declared, "I do not desire to enjoy the prosperity or happiness of heavenly life until I can rejoin my brothers and then take revenge against my enemies."

Indra then informed Arjuna, "First of all, you must obtain the darśan and blessings of Lord Śiva. Then, I shall once again appear and deliver unto you all of the celestial weapons which you desire. Now, engage yourself rigidly in the worship of Lord Mahādeva so that your aspiration may quickly be fulfilled."

After saying this, Indra disappeared from that spot, and Arjuna continued to reside there, applying himself to the execution of very severe austerities. Dressed in deerskin, rags and grass, Arjuna ate only fallen leaves and fruit every third day during the first month of his vow. Then, during the second month, he reduced his eating to only one time in six days. During the entire third month, Arjuna ate only twice, and at the beginning of the fourth month, he gave up eating altogether. While standing on the tips of his toes and with his arms upraised, Arjuna maintained his life simply by breathing air.

At this time, all of the rṣis who resided in that area approached Lord Śiva and said, "O Lord, because of Arjuna's severe austerities, the entire area is becoming over-heated, and thus we are feeling some difficulty. O deliverer of the distressed, please go to Arjuna and make him desist from his terrible vows."

Lord Śiva replied, "O Sages, rest assured that I know all about Arjuna's
intention. Do not be anxious, for this very day I shall go and award him with the fulfillment of his desires."

After the ṛṣis had departed, Lord Śiva assumed the form of a large Kirāta hunter. Taking up his bow and arrows, he then went to where Arjuna was performing austerities, accompanied by Umā, who was disguised as a Kirāta woman, and numerous other associates who had taken similar forms. Because of Lord Śiva's presence the entire forest took on a more beautiful aspect, and silence prevailed as all of the birds, animals and streams became quiet. Then, as Lord Śiva came to the spot where Arjuna was standing, he saw that a demon named Müka had taken the form of a boar and was stealthily approaching Kunti's son with the intention of killing him. When Arjuna saw the fierce boar, he quickly strung his bow and while placing an arrow upon the bowstring, he announced, "Kindly wait a moment, and I shall send you to the abode of Yamarāja."

Lord Śiva, as a Kirāta, then forbade Arjuna by saying, "You cannot slay this boar for I have aimed at it first."

Arjuna ignored the words of the hunter, however, and thus both he and the Kirāta released their arrows so that they simultaneously pierced the boar. Then, while giving up his life, the boar assumed his real form as a terrible Rākṣasa. Arjuna then saw before him the Kirāta, surrounded by numerous women, his effulgent, golden form giving him the appearance of a demigod. Taking this as an opportunity to exhibit his prowess, Arjuna inquired, "Who are you, and why have you come to this forest? Because you have impudently pierced the boar that was first aimed at by me, I will not allow you to leave here with your life!"

The Kirāta smilingly replied, "We are accustomed to living in the forest, and so you should not be surprised to see me here. On the other hand, you were brought up in royal luxury. For what purpose have you come here to reside? It was I and not you who struck the fierce Rākṣasa with my arrow and sent him to the abode of Yamarāja! It was I who first took aim! Because you are overly proud of your strength, you have foolishly imputed your own fault to another. It is you who have acted against the codes of hunting, and thus I shall not let you escape with your life!"

At this, Arjuna became enraged and so, without further talk, he attacked the Kirāta with his arrows. The hunter remained undisturbed,
however, and then smilingly urged, "You wretch! Why don't you discharge some more powerful arrows that are capable of piercing me?"

Arjuna replied with showers of arrows and soon, the fighting became very fierce as both heroes became enraged. However, when Arjuna saw that the Kirāta was unaffected in spite of his perfect shower of arrows, he thought with great astonishment, "This is no ordinary adversary. I know that sometimes the demigods descend upon the Himālayas in order to enjoy themselves. Perhaps this is Lord Śiva or some other Deva, Yakṣa or asura. Still, whoever it may be, if he is anyone other than Lord Śiva, I will surely vanquish him very shortly!"

While thinking like this, Arjuna once again showered his arrows, but to no avail. Then, he was shocked to find that his arrows suddenly became exhausted. Being exceedingly alarmed, Arjuna thought of Agni, who had given him the so-called inexhaustible quivers. Then, as Arjuna wondered what weapon he should employ next, the Kirāta came close by. Taking advantage of this good opportunity, Arjuna placed the end of his bow around the hunter's neck and then began to drag him while simultaneously striking him with his fists. Then, much to his dismay, the Kirāta suddenly snatched away his bow and so Arjuna quickly unsheathed his sword and rushed at his foe, hoping to end the conflict once and for all.

Although this mighty sword could smash rocks to pieces with its sharp blade, when Arjuna brought it down with full force upon the Kirāta's head, it broke into fragments as soon as it touched the hunter's crown. At this, Arjuna resorted to showering rocks and trees upon the Kirāta, but the hunter bore all of these with perfect patience. Finally, in desperation, the maddened Arjuna rushed impetuously at his enemy and struck him with his fists with all his might. When the Kirāta returned the blows the entire forest reverberated with the thundering sounds. Arjuna then tried to crush the Kirāta in his embrace, and as the two mighty warriors squeezed each other, smoke began to emanate from their bodies. The Kirāta was more powerful, however, and thus Arjuna soon lost consciousness due to the crushing force of his embrace. Indeed, with his body all bruised and mangled, Arjuna fell to the ground, as if dead. Then, when he finally regained consciousness, the blood-stained Pāṇḍava hero became very aggrieved upon realizing that he had been
defeated. In that humiliated condition, Arjuna began to mentally prostrate himself before Lord Śiva in order to offer him his obeisances. Then, from the clay which he found around him, Arjuna fashioned a small deity of Lord Mahādeva. Thereafter, as he engaged in worshipping the mūrti, Arjuna suddenly saw that the flower garland which he had offered was decorating the crown of the Kirāta, and thus he became filled with great joy. In this way, Arjuna realized that it was Lord Śiva himself who had appeared before him due to being pleased with his execution of austerities. Having thus regained his composure, Arjuna offered his obeisances at the lotus feet of Lord Śiva, who then said, "My dear son of Kunti, I am very pleased to have witnessed your prowess, which is almost equal to my own. Now, I shall give you divine eyes so that you can behold my original form. O Arjuna, you are actually a great rṣi and eternal associate of the Supreme Lord. Therefore, there is no doubt that ultimately you will vanquish your enemies. I also wish to play a part in helping you to achieve that end and so I will give you one of my irresistible weapons."

When Arjuna saw Lord Śiva and the goddess Umā in their celestial forms, he got down upon his knees and with folded hands he offered prayers. Arjuna begged the Lord to mercifully forgive him for his having ignorantly dared to challenge him to fight. In response, Lord Śiva took Arjuna by the hand and then smilingly pardoned him for the supposed offense. Then, Lord Śiva warmly embraced Arjuna and said, "O descendent of Bhārata, in a former life you appeared on this earth as Nara, the friend of Lord Nārāyaṇa. Now, please give up all misgivings, for I shall once again make your quiver inexhaustible and I will relieve your body of all pain. In addition, you may ask from me whatever benediction you like, for I am very pleased with your pure devotional attitude."

Arjuna then requested, "O Lord, please give me the brahmāstra weapon by which you destroy the entire universe. With that supreme weapon I shall be able to face Bhīma, Droṇa and other great warriors without fear."

Lord Śiva replied, "I shall award you this favorite weapon of mine, which is known as the pāśupata, and which is not even possessed by the great
demigods, headed by Indra. However, I must warn you that if it is invoked without adequate cause, the pāśupata can destroy the entire universe. There is no one in existence who can escape death when this weapon is discharged, and it can be employed by the use of a bow, or else simply by mantra, thought or glance."

After hearing this, Arjuna first of all purified himself and then requested Lord Śiva to instruct him in the weapon's use. In this way, Lord Śiva imparted the knowledge of the pāśupata-astra to Arjuna, and then, from that time onward, that weapon began to wait upon the son of Kuntī just as it did upon Mahādeva. When the pāśupata-astra was imparted to Arjuna, the earth began to tremble and the sound of a thousand conchshells, drums and trumpets could be heard. Hurricane winds began to blow and all of the demigods and demons could see the terrible weapon in its embodied form as it stood at Arjuna's side.

Due to the touch of Lord Śiva, Arjuna became completely relieved from all kinds of material contamination and thus he began to shine forth with a blazing spiritual splendor. Lord Śiva then returned the Gāṇḍīva bow to Arjuna and said, "Now you shall be able to ascend to heaven in order to fulfill your cherished mission."

After saying this, Lord Śiva suddenly departed from that place by going through the sky along with Umā and his other associates. Having received the mercy of Lord Śiva, Arjuna felt as if all of his objectives had already been achieved. Then, as he remained absorbed in thought, marveling about all that had just transpired, Varuṇa suddenly appeared before Arjuna along with his associates, the rivers personified, and many Nāgas, Daityas, Sādhyas and great aquatics. Kuvera then came there along with numerous Yakṣas, and so did Yamarāja, accompanied by the pītṛs. The next moment, King Indra arrived there, riding upon his carrier, Airāvata. The heavenly ruler was accompanied by his consort Śacī, and he was being preceded by hosts of Gandharvas and great ṛṣis.

After alighting on the surrounding mountain tops, these Lokapālas addressed Arjuna one after the other. From the south mountain peak, Yamarāja said in a deep voice, "O son of Kuntī, you have been given divine vision in order to behold us in our celestial forms. We have come here to assure you that Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa and all others who oppose you will be vanquished, because Lord Viṣṇu Himself has appeared on the
earth in order to relieve it of its burden. Now, in order to assist you in your mission, here is my infallible mace along with the mantras for employing it."

From the western peak, Varuṇa then said, "O Arjuna, I shall award to you my infallible nooses and other incomparable weapons."

From the northern peak, Kuvera said, "Here is my favorite weapon, the antardhana, which puts the enemy to sleep."

From the eastern peak, Indra said, "My dear son, in order to fulfill your mission, you will spend some time with me in my heavenly abode. Soon, Mātali will come to you, riding on my chariot, and he will take you to Āmārapurī. There, I shall impart unto you all of the celestial weapons which are being kept in my custody."

Arjuna was certainly astonished to see all of the Lokapālas before him, and after receiving their weapons, he worshipped them with prayers and offerings of fruit and water. Thereafter, the demigods departed for their respective abodes, and from that time on, all that Arjuna could think of was the expected arrival of Indra's chariot. It was while absorbed in such thoughts that Arjuna suddenly beheld the effulgent chariot coursing through the sky, making a rattling sound like thunder. Drawn by 10,000 horses, the chariot of Indra was occupied by huge Nāgas. After bringing the chariot before Arjuna, Mātali got down from his driver's seat and announced, "My dear son of Indra, please mount upon this chariot, for the king of heaven wishes to see you without delay!"

Arjuna then requested, "O Mātali, please mount upon the chariot first while I perform some purificatory rites. One who is deficient in ascetic merit cannot even hope to see this chariot, and so what to speak of ride on it."

After saying this, Arjuna took his bath in the Gaṅgā while reciting his customary prayers. Then, he offered water to the pīṭras and at last, he offered respects unto the Mandara mountain where he had been residing. Arjuna expressed his appreciation for having taken advantage of the mountain's fruits, water and other necessities which it had kindly provided.

Thereafter, Arjuna mounted upon the celestial chariot with great delight, and as it ascended into the sky, he was able to behold many
wonderful regions which from the earth appear to be mere points of light. In these heavenly regions, there is no sign of sun, moon or fire, because the ascetic splendor of the residents illuminate them brilliantly. Arjuna then saw numerous rājarṣis who had died in battle or else had attained to the heavenly regions by dint of their success in performing great austerities. He also saw numberless Gandharvas, Guhyakas, Apsarās and ṛṣis, and when he inquired about them from Mātali, the charioteer explained, "O son of Kuntī, all of these virtuous persons were beheld by you from the earth as the twinkling points known as stars."

At last, after passing through innumerable regions of great beauty and splendor, Arjuna arrived at Amarāvatī, the abode of Indra. Arjuna first of all saw Airāvata, the king of heaven's elephant carrier. Then he saw the Nandana garden, which is the sporting ground of the Apsarās, and finally the city of Indra itself, crowded with Siddhas and Cāraṇas. The heavenly regions which Arjuna beheld are only seen by those who have been highly virtuous. They can never be visited by persons who failed to perform sacrifices, who turned their back on the enemy during battle, who drank intoxicating liquor and who ate meat which had not been first offered in sacrifice.

After entering Amarāvatī, Arjuna was astonished to see thousands of celestial chariots and innumerable gardens which resounded with the sounds of heavenly music. As he went along the avenues, he was praised by hosts of Gandharvas, Apsarās, Siddhas and ṛṣis. Mātali then introduced Arjuna to the Sādhyas, Viśvadevas, Maruts, Aśvins, Ādityas, Vasus, Rudras and Brahmarṣis, as well as the great Rājarṣis who resided there headed by Dilīpa.

Thereafter, Arjuna met Nārada Muni, Tumburu, and the Gandharvas Hāhā and Hūhū. At last, after having offered his respects unto all of these exalted personalities, Arjuna was brought into the presence of Indra. The king of heaven was seated upon the his royal throne, over which was held a white umbrella. He was being fanned by numerous perfumed cámaras and he was being praised not only by the Gandharvas, but also by the foremost brāhmaṇas. Arjuna quickly dismounted from the chariot and bowed down his head with great reverence at the feet of his father. In turn, Indra raised Arjuna up and embraced him with great affection. Then, taking hold of Arjuna's hand, Indra made him sit down
beside him upon his royal throne. Indeed, due to great parental love, Indra took Arjuna upon his lap and began to smell his head with great satisfaction. While touching Arjuna's face with his hand, Indra gazed at him with insatiable eyes. All the while, the Gandharvas were offering their praises and thousands of Apsarás danced. The incomparably lovely celestial nymphs shook their large breasts as they coyly glanced around and exhibited other attractive features that were capable of stealing away the hearts of all men who beheld them. Then, having understood the desire of Indra, the Gandharvas brought forth arghya and water for Arjuna to wash his feet. Finally, Arjuna was led into Indra's palace where he continued to reside for the next five years, surrounded by every sort of comfort and luxury imaginable. During this period, Arjuna received Indra's favorite weapon, the thunderbolt, as well as numerous other celestial weapons, directly from his father's hand. However, even though he resided in heaven and thus had every sort of material facility at his beck and call, Arjuna felt great pang of separation from his brothers. Then, one day, after Arjuna had received all of the celestial weapons along with the knowledge of how to invoke them, Indra said, "My dear son, now I want you to learn the arts of music and dancing from the Gandharva, Citrasena."

Indra thus gave Citrasena to Arjuna as a friend so that he could learn about the music of heaven, which is unknown in the world of human beings. Thereafter, as the two friends lived happily together, Citrasena taught Arjuna the art of instrumental music, vocal music and dancing as well. Still, Arjuna always remained restless at heart for he constantly remembered how Śakuni had cheated his elder brother out of his kingdom. Arjuna also remembered Duḥśāsana's insults and thus longed for the time when he would witness his death. Indra had noticed how Arjuna repeatedly stared at Urvaši and so, one day, he called for Citrasena and ordered, "Go now as my messenger and inform Urvaši that she should entertain Arjuna in such a way as to make him fully conversant with the art of enjoying female companionship." Citrasena then went to Urvaši and said, "It is King Indra's desire that you go to Arjuna and make him taste the pleasures of heavenly sense enjoyment. I can assure you that Arjuna is already inclined to you."

At this, Urvaši smiled and replied, "It will be my great pleasure to accept
Arjuna as my lover, for I am already under the influence of Cupid's arrows."

Urvaṣī then dismissed Citrasena, and after having taken her bath,
dressed and decorated herself gorgeously, putting on flower garlands and
celestial perfumes. Being already overcome with lust, Urvaṣī began to
imagine within her mind how she would sport with Arjuna on a soft bed
and enjoy his loving caresses. When evening arrived, the moon rose
above the eastern horizon and Urvaṣī set out for Arjuna's residence.
While going through the street, she appeared to be especially beautiful,
and her large breasts forced her to bend slightly forward. Bunches of
flowers decorated her hair, and her large, perfectly shaped buttocks,
which were the abode of the god of love, were covered with a lacy cloth.
Being slightly intoxicated by liquor and highly excited by desire, the face
of Urvaṣī bore an exceptionally delightful expression. Thus, she who is
considered to be the pinnacle of beauty in the heavenly planets,
appeared to be even more beautiful on this occasion.
When Urvaṣī arrived at Arjuna's residence, she gave her introduction to
the doorkeeper and thereafter, she was ushered in. When Arjuna saw
that Urvaṣī had come to his home at night, he became a little fearful of
meeting her. Indeed, out of shyness, Arjuna closed his eyes as he
approached Urvaṣī and then, while showing her great respect, said,
"Please consider me to be your servant and thus command me as you
desire." Urvaṣī replied, "Your father, the king of heaven, has instructed
me to initiate you into the art of enjoying conjugal pleasure. Therefore,
O best of males, I have come here in order to accept you as my lover.
You may remember how, on your arrival in heaven, your father had
arranged a big festival in your honor inviting all of the demigods. At
that time, the principal Apsarās danced, and I could not help but notice
that your gaze was steadily fixed upon me. Your father had also seen this
and for this reason, he has ordered me to gratify you in all respects. My
dear handsome hero, frankly speaking, I am also very much attracted to
you, and thus in great eagerness I have come here." While listening to
Urvaṣī, Arjuna had become excessively bashful and he even covered his
eyes with his hand. Finally, Arjuna said, "O best of the Apsarās, I
consider you to be my superior, just like a mother. Indeed, you are the
mother of the entire Kuru dynasty and thus it was with great awe and
veneration that I had gazed upon you, for you are the superior of my superiors."

Urvaśī replied, "O foremost of kṣatriyas, we Apsarās are completely free to accept whoever we like as our lovers. Thus, even the sons and grandsons of the descendants of Pūru sport with us without incurring any sin. O Arjuna, I am burning with desire to have you and so please do not even think of turning me away."

However, Arjuna very respectfully insisted, "O respectable lady, I can only see you as a mother, just like I consider Kuntī, Mādrī or Śacī. Therefore, I will worship you just like a son and in return you should protect me just like a mother."

When Urvaśī thus saw that her passionate desire was doomed to frustration, her heart flared up with rage. Indeed, her whole body shook with anger and then, while furrowing her eyebrows, she cursed Arjuna by saying, "Because you have neglected a woman who has approached you under the dictates of lust and at the command of your father as well, you shall have to pass some time in the company of women as a eunuch dancing teacher!"

As Urvaśī thereafter returned home, she was still shaking with anger and breathing heavily. Arjuna immediately went to Citrasena and described everything that had taken place, and in turn, the Gandharva prince went and reported the matter to Indra. The king of heaven then called for Arjuna, and after taking him to a secluded place he began to console him with sweet words as follows: "My dear son, you have surpassed even the great rṣis in the matter of maintaining self-control in the presence of a beautiful woman! Do not be afraid of Urvaśī's curse, for it will act for your benefit during the thirteenth year of your exile, the period when you will have to remain incognito. Do not worry, for after passing that year as a eunuch, you will once again regain your manhood."

After hearing this, Arjuna gave up all anxiety with regards to Urvaśī's curse and thus he felt great relief. Then, one day, the great rṣi Lomasa came to Āmāravana in order to see the king of heaven. After bowing down before Indra, Lomasa Ṭṛṣṇi was offered a nice seat. Then, when he saw how Arjuna was sharing the same throne with the king of heaven, Lomasa began to wonder, "How is it that a mere kṣatriya could attain to
such an exalted position?" Indra could understand Lomasa's thoughts, and so he spoke as follows: "My dear ṛṣi, Arjuna is not an ordinary human being. He is actually my very own son. In his previous birth Arjuna had appeared as Nara, the associate of Nārāyaṇa ṛṣi, in order to execute severe austerities at Badarikāśrama in the Himalayas. Now, Nara and Nārāyaṇa have once again appeared in order to execute the mission of the demigods by relieving the burden of the earth.

"Besides this, there is a race of Dānavas known as Nivāta-kavacas, who have become invincible by dint of boons they had received from Lord Brahmā. The Nivāta-kavacas are now preparing to attack the demigods and only Nara, or Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself, is capable of killing them. It would not be proper for us to request Lord Nārāyaṇa to accomplish such a small task, however. Therefore, I will ask Arjuna to kill these Dānavas before returning to his brothers on earth.

"My dear Lomasa, I would also like to request you to please go and meet Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira at Kāmyakaavana. Reassure him about Arjuna's well-being and inform him that his brother will soon return after having mastered the use of all celestial weapons. In the meantime, as they await Arjuna's return, you should take the Pāṇḍavas on a tour of all the holy places of pilgrimage and protect them from the attacks of fierce Rākṣasas."

After giving his consent, Lomasa ṛṣi departed for earth, and soon thereafter, he arrived at the Kāmyaka forest. Meanwhile, at Hastināpura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra had heard from Śrīla Vyāsadeva about how Arjuna was residing in the abode of Indra. Calling for his secretary and confidant, Sañjaya, the blind king then disclosed his feelings by saying, "I consider Arjuna to be unrivaled and invincible and because of this my wicked sons are surely doomed."

Indeed, one after another, Dhṛtarāṣṭra remembered all of Arjuna's heroic feats, and the more he thought about them, the more morose he became. Sañjaya then said, "O King, you can rest assured that the Pāṇḍavas will never forgive Duḥṣāsana for dragging Draupadī into the assembly of Kurus, nor will they forgive Duryodhana for showing his thighs to her. When Bhīma saw these two outrages, he made terrible vows, and after Arjuna satisfied Lord Śiva by his prowess, that chief of the demigods predicted that the Pāṇḍavas would slay your sons in
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then lamented, "It is my misfortune that my eldest son does not follow my advice, considering me to be blind and foolish. Instead, he prefers to take council from those wretches, Karṇa and Śakuni. My dear Sañjaya, I pass my nights all sleeplessly because I am filled with unbearable anxiety and grief. My mind simply dwells upon the misbehavior of my own sons and the heroic feats of the Pāṇḍavas. Alas! I am such a fool because of my unwillingness to take advantage of the good advice which had repeatedly been given to me!"

Sañjaya replied, "O King, your lamentations are all useless! You could have restrained your evil-minded son, but due to blind affection for him you refused to do so. That is your one great fault and so now you will have to reap the consequences. Some time back, Lord Kṛṣṇa visited the Pāṇḍavas in the forest and upon seeing their wretched condition, He became highly enraged. Indeed, Lord Kṛṣṇa became so angry that He vowed to kill your sons and all their allies that very day! Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira managed to pacify the Lord, however, by urging Him to wait for the end of their exile. At this time, the Pāṇḍavas requested Kṛṣṇa to become Arjuna's charioteer when it would be necessary to fight with the Kurus. The Lord agreed to this proposal and then He gave Draupadī many assurances that her insults would be avenged."

When Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard this, he became even more convinced that a battle would take place as a result of his son's folly. Meanwhile, the Pāṇḍavas remained at Kāmyakavana, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Arjuna. They spent their time hunting deer in the forest or else in the company of the brāhmaṇas, studying the Vedas and performing sacrifices. The Pāṇḍavas also collected fruits and roots and offered them to the brāhmaṇas and took the remnants as prasādam. One day, as the Pāṇḍavas were sitting together, plunged into the ocean of grief on account of separation from Arjuna, Bhima gave vent to his pent-up grief and addressed his elder brother as follows, "O King, your fondness of dice is the sole cause of our misfortune! And if that were not enough, you have sent away Arjuna, making our misery even more unbearable! A kṣatriya's duty is to fight! Therefore, after summoning Arjuna and Lord Kṛṣṇa, we should immediately go and kill the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. It is not sinful to kill deceitful people by crooked means. And, if you insist
upon keeping your vow, then, after killing the Kauravas, you can return to the forest in order to pass the remaining time. What is the use of such over-adherence to so-called morality? What if we are recognized during the thirteenth year of our exile? Even if we can successfully keep ourselves hidden, upon our return to Hastināpura, you will certainly be challenged to dice once again and thus all of our endeavors will prove fruitless. I can kill all of the Kauravas single-handedly, but I do not do so simply because I am awaiting your permission." In the hopes of pacifying his brother, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Bhīma, just be patient. Rest assured that at the end of the thirteenth year, you and Arjuna will slay Duryodhana and all of his allies."

While Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was thus speaking to Bhīma, a great sage named Brhadāśva came there, and so the king offered him a nice seat and respectful worship with offerings of and other articles. Then, when Brhadāśva was seated at ease, Yudhiṣṭhira submitted his unhappiness before the sage as follows: "O Åñi, because we have lost our kingdom in a deceitful gambling match and have suffered great insults from our relatives, our lives have simply become painful burdens. Besides this, our beloved Arjuna is also absent and thus we have all become very morose. My dear sage, in the history of this earth, has there ever been anyone more unfortunate than myself?"

Brhadāśva replied, "My dear king, please listen to me with rapt attention, as I narrate the history of a person who was put into a much more wretched condition than you: There was once a king of the niṣādas named Nala, who was the son of Vērasena. Like Indra in the heavenly kingdom, Nala was the foremost of monarchs and like the sun, his glories were spread everywhere and were most resplendent. Highly beloved by both men and women, King Nala was a very powerful and heroic warrior and was the foremost of bowmen. The righteous and truthful king was a great soul, and, ever determined to act for the welfare of brāhmaṇas, he was well versed in the Vedas and a controller of the senses. Mahārāja Nala was a man of great and diverse accomplishment. He was especially well veised in the knowledge of horses and was very fond of playing dice. During this time, King Bhīma ruled over the Vidarbhas, and like Nala, was the possessor of every virtue. Mahārāja Bhīma was a most powerful
and unwavering hero on the battlefield and to his subjects, he was the most sympathetic ruler. And yet, in spite of all endeavors, King Bhêma was nonetheless morose, for it so happened that he was childless. Then, one day, a brahmârṣi named Damana arrived at the royal court, and so King Bhêma and his queen provided him with a most warm and respectful reception. Being very pleased with their great hospitality, the great ṛṣi blessed the couple so that in due course of time, they were blessed with an incomparable daughter, as well as three exalted sons. The girl was named Damayantî and the three boys, all of whom possessed extraordinary prowess and highly elevated character, were named Dama, Danta and Damana.

As she grew up, Damayantî became celebrated all over the whole world on account of her remarkable beauty. Indeed, while being waited upon by hundreds of young and beautiful maidservants all gorgeously dressed and decorated with valuable jewels and ornaments, the slender-waisted and large-eyed Damayantî shone in their midst as if she were the goddess of fortune herself. Neither in heaven or on the earth had anyone seen or heard of someone who possessed feminine attraction equal to that of the princess Damayantî. Thus, even the demigods of heaven became gladdened at heart upon seeing her.

Similarly, King Nala was without rival in this world, and his wonderfully handsome bodily features made him appear like Kandarpa, the god of love. Being inspired with genuine admiration for the prince and princess, professional reciters again and again glorified King Nala before Damayantî and vice-versa in their respective palaces. Thus, it so happened that after repeatedly hearing about one another's attributes, Nala and Damayantî developed an attachment for one another, even though they had never met. Gradually, that attachment grew so strong that Mahârâja Nala became overwhelmed by the love that filled his heart and thus, he began to pass much of his time in solitude within the palace gardens.

One day, Nala came upon some wonderful swans with golden wings that were wandering in the palace garden. Out of curiosity, he caught one with his hands. The swan then fearfully pleaded, "My dear king, I do not deserve to be killed by you. Kindly spare me and in return I shall do something which will be very agreeable to you. I am going to Vidarbha
and I will speak to Damayantī in such a way that she will no longer
desire to have any other man besides you for her husband."
Upon hearing this, the astonished King Nala let the swan go free.
Thereafter, the entire flock of swans flew to the kingdom of Vidarbha
and came before the princess Damayantī, who was seated among her
girlfriends. Damayantī felt highly delighted to behold the golden winged
swans and at once rose up and tried to catch one. As the swans fled in all
directions, the other young girls began to pursue them. At this time, the
swan which Damayantī was chasing cleverly led her to a secluded place
within the garden. Then, in human speech, that swan said, "O
Damayantī, there is a king of the niśādas named Nala, whose handsome
appearance equals that of the twin Aśvīns in heaven. O fair-
complexioned maiden, if you become the wife of this noble prince, then
your unparalleled beauty and good qualities will serve the purpose for
which they have been created. We have seen all of the demigods,
Gandharvas, Nāgas, Rākṣasas and human beings, but never have we
beheld such a person as Nala, who is the crown-jewel among all males.
When there is a union of the best of women with the best of men, then
happiness is the assured result."
Damayantī replied, "My dear swan, I beg you to please go and speak on
my behalf before King Nala so that your sweet words may bear fruit.
This is my request if you are willing to do something for my benefit."
Agreeing to help the princess, the swan departed for the kingdom of the
niśādas and upon arrival, he related all that happened before King Nala.
Meanwhile, after hearing the words of the swan, Damayantī lost all
peace of mind on account of love for Nala. Being filled with anxiety and
constantly heaving heavy sighs, Damayantī became very pale and thin
due to her melancholy. Indeed, because her heart had been deeply
pierced by Cupid's arrows, Damayantī gradually came to appear like a
demented person on account of her distracted mood and upturned gaze.
Damayantī lost all inclination for the objects of enjoyment which
surrounded her and she simply passed her days and nights engaged in
weeping that was sometimes interspersed with cries of "Oh!" and "Alas!"
Upon seeing her in such a pitiable state,-Damayantī's maidservants
tactfully presented the matter before King Bhīma as if she were suffering
from some kind of affliction. Taking the matter very seriously, the king
thought about his daughter's condition at great length and then concluded, "Since Damayanti has already attained the age of puberty, it is time for her to hold a svayaṁvara."

Thereafter, King Bhēma sent out invitations to all of the rulers of the earth and all directions soon became filled with the rattle of chariots, the trumpeting of elephants and neighing of horses. Accompanied by their armies, and dressed and decorated in the finest royal style, kings and princes from all comers of the earth came to Vidarbha, where they were received with due respect by the magnanimous Mahārāja Bhēma. Meanwhile, it so happened that the foremost of celestial āñis, Nārada and Parvata, came to the palace of Indra in the course of their perpetual wanderings. After worshipping the two great sages, Indra inquired about their welfare, and so Nārada smilingly replied, "We are quite satisfied due to our Kṛṣṇa consciousness and all of the kings of the earth have become enthused with new hope and vitality."

Indra then asked, "The righteous kings of the earth who courageously die upon the battlefield, without having turned their backs, attain to this heavenly region which awards them the fulfillment of all desires. Where are those kṣatriya heroes now? Those who are my favorite guests are no longer seen by me to be approaching my realm."

Nārada then replied, "Listen, O Indra, as I disclose to you the reason why you do not see these heroic kings at present. The ruler of the Vidarbhas has a daughter named Damayanti, whose beauty is unrivaled on earth. Since her svayaṁvara will take place soon, all of the foremost kṣatriyas on earth have gone to Kuṇḍina, being exceedingly eager to gain her hand in marriage."

As the celestial āñi and heavenly king were thus conversing, the other Lokapālas happened to come before Indra. After hearing the words of Nārada, these directors of universal affairs excitedly exclaimed, "We shall also attend the svayaṁvara of Damayanti!"

The Lokapālas then immediately departed for the kingdom of Vidarbha, riding upon their respective vehicles and accompanied by their personal associates. Having heard the news of Damayanti's svayaṁvara, King Nala had also set out with a cheerful heart that was full of love for the young princess. Thus, it so happened that as the demigods were passing by overhead, they could see the handsome Nala, whose beauty made him
resemble Cupid, the god of love. Although traversing upon the ground, the prince appeared to be as resplendent as the sun, and thus the highly astonished Lokapālas practically abandoned their hopes of winning the hand of Damayantī. After quickly devising a plan, however, the demigods left aside their celestial vehicles and descended upon the earth in order to speak to King Nala as follows: "O ruler of the niśādas, and best of human beings; O you who are ever devoted to truth, please assist us by acting as our messenger."

The pious Nala immediately agreed to render this service to those who he could understand to be exalted personalities. Then, he inquired with folded hands, "Who are you and what is it exactly that you wish for me to do? Please tell me all of this truthfully."

Indra then replied, "We are chiefs of the demigods who have come to the earth for the sake of the princess Damayantī. I am Indra, the king of heaven, and these exalted personalities accompanying me are Varuṇa, the lord of the waters; Yamarāja the controller of death, and Agni; the fire-god. Now, please go to Damayantī, and announce our arrival by saying, "The guardians of the world have come here, desiring to attend your svayaṁvara. Therefore, it behooves you to choose either Indra, Varuṇa, Agni or Yamarāja as your lord."

Upon hearing this, Nala joined his hands and pleaded, "I have come here with the same intention and thus it is not proper for you to send me on this errand. How can someone who is overwhelmed by love speak to his beloved on behalf of another? O best of the demigods, please desist from your endeavor to employ me in this manner."

However, the demigods replied, "You have already promised to act as our messenger and so why should you now try to refuse? O virtuous ruler of the niśādas, what kind of behavior is this?"

Nala then argued, "The palace of the Vidarbha king is certainly well guarded. How shall I be able to enter the inner apartments in order to see Damayantī?"

However, Indra confidently replied, "By our superior power you shall easily gain entrance. Therefore, please give up all hesitation and fear."

Finally, Nala relented and thus gave his solemn consent and departed. As Indra had predicted, Nala entered the royal palace without impediment and there, he beheld the beautiful princess of Vidarbha,
surrounded by her numerous maidservants. Damayantī seemed to rebuke the moonshine with her own luster, and her delicate limbs, slender waist and very pretty eyes enhanced her natural loveliness. As Nala gazed upon the glaring beauty of the sweetly smiling Damayantī, his love for her increased without bounds. However, since the virtuous prince was determined to fulfill his promise to the Lokapālas, he suppressed his surging emotions.

Similarly, Damayantī, the best of women, became overwhelmed at the sight of Nala's splendor and thus she sprang up from her seat in amazement, as did the others. Mentally, the princess and her maidservants offered their homage unto King Nala by thinking, "Oh, what handsome features and gentle nature is possessed by this incomparable hero! Who is he that has come here; a demigod, Gandharva or Yakṣa?"

While the maidservants remained silent, being very bashful and bewildered by Nala's splendor, Damayantī proceeded to smilingly address the intruder as follows: "Who are you, of faultless form, that has come here and awakened my love? You appear to be a celestial being who has descended upon the earth. For what purpose have you come here? My apartment is very heavily guarded and so how did you manage to enter my room unnoticed?"

The niṣāda prince then replied, "O most beautiful lady, my name is Nala and I have come here as a messenger on behalf of the demigods. Indra, Agni, Varuṇa and Yamarāja all desire to obtain your hand in marriage and thus they request you to choose one of them as your lord. It is by dint of their prowess that I have been able to come before you unnoticed and unobstructed. It is just to deliver this message that I have come here, O gentle one, and so now you can do as you please."

Upon hearing this, Damayantī first of all bowed to the demigods and then smilingly said. "O Prince, my very self and whatever I possess belong to you alone. After hearing the words of the swan, my heart began to burn with love for you. It is for your sake alone that I have arranged for all the kings of the earth to assemble here. Now, please grant me your love and faithfulness in return and give me your command as to what I should do. O Hero, if you reject me, then for your sake I shall give up my life by taking poison, entering the fire or by
Nala replied, "How can you choose a mere mortal like me in the presence of the great Lokapālas? You had better turn your heart toward those universal directors, the dust of whose feet I am not the equal. If you displease these great controllers, then doom will surely await us both. On the other hand, if you accept one of these deities, you will be able to enjoy the opulence of heaven to your heart's content. O faultlessly beautiful one, what woman in her right mind would not select Agni, Indra, Varuṇa or Yamarāja as her lord?"

As tears began falling from her lovely eyes, the grief-stricken Damayantī insisted, "O Lord of the earth, after respectfully bowing down to the demigods, it is you alone whom I will choose and I say this in all earnestness."

Unto the trembling Damayantī, who stood before him with folded hands, Nala then replied, "O amiable one, you may certainly do as you please. However, since I have given my promise to the demigods to act as their messenger, it would be unbefitting for me to endeavor on my own behalf at this time. When seeking my own interest is in harmony with virtue then I shall do so but not otherwise. O most beautiful one, I advise you to act in the same manner."

Damayantī then said in a voice which was choked with tears, "O Prince, I see a faultless way in which you can act and thus remain untainted by any sin. Simply you must attend my svayaṁvara in the company of the Lokapālas. At that time, I shall choose you of my own volition and thus no blame can possibly be attributed to you."

Thereafter, King Nala returned to where the Lokapālas had been awaiting him. The demigods anxiously inquired, "Have you seen Damayantī, that most beautiful maiden of lovely smiles? What has she said to us? Please relate truthfully everything that took place between yourself and the princess of Vidarbha."

Nala replied, "At your command, I entered Darnayanti's residence unperceived by anyone except the princess and her maidservants, who were all highly astonished to see me. Although I earnestly spoke on your behalf, the fair-faced girl had already dedicated her mind and heart unto me and thus she said, 'Let the Lokapālas come along with you to my svayaṁvara. There in the presence of everyone, I shall choose you as my..."
husband and thus no one will be able to blame you.' This is all that transpired between Damayantī and myself and so now everything depends upon your good will, O best of the celestials."

Soon thereafter, at an auspicious hour, King Bhīma summoned all of the assembled monarchs to the arena of Damayantī's svayaṁvara. Without wasting time, those heroic kṣatriyas hastened there with hearts that were overwhelmed with lust due to strong hopes of attaining the princess' hand in marriage. Like lions, the mighty warriors entered the festively decorated arena and then took their respective seats. All of the princes were very powerfully built, having arms that resembled iron maces, and their handsome faces were adorned with fine features and framed by well-groomed hair. The kings thus shone like so many stars in the firmament but when the princess Damayantī entered the arena, her dazzling beauty completely stole away their eyes and hearts. Indeed, wherever those heroes' glances first fell upon the faultless body of Damayantī, their sight became riveted and could not move from that enchanting vision.

Then, when the names of the assembled princes were announced for her information, Damayantī saw five persons before her who exactly resembled Nala and one another. Her mind having become clouded with doubt, Damayantī could not ascertain the real Nala, for at whomever of the five she looked at she saw the niñāda prince. Damayantī then thought, "Oh, how shall I determine who is my real beloved and who are the celestials?" and thus her heart became filled with grief. Again and again she tried to observe the distinguishing marks of these great demigods which she had heard about since her childhood. However, none of these familiar characteristics were visible in the persons whom she saw before her. Finally, the intelligent princess decided that her only recourse was to take shelter of the demigods themselves. Thus, after bowing down to the four Lokapālas within her mind, the trembling Damayantī addressed them as follows with folded hands:
"After hearing the speech of the golden-winged swan, I chose Nala within my heart as my lord. Now, for the sake of truth, please reveal my beloved to me. Let the exalted demigods assume their original forms so that I may positively ascertain which of you is the king of the niñādas."

Upon hearing Damayantī's pitiful words, and seeing her fixed
determination and fervent love for King Nala, the four Lokapālas revealed their celestial forms which were unmoistened by perspiration, unstained by dust, decorated with garlands of unfading flowers, having unblinking eyes and whose feet did not touch the ground. By their side stood King Nala, his feet resting upon the earth, and his body adorned with blinking eyes and stained with dust and beat. Nevertheless, without hesitation, the large-eyed daughter of King Bhéma went and caught hold the border of Nala's garment and then placed the flower garland around his neck. As soon as they saw that Damayantī had chosen Nala as her husband, the assembled kings cried out, "Oh!" and "Alas!", whereas the demigods and rṣis exclaimed, "Excellent! Excellent!" Nala then solemnly told Damayantī, "Since you have chosen a mortal like me as your husband, in spite of the presence of the best of celestials, rest assured that I shall always remain obedient to your commands. O sweetly-smiling, beautiful girl, for as long as life dwells within my body, I shall remain yours and yours alone."

In return, the jubilant Damayantī expressed her dedication to Nala and then, together, the newly-wedded couple sought protection of the Lokapālas who were present before them. Being very pleased at heart on account of the noble behavior of both the prince and princess, the great demigods thereafter bestowed eight benedictions upon King Nala. Indra said, "My dear king of the niñādas, you will be able to see me present at your sacrificial performances and after death, you will attain a highly elevated destination."

Agni said, "You will be able to see me whenever you wish and after giving up your present body, you will attain to regions which are as resplendent as myself." Yamarāja said, "I hereby grant you the ability to perceive subtle tastes in food. I can also assure you that as far as virtue is concerned, your name will always have pre-eminence."

Varuṇa then said, "I will appear before you when you so desire and here are garlands which possess a wonderful celestial fragrance."

Thereafter, the demigods departed for their heavenly abodes and then the assembly of kings also took their leave, being very satisfied at heart for having witnessed Damayantī's selection of Nala under extraordinary circumstances.

After the departure of these great monarchs, King Bhēma very happily
celebrated the marriage ceremony of his daughter and the niṣāda prince with great pomp. Finally, after remaining at Vidarbha for some time, King Nala took leave of his father-in-law and returned to his own capital city with his newly-wedded wife. Thereafter, having attained the best among women, King Nala began passing his days in great joy while at the same time ruling over his subjects righteously. Mahārāja Nala performed the aśvamedha-yajñā and many other sacrifices and gave abundant charity unto the brāhmaṇas. Like a resident of heaven, Nala enjoyed life along with Damayantī, by sporting in various romantic forests. In due course of time, he begot a twin son and daughter, who were named Indrasena and Indrasenā, respectively.

As the Lokapālas were returning to heaven after having witnessed Damayanti’s svayaṁvara, they happened to see the personalities of Dvāpara and Kali approaching. Indra then curiously inquired, "O Kali, where are you going in such a rush along with Dvāpara?" Kali replied, "I am going to the svayaṁvara of Damayantī. Since my heart has become fixed on the princess, I wish to obtain her for my wife." Upon hearing this, Indra smirkingly said, "Damayanti’s svayaṁvara is already over and she has chosen King Nala for her husband, even in our very presence."

When he heard this, Kali, the vilest of celestials, became filled with rage and declared, "Since Damayantī has chosen a mere mortal in the presence of exalted demigods, she deserves to undergo terrible suffering as punishment for such impudence!"

At this, the Lokapālas replied, "My dear Kali, please control your anger, for Damayanti chose Nala with our approval. What girl would not want as her husband, the incomparably handsome prince of the niṣādas, who is endowed with every virtue? King Nala has studied the four Vedas and the Purāṇas, which are considered the fifth Veda, and he is conversant with all kinds of duties. He is non-violent, truthful, and ever-fixed in his vows. In terms of knowledge, self-control, austerity, purity and tranquillity, Mahārāja Nala is equal to us in all respects. O Kali, the fool that desires to curse such a great and faultless personality actually
condemns himself and thus becomes destroyed by his actions."
Having said this, the Lokapālas continued to their destinations. Kali then told Dvāpara, "I cannot suppress my anger over this matter and thus I shall possess Nala in order to deprive him of his kingdom and the daughter of King Bhīma as well. For this purpose I therefore request you to help me by entering the dice with which the ill-fated Nala will be under my influence."
After enlisting the help of Dvāpara, Kali began residing at the palace of King Nala, ever-intent upon finding out a flaw in his behavior. In this way, a long time passed as Kali continued living in the kingdom of the niśādas. Then, one day, after twelve years had elapsed, Kali saw that, after passing urine, Naia touched water before saying his evening prayers, but he neglected to wash his feet. Taking advantage of this oversight, Kali immediately entered Nala's body and thus began possessing him.
Then, in an expanded form, Kali appeared before Nala's brother, Puṣkara, and addressed him as follows: "Go and challenge your brother to play dice, for with my assistance you will surely win. After defeating Nala, you will become the unrivaled ruler of the niśādas."
Dvāpara then appeared before Puṣkara and informed him, "I will become the principal die called Vrisha. During the gambling match I will always roll in your favor and thus enable you to effortlessly win your brother's kingdom and wealth."
After receiving these assurances, Puṣkara went to King Nala and repeatedly insisted, "Let us play dice together." Being challenged in the presence of Damayantī, the righteous king could not refuse and so a time was fixed for the gambling match. In the game of dice that ensued, Nala gradually lost all of his possessions as he staked gold, silver, chariots, horses and clothing. Indeed, the niśāda king became so maddened while playing that none of his friends could dissuade him from the impending disaster that loomed before him. When they received news that Nala was losing everything at dice, all of the citizens headed by the royal ministers assembled outside the gambling arena, being unable to bear the thought of losing their magnanimous ruler. The king's charioteer then went to Damayantī and informed her of the situation as follows: "O Queen, the citizens and ministers are all waiting at the palace gate.
Please go and inform the king that they have come here in order to dissuade him from his present disastrous course, being unable to bear the thought of his downfall."
Thereupon, Damayantī, who was so overwhelmed by grief that she was also practically deprived of reason, came before her husband and spoke as follows in a voice that was choked with emotion:
"O King, the citizens along with the state councilors are now at the gate desiring to see you. Since they have come here out of loyalty, it behooves you to grant them an interview."
However, since King Nala was firmly in the clutches of Kali and in a frenzy because of gambling, he did not even turn to utter a reply to his wife's piteous appeals. When the ministers and citizens were informed of this, they reluctantly returned home, afflicted with grief and shame, and saying, "Our king is as good as dead."
The gambling match between Nala and Puṣkara continued for many days, and with each cast of the dice, the virtuous king lost more and more. While continuously thinking about how her husband had become like a man deranged and bereft of all good sense, the poor Damayantī became highly alarmed and filled with an intolerable grief.
Apprehensive of the calamity at hand and ever seeking her husband's welfare, she ordered her faithful maidservant, Vrihatsena, "Please go and summon the state ministers in the name of King Nala. Inform them of all that has been lost in the gambling match and whatever yet still remains."
Upon learning of Nala's desire to see them, the ministers exclaimed, "Oh, this is a great fortune for us!" When the news spread, all of the citizens arrived in a body at the palace gate for a second time, accompanying the royal councilors. Damayantī then once again went and informed King Nala, but as before, he could not be distracted from the gambling match for even a moment to utter a word in reply. Thus, again Damayantī had to return to her apartment, filled with shame and despair. Knowing that the dice were uniformly turning against Nala and that he had lost almost everything, Damayantī told her maidservant who was always intent upon her welfare, "O Vrihatsena, go once again, and in the name of King Nala, bring the charioteer Vārṣṇeya, for the matter has become very serious."
Vrihatsena had Vārṣṇeya summoned by some trusted servants. When the charioteer came before Damayantī, who knew how to speak very gently and according to the time and circumstance, she addressed him as follows: "The king has always acted as your best wellwisher, and so now that he is in difficulty, it behooves you to help him. The more that King Nala loses to Puṣkara the more fervently does his desire for gambling grow. Even though the dice unerringly fall in Puṣkara's favor, Nala does not even pay me or his friends the slightest attention, for he is feverishly absorbed in the play. In spite of this, I do not blame the righteous king or even consider him to be at fault, for he has become like a madman under the influence of gambling."

"My dear Vārṣṇeya, I seek your protection in this desperate hour of need. Please yoke King Nala's swiftest horses onto his chariot and take my twin son and daughter to the house of my parents at Kuṇḍīna. After placing the children in the care of King Bhīma, along with the horses and chariot, you may remain at Kuṇḍīna or go anywhere else that you desire."

Vārṣṇeya went and reported Damayantī's words to the chief ministers. Then, having obtained their consent, he started out for Vidarbha, taking Nala's small children with him. After handing them over to King Bhīma, Vārṣṇeya bade him farewell feeling great sadness on account of his master, Nala. Thereafter, having first of all wandered about for some time, Vārṣṇeya arrived at the city of Ayodhyā. There, with a sorrowful heart he came before King Ṛtūparṇa and then entered his service as a charioteer.

After the departure of Vārṣṇeya, Puṣkara completed winning the entire kingdom of Nala along with all of his possessions. This having been accomplished, Puṣkara laughingly said, "Let the play continue. What stake can you put forward now? The only thing that remains in your possession is the beautiful Damayantī, for all else has been won by me. Therefore, if you so desire, you can stake your wife as the final wager."

Upon hearing these cruel words from his brother, King Nala felt as if his very heart would burst on account of rage. Still, he carefully restrained his anger, and refrained from speaking even a word in retaliation. While gazing at Puṣkara in anguish, King Nala proceeded to take off all of the ornaments that decorated his body. Having thus renounced his
possessions, Nala remained dressed in but a single piece of cloth, and in this condition he set out, enhancing the grief of all of his friends, relatives and admirers. Damayantī followed her husband and she also wore but a single piece of cloth, and thus together they left the city in which they had previously resided in royal luxury.

Nala and Damayantī remained at the outskirts of the niśāda capital for three nights. However, Puṣkara made the following proclamation which was broadcast throughout the entire city: "That person who shows even the slightest attention to Nala will be immediately condemned to death." On account of this, and due to knowing Puṣkara's great enmity toward Nala, none of the citizens dared to approach their former ruler. After subsisting on only water for three nights, Nala, being exceedingly hungry, went away in search of fruits and roots, and so Damayantī quietly followed behind him. Finally, after wandering about for many days on the verge of starvation, Nala saw some unusual birds with golden feathers. He thought, "These will serve as my feast today," and then he deftly covered the birds with the single cloth that had served as his garment. However, the birds unexpectedly rose up in the sky, taking along with them Nala's last possession. Seeing Nala naked and grief-stricken, his head turned toward the ground in shame, the birds addressed him, saying, "O foolish one, we are the very dice with which you had played and lost your kingdom. We came here desiring to take away this cloth, for we had been very displeased that you were able to depart from the gambling arena with anything at all in your possession."

After hearing this, the unfortunate Nala told Damayantī, "O faultless one, they who have deprived me of my kingdom, afflicted me with severe hunger and caused the niśādas to ignore me, have now taken away my only cloth, having assumed the form of birds. Having fallen into the depths of disaster, I have become so greatly afflicted that I am practically deprived of my senses. Since I am your lord, please hear the words which I will now speak for your welfare. Here is the road leading south and passing by the city of Avantī. This road leads to the kingdom of the Vidarbhas and that one wends its way to the kingdom of the Kośalas."

The distressed King Nala continued to point out these paths to his wife again and again. Finally, in a voice that faltered on account of her tears, Damayantī replied to her husband with the following pitiful words: "O
King, when I think of your intention, my heart trembles and my limbs become weak. How can I go away, leaving you aside in this desolate forest, deprived of kingdom and wealth, afflicted by hunger and fatigue, and without even a covering garment? While staying here in this desolate forest, famished and weary, when you think about your former opulence, your heart will certainly become filled with grief. At such times, I shall be able to comfort you, for in times of distress, a man can find no better shelter than his faithful wife."

Nala replied, "O slender-waisted Damayantī, it is true that a man in distress has no better friend or medicine equal to his devoted wife. I do not seek to renounce you, O dear one, and thus why do you speak in this fearful manner? I could forsake my own life, but you I could never give up."

Damayantī then said, "O best of kings, if you do not intend to forsake me, then why do you repeatedly point out the path which leads to my parental home at Kuṇḍīna? I know that you would never willingly desert me, but now, since your mind has become very distracted, I do not know what to expect. Since you again and again point out to me this road and that, you are unwittingly enhancing my grief. If you want me to stay with my relatives, then let us both go to Kuṇḍīna for there King Bhīma will receive you with great respect. In the kingdom of the Vidarbhas, we could pass our time very happily while living in my father's palace."

Nala replied, "Surely your father's kingdom is as good as my very own, but I would never think of going there in my present miserable condition. Formerly, I went to Kuṇḍīna in a glorious manner and awarded you with the fulfillment of your desires. How then could I again go there in this miserable condition, thus increasing your grief?"

While thus comforting Damayantī, Nala, who was now sharing her cloth, wandered off hungry and fatigued until he at last came to a shelter which had been constructed for the welfare of travelers. There, the king of the niñādas sat down on the hard ground along with the beautiful princess of Vidarbha. Wearing half of Damayantī's cloth, being exhausted and dirty, the distraught Nala soon fell asleep. Not long thereafter, the innocent and delicate Damayantī, who was plunged deeply into the ocean of distress, also fell into sound slumber. However, being plagued by the painful remembrance of the loss of his kingdom,
Nala could not sleep peacefully. Thus, with a distraught mind, he thought, "What is the use of continuing in this wretched manner? Wouldn't death now be preferable for me? My poor wife is so devoted to me and thus she suffers unnecessarily on my behalf. If Damayantî were not burdened with me then perhaps she would return to her relatives. At her father's palace, it might be possible for her to forget her miseries and thus once again live comfortably and happily. On the other hand, if she remains here and shares my life of misfortune, then there will be no such chance."

After thinking like this for a long time, Nala concluded that to desert Damayantî was his best course of action. This conviction became reinforced as Nala thought, "Because my wife possesses spotless good fortune and is ever devoted to her husband, it will not be possible for anyone to harm her, even while she travels alone through the forest on the way to her parental kingdom."

Because his mind was under the control of the wicked Kali, Nala felt justified in deserting the poor princess who innocently slept beside him. Then, desiring to cover his nakedness, Nala thought, "I should cut Damayantî's cloth into two pieces, but how can I accomplish this without waking her?"

After considering thus, Nala paced back and forth in that wayside shelter, and while doing so, he suddenly spied an unsheathed sword lying in a dark corner. Nala then cut Damayantî's cloth in half, threw the sword aside, and departed while his poor wife remained immersed in deep slumber. After going a short distance, however, Nala's heart softened and thus he was once again drawn back to the shed in the forest. Upon seeing the innocent Damayantî, Nala burst into tears and lamented, "O, how is this possible?! That beloved of mine whom neither the sun nor the wind had the opportunity of seeing, is now lying down upon the bare ground, covered by only a cut-off piece of cloth. How will the beautiful daughter of King Bhêma feel upon awakening? Being without me, how will she survive while walking through the forest, which is inhabited by numerous snakes and wild beasts of prey? O blessed one, may the Ādityas, Vasus, Maruts and the twin Aşvîns protect
you along with your natural virtue."
In spite of these feelings, Nala prepared to depart for a second time, for
he was bereft of reason due to the influence of Kali. And yet, once
again, after just taking a few steps, he returned to where his beloved
princess was sleeping. Indeed, time and time again, Nala was dragged
away from Damayantī by the wicked Kali, and yet again and again he
was forcibly drawn back to her by his ardent love. Thus, it appeared as if
the wretched Nala's heart was being torn in two by the contending
forces. Like a swing, he kept departing from the shelter of the forest,
only to return once again. Finally, however, after lamenting very
pitifully for a long time, the possessed King Nala went away for good,
forsaking his sleeping wife.
Soon thereafter, being refreshed on account of her sound sleep, the
gentle-hearted Damayantī awoke in that lonely forest. After opening
her eyes and recollecting her circumstances, when she failed to see her
husband at her side, Damayantī screamed aloud in fright and grief, "O
mighty king! O dearly beloved lord! Have you deserted me? O illustrious
prince, you are truthful in speech and conversant with morality. How
then, have you left me alone as I remained asleep in this uninhabited
forest? Now I am forever doomed! Why have you deserted your devoted
wife who has never once wronged you? My dear lord, that I continue to
live for even a moment after being deserted by you is only because
human beings are destined to die at their appointed time. O King,
enough of this joke! I am terribly frightened so please come out and
show yourself. Certainly, you are hiding behind those bushes. Why don't
you reply to me? Since I am in this helpless condition and lamenting so
sorrowfully, it is very cruel for you not to come here and comfort me. I
do not grieve for myself. I only feel pained to think of how you will have
to pass your days alone, oppressed by hunger, thirst and fatigue. When
you lie down alone in the evening beneath the trees, how will you feel,
not seeing me present before you?"
Burning with anguish and weeping convulsively, Damayantī began
running here and there, looking for King Nala. Sometimes, in her grief,
she sank down to the ground as if unconscious and then, with a start,
she would once again rise up. Sometimes Damayantī shrank back in
terror and sometimes she simply wailed aloud, declaring, "Whoever has
caused this calamity to befall King Nala shall one day have to bear even greater affliction than that which we are presently enduring."

Like a madwoman, Damayantī wandered here and there in the forest, searching for her husband and crying out, "O King! O my lord!" While thus running wildly and lamenting piteously, Damayantī came near a gigantic serpent that hungrily seized her in its clutches. Captured within the serpents coils, Damayantī continued to weep, not for her own misfortune, but on account of her poor husband. In anguish due to separation, she cried out, "O King, why do you not rush here to rescue me now that I am seized by this snake and without protection? O my lord, why did you go away and leave me alone in this desolate forest? How do you feel when you remember your poor neglected wife? Who will soothe you when you become hungry and weary? When you become free from your present oppression and have once again regained your opulence and healthy state of mind, how will you feel while remembering me?"

A hunter, who was roaming the forest, happened to hear Damayantī's wailing and thus he swiftly came running to that spot. After having seen the large-eyed and beautiful woman caught within the serpent's coils, the hunter quickly rushed forward and cut off its head with his sharp weapon. Having freed the panic-stricken Damayantī from the threat of imminent death, the hunter first of all sprinkled water all over her body. Then, when Damayantī had regained her composure, the hunter fed her and comforted her with reassuring words. The hunter then asked, "Who are you and why have you come to this remote forest? O most beautiful one, how has this condition of extreme misery befallen you?"

In reply, Damayantī narrated the history of her misfortune, and while listening to the story, the hunter saw before him the most beautiful of women, dressed scantily in but half a cloth. While eagerly gazing at Damayantī's full breasts, rounded hips, delicate and faultless limbs and a moon-like face, the hunter became overwhelmed with a powerful lust for sensual enjoyment. Being afflicted by the god of love, The hunter began wooing the princess in that secluded place with very appealing words. As soon as the chaste and virtuous Damayantī understood the hunter's intention, she blazed forth with anger and indignation. At this, the hunter gave up the facade of mild behavior and attempted to forcibly
seize the helpless princess. Being already intensely distressed on account of separation from her husband and kingdom, the harassed Damayantī then angrily cursed the hunter, saying, "I have never even thought of any man except the heroic king of the niṣādas. Therefore, let this evil-minded wretch who subsists by killing animals, fall down dead at once."

As soon as this curse was uttered by the faultless princess, the hunter fell down dead upon the ground, like a tree consumed by a forest fire. Thereafter, the lotus-eyed Damayantī continued wandering throughout the fearful and solitary forest, which was not only the habitat of all varieties of wild beasts, but tribes of thieves and aborigines as well. Gradually, the princess of Vidarbha passed through various mountainous regions, whose valleys provided a wondrous sight, and she came upon many rivers and lakes that resounded with the cries of myriad birds and beasts. Damayantī saw countless fearful snakes and Rākṣasas of ghastly appearance, and yet, she was not terrified on this account. She only felt distressed because of separation from her beloved husband.

After wandering through the forest for a long time in search of King Nala, Damayantī sat down upon a large stone, filled with sorrow and trembling on account of fatigue. While venting her pent-up grief, the princess lamented her misfortunes as follows: "O king of the niṣādas, with a broad chest and mighty arms, where have you gone, leaving me aside in this fearful forest? O powerful hero and best of men, who is always charitable to the brāhmaṇas, have you proven false to me alone? Do you not remember the solemn declaration you uttered before me at the time of our marriage? You should know that truthfulness is considered a more exalted virtue than even the study of the entire Vedas along with their supplements. O great warrior, O King Nala, I am about to die in this dreadful forest. Since I am yours and yours alone, why do you not come here and reply to me?"

"My lord, you always used to say, 'Except for yourself, O Princess, there does not exist anyone who is dear to me.' Now, why do you not come and deliver your poor wife who is bewailing her fate, bereft of reason, emaciated, pale and dressed in but half a cloth? Alone and weeping, I am like a poor deer that has been separated from its herd. In this terrible forest, abounding with wild and dangerous creatures, from whom shall I inquire, saying, 'Have you seen King Nala?"
"Here comes the king of the forest, the tiger, with his sharp teeth and prominent cheeks. Even him I shall approach fearlessly, 'O Tiger, I am Damayantī, the daughter of the ruler of Vidarbha and the wife of King Nala and am overwhelmed by grief. I am searching for my husband in this lonely forest. Could you please comfort me with news about King Nala if you have seen him. On the other hand, if you cannot speak about that vanquisher of enemies, then devour me so that I can become free from my miserable condition!"

"This great mountain can also hear my plaintive cries in the wilderness, so let me inquire from it about the whereabouts of Nala. 'O celebrated hill possessed of beautiful peaks and adorned with blossoming trees of all description, I bow down to you. I am the princess Damayantī, the daughter of King Bhīma, who is the ruler of the Vidarbhās. The heroic and handsome Nala, the son of the niṣāda king, who is ever devoted to the brāhmaṇas and the performer of sacrifices, is my husband. Bereft of my former prosperity as well as my beloved lord, I have come here afflicted by misfortune, in search of the great King Nala. O foremost of mountains, have you seen him traversing this dreadful forest, oppressed by hunger and grief? Seeing me here alone and overwhelmed by unbearable sorrow, why do you not comfort me with news of my beloved?"

"O Hero, O most powerful warrior, if you are in the forest, then please come before me. When shall I once again hear your deep and gentle voice? O my lord, I am terribly frightened. Therefore, please come here and comfort me."

After thus bewailing her cruel destiny and inquiring after her husband like a madwoman, Damayantī continued to proceed toward the north. After three days and nights, she came to a wonderfully scenic grove that served as the abode of great ṛṣis and resembled in beauty the regions of heaven. There, Damayantī beheld the foremost of ascetics, headed by Vasiṣṭha, Bhṛgu and Atri, engaged in the practice of severe penances, seeking the pathway to liberation. Some of the ṛṣis were living on only water and others sustained their lives by taking in air and nothing else. This very sight enlivened Damayantī and thus dispelled her grief for the time being.

After entering the āśrama, which abounded with deer and monkeys,
Damayantī offered her obeisances unto the great ṛṣis and stood before them in an attitude of great humility. The sages warmly welcomed Damayantī and then said, "Please sit down here and tell us for what reasons you have come to our abode in this remote place. What may we do for you?"

In reply, Damayantī inquired for the sake of politeness, "O sinless ones, a best of the brāhmaṇas, I hope that all is well with you and your execution of austerities for the purpose of salvation. Are the residents of your āśrama well and peaceful, including the wild beasts and birds that have also taken shelter here?"

The ṛṣis replied, "O most beautiful and illustrious lady, because we have taken shelter of the lotus feet of the Absolute Truth, Lord Viṣṇu, there is no possibility of misfortune overtaking us. Now, please tell us who you are and what it is that you seek. Beholding your splendid form, we have become highly delighted and amazed. O blessed one, are you the presiding deity of this forest, mountain or river, or some other celestial goddess? Please take heart and do not allow yourself to succumb to grief."

Damayantī then said, "O brāhmaṇas, I am not at all a goddess. I am a mere human being. Now, please listen attentively as I narrate to you the history of my misfortune. The king of the Vidarbhas, named Bhīma, is my father, and prince Nala, the ruler of the niśādas, is my husband. King Nala is ever-devoted to the demigods and brāhmaṇas, of mighty prowess, truthful, conversant with all religious principles, wise, equal in splendor to the celestials, and he has a face that can only be compared with the full moon.

"Unfortunately, the poor king was challenged to gamble with dice by a certain crooked and mean-minded person, and thus he came to be deprived of his wealth and kingdom. Now, being separated from my husband, I have been anxiously searching for him through forests, mountainous regions, and by the banks of lakes and rivers. Being excessively aggrieved over the loss of my lord's presence, I have no determination to live any longer than a few more days. Please, therefore, let me inquire if you know the whereabouts of King Nala, the ruler of the niśādas."

The ṛṣis thus replied to Damayantī, "O beautiful and chaste daughter of Bhīma, rest assured that indeed you will soon be happily reunited with
your King Nala. By dint of the power of our austerities, we can also see that King Nala will be restored to his former position of sovereignty, opulence, and righteousness without doubt."

Having thus spoken, the ṛṣis disappeared from sight, along with their fire sacrifices and hermitages. The lovely-limbed Damayantī, bewildered by this vision, wondered, "Was this just a dream, never really true? Where did everyone and everything disappear to?" Soon Damayantī once again became overcome by grief over her missing husband, Nala.

Lost in ever-increasing grief, Damayantī's eyes filled with tears as she lamented. As she came upon an Aśoka tree, she asked, "O beautiful Aśoka tree, have you seen my beloved husband, the king of the niṣādas? My darling Nala is dressed with only half a piece of cloth about his delicate body. Please grant me that he may now come to this forest and mitigate my sorrow!" Pleading in this way, Damayantī circumambulated the Aśoka tree and then continued to wander off in search of Nala.

As Damayantī continued her search for Nala, she encountered various rivers, and forests with many trees, birds, and animals. She also encountered many streams, hills, and mountain slopes. While thus wandering through the forest, Damayantī encountered a long road upon which a large caravan was traveling. The caravan, which contained numerous elephants, horses, and carts, was traveling along the banks of a beautiful river. Upon seeing the procession, the large-hipped Damayantī ran towards its midst.

Damayantī appeared just like a mad woman, for she wore only half a skirt, her hair was covered with dust, and she was pale, thin and dirty. She was met by the procession with surprise, fear, suspicion, and curiosity. Nevertheless, she implored, "I am but the daughter of the king of Vidarbha, and I am searching for my husband, Nala, the king of the niṣādas. If anyone knows the whereabouts of my beloved Nala, please tell me!"

At this, the leader of the caravan, Śuci, spoke to Damayantī, "Please listen, good woman: I am the leader of this caravan, but I have not seen any man called Nala. There are many animals in this dangerous forest, but no men live in it." Then Damayantī inquired about where the caravan was headed to, to which Śuci replied, "This caravan is quickly
traveling to the city of Suvahu, the righteous ruler of the Cedis."

Thereafter, Damayantí accompanied the caravan, anxious to find some clue which might lead to the whereabouts of her husband. After many days, the merchants came to a large lake overgrown with lotus flowers in the midst of that desolate forest. Soft grass grew on the shore of the lake and all around were many trees filled with fruits and flowers so that the whole area was very delightful to see. The water of the lake was very clear and sweet and the atmosphere was enhanced by cool and pleasing breezes. Thus, the fatigued members of the caravan decided to suspend their journey for the day, since the sun was already looming low on the horizon. After spreading themselves out in the surrounding woods, everyone soon fell asleep so that all became hushed and still.

Then, at midnight, a herd of wild elephants happened to pass that way. When they saw the numerous domesticated elephants belonging to the caravan, the wild elephants became highly infuriated and so rushed impetuously at their tamed brothers in order to kill them. During the stampede that ensued, the maddened elephants crushed whatever stood in their way and thus shrieks of anguish and fright were heard as the merchants, still half asleep, began fleeing for their very lives in all directions. Some of the members of the caravan were trampled by the elephants or gored by their tusks, and innumerable camels and horses were also slain. Some of the people fainted to the ground because of fright, and others managed to escape by climbing up into trees.

As the caravan was thus besieged by the infuriated elephants, a tremendous uproar was created by the panic-stricken men and animals. Someone shouted, "Run away quickly and save your life!" and someone else replied, "Why are you in such a hurry? First, pick up these heaps of jewels which have been scattered all around." Another person then pleaded, "All of this wealth is of no value to one who is dead. Therefore, you crazy fool, run away as quickly as possible and save your life!"

Damayantí awoke with a start while the terrible slaughter was in progress, and upon seeing the confusion, she quickly got up and began wondering what to do. Finally, when the wild elephants went away, those persons who survived the calamity gradually reassembled and began talking among themselves as follows: "What is it that we did in order to reap such disastrous results? Certainly we failed to properly
worship Kuvera, the lord of the Yakṣas, or the deity who is responsible for causing such calamities. Then again, perhaps our stars are arrayed in an extremely inauspicious manner. What else could be the cause of our misfortune?"

Others, however, who had become distracted by grief over the loss of their wealth and relatives said, "That woman having a dirty and disheveled appearance who joined our party was surely the cause of this dreadful occurrence. She must be an evil Rākṣasa, Yakṣa or Piśāca woman, and if we ever see her again, we shall beat her to death with our fists and heavy stones!"

In the dark, the terrified Damayantī could hear these hateful words and thus she began running away as fast as possible, overcome by shame and fear. Having once again become fully submerged in the ocean of distress, Damayantī reproached herself as follows: "Alas! How strongly the wrath of God is bearing down on me. I only meet with one great misfortune after another. I must have committed greatly sinful acts in my past life so that now I have become bereft of my kingdom and separated from my husband and children. Oh, what horrible misdeed did I perform so that I now find myself in such an unprotected state in this dense forest, abounding in wild animals of prey."

The next morning, Damayantī met some brāhmaṇas who had been traveling with the caravan and had survived the elephant attack. While bewailing the loss of their loved ones, these brāhmaṇas set out for the Cedi kingdom and so Damayantī decided to accompany them. Then, while walking along the highway, the hapless Damayantī thought, "After wandering alone in the forest for a long time, I fortunately came upon a caravan of merchants. The disaster which overtook them must certainly have come about as a result of my own misfortune. Only because my destined end had not yet arrived was I able to escape the calamity unharmed. However, I will surely have to go on suffering unbearable miseries for a very long time. From childhood, I have never committed even the slightest sinful activity. Therefore, I must be suffering by the will of the Lokapālas who had come to my svayamvara and whom I disregarded in favor of King Nala."

By evening, Damayantī reached the capital city of the Cedis and so she took leave of the 180 brāhmaṇas. Wearing but half a garment,
Damayantī appeared like a madwoman, and upon seeing her dirty and disheveled appearance, a crowd of young boys began following her out of curiosity. From the terrace of her palace, the queen-mother saw Damayantī and so she ordered her maidservant, "Go and bring that woman here so that I may meet her. She is very aggrieved and perplexed because of the crowd and yet, in spite of her distressed condition, the radiance of her beauty astonishes me. Although externally appearing to be a madwoman, because of her bodily features, she looks like the goddess of fortune herself."

The maidservant went out, and after dispersing the crowd, she brought Damayanti into the palace and presented her to the queen-mother. The queen-mother then said, "In spite of your wild and dirty condition, I can see that you possess a very rare beauty. Indeed, even in this wretched state, you shine like lightning amidst dark clouds. Please tell me who you are and to whom you belong. Surely your beauty does not belong to this earthly realm, although you are now divested of your ornaments."

Damayanti then replied, "Please know for certain that I am a human being and ever devoted to my husband. I am a serving woman from a good family, and now I live alone as I please, subsisting upon fruits and roots. My husband was also fully devoted to me, but he was defeated in gambling and thus had to retire to the forest. I accompanied him and tried my best to comfort him, but when he became greatly afflicted with hunger, thirst and grief, he deserted me, although I am faultless. Ever since then, I have been searching for my lord but, being unable to find him, I continually burn with grief throughout the entire day and night."

Unto the gentle Damayanti, whose eyes were filled with tears, and whose voice had become choked with emotion, the Queen-mother said, "O blessed lady, please stay here with me and I will send my men out to search for your husband. You should remain here, for he may come to this city in the course of his wanderings."

Damayantī replied, "I may stay here, but only on certain conditions since I have undertaken certain vows. I shall not eat the remnants of anyone's food, and I shall not wash anyone's feet. I will not speak with any men and if anyone tries to induce me to become his mistress, then you must immediately punish that person. Let me first of all instruct the brāhmaṇas whom you will send out in search of my husband. If you will
comply with my requests, then I shall be glad to remain here in your service."
The queen-mother then happily said, "I agree to all that you have said, for you have done well in adopting such vows."
Then, turning to her daughter, Sunandâ, the queen-mother said, "My dear, I want you to accept this woman, who appears to be more like a goddess than a human being, as your sairindhrî. Let her be your constant companion, since both of you are of the same age."
Sunandâ cheerfully accepted Damayantî and then led her to her apartment, accompanied by her other maidservants. Damayantî was satisfied with the respectful treatment which she received from the royal family, and thus she continued to reside comfortably there without anxiety or want.

Meanwhile, having deserted the faultless Damayantî, King Nala came upon a raging fire while wandering in the forest. From within the flames he heard the anxious voice of someone crying out to him again and again, "O righteous Nala, please come here and save me!"
After calling out, "Fear not!" Nala entered into the fire's midst and there he beheld a mighty Näga, trembling with fear. With folded hands, the serpent then said, "O King, I am the Näga Karkoṭaka. Once upon a time, I foolishly deceived the great rṣi Nārada and so he angrily cursed me saying, 'Remain at this place without being able to move until a king named Nala comes and takes you away. Then, as soon as you reach the spot where the king puts you down, you will be freed from my curse.' 'O King, because of the rṣi's curse, I cannot move from this spot and thus I am in great danger on account of the raging fire. Please save me from this peril and in return I shall become your friend and instruct you for your welfare. As soon as you pick me up I shall become very light in your hands, so quickly let us depart from this place.'
After saying this, the Näga immediately became as small as a thumb and so Nala picked him up and carried him far out of the reach of the forest fire. Upon coming to an opening in the forest, Nala was just about to put down Karkoṭaka when the serpent said, "O King, proceed onward. Count out loud just a few more steps and I shall do something that will
prove to be for your benefit."
Nala obediently continued walking and when he counted his tenth step, the Nāga suddenly bit him and in an instant, the king's form markedly changed and the serpent also assumed his normal condition, being freed from Nārada's curse. Upon seeing his own bodily transformation, Nala became highly astonished and aggrieved and so Karkoṭaka spoke as follows in order to pacify him: "I have deprived you of your great beauty so that people may not be able to recognize you. The poison which I have injected into your body will not give you pain but it will torment the person who deceived you, depriving you of your kingdom and your beloved wife. As long as that wicked person possesses you and does not leave your body, he will feel as if he is being burned by fire. On the other hand, by my grace, you shall become immune to the attacks of fanged animals, and even the curses of brāhmaṇas who are well-versed in the Vedas, and in battle you will always come out victorious."
"O king of the niśādas, go now to the delightful city of Ayodhya and present yourself before King Rūpaparna, who is very skilled in gambling. Introduce yourself by saying, 'I am a charioteer, Vahuka by name', and thereafter the king will trade you his skill with dice for your knowledge of horses. Later on, you shall become reunited with your wife and children and then regain your lost kingdom by utilizing the acquired art of dice-playing. Therefore, O Nala, do not give way to sorrow. Whenever you would like to regain your original handsome body, you can instantly do so by simply remembering me and putting on these mystic garments."
While saying this, the Nāga gave King Nala two pieces of celestial cloth and then made himself miraculously invisible, then and there. Ten days later, Nala reached Ayodhya, the capital of Kośala. After coming before King Rūpaparna, the son of Bhangasura, Nala said, "My name is Vahuka, and in this world there is no one equal to me in the art of managing horses. Please also be informed that I give incomparable advice during times of difficulty and with regards to affairs that require great skill. In addition, I am an unparalleled cook. O King, kindly maintain me and in return I shall always endeavor for your welfare."
King Rūpaparna replied, "Vahuka, please remain here at Ayodhya with me, for I have always desired to have a very swift charioteer. I hereby
appoint you as the chief superintendent to my stables at a salary of 10,000 coins, and my other charioteers, Vārsñeya and Jivala shall work under your directions. Please live happily in their company and rest assured that I shall provide all of your wants."

Thereafter, Nala continued residing at Ayodhyā and because he was well respected, he passed his time without difficulty. However, while remembering his wife, Damayantī, Nala would sorrowfully recite the following verse every evening: "Where lies the helpless one who is afflicted with hunger and thirst and who is worn out from fatigue? Where is she who always thinks of this poor, unfortunate wretch and upon whom is she now waiting?"

Once, after hearing this recitation, Jivala inquired, "O Vahuka, about whose wife are you daily lamenting in such a pitiful way? I am very curious to hear about this if you wish to tell me."

King Nala replied, "A certain person who is devoid of intelligence had an illustrious wife but then he broke his promise to her. For some reason, that wretch became separated from his wife and thus he wandered about for a long time, burning with grief. Calamity had somehow overtaken this man, and when as a result, he was banished from his kingdom, his chaste wife followed him to the forest. There, however, that hard-hearted ingrate deserted her, and thus she lives precariously, alone and afraid for her life, and practically fainting because of hunger and thirst. While remembering his wife at night, that unfortunate man chants this sorrowful verse."

Meanwhile, some time after Nala's banishment, King Bhéma became determined to find the niñäda king and so he sent out some brähmaṇas to search for him. King Bhéma told them, "Look everywhere for Nala and my daughter, Damayantī. He who is able to bring them back to my kingdom will be rewarded with one thousand cows, agricultural fields and a large village. Even if Nala and Damayantī cannot be brought here, the brähmaṇa who simply locates them will receive 1,000 cows as a reward."

Thereafter, the brähmaṇas fanned out in all directions, but for a long time there was no clue as to the whereabouts of Nala and Damayantī. Then, while searching throughout the city of the Cedis; a brähmaṇa named Sudeva happened to see Damayantī in the king's palace, seated
along with Sunandā. Damayanti's incomparable beauty was still slightly discernible, like fire enveloped by smoke, and upon seeing her, Sudeva was convinced of her identity. The brāhmaṇa thought, "I had seen Damayanti many times before her marriage. Although this woman is dirty and emaciated, she is definitely the same princess. Resembling the full moon, possessing unchanging youth, illuminating all sides by her splendor, and having large lotus-petal eyes. This woman appears like a lotus flower that has been transplanted from Vidarbha by ill-fortune and covered over with mire in the process. Oppressed with grief on account of separation from her husband, she appears like the night of the full-moon besieged by Rāhu's eclipse. This woman's plight makes her appear like a lake whose lotus flowers have been ravaged by the trunks of wild elephants, while birds have taken flight because of fear of the invaders. Destitute of all royal comforts and separated from her loved ones and friends, she lives in distress, supported only by the hope of once again seeing her husband. Indeed, the husband is the best ornament of any woman, however destitute of other ornaments she may be. Since her husband is not at her side, this woman, although supremely beautiful, does not shine brightly. It is certainly an amazing feat if King Nala is still maintaining his life and has not yet succumbed to grief, being separated from such a wife. Upon seeing the wretched condition of this black-haired and lotus-eyed princess, who is most deserving of happiness, even I feel greatly pained at heart. Alas, when shall this woman, who is endowed with all auspicious marks, cross over the ocean of misery and once again regain her lord? It behooves me to comfort Damayantī, who is so eager to behold her husband, and who is tolerating miseries that she had never before experienced."

Sudeva then approached Damayantī and said, "O princess of Vidarbha, I am the brāhmaṇa, Sudeva, a dear friend of your brother. I have come here searching for you under the order of your father, King Bhīma. All of your family members are quite well and your twin son and daughter are also living peacefully. However, all of your kinsmen are very morose on your account and at this very moment there are hundreds of brāmanaś looking for you all over the world." Damayantī recognized Sudeva and in reply she began inquiring about the welfare of her family members, one after the other. Soon, however,
due to the unexpected sight of her family friend, Damayantī began to weep very bitterly, giving vent to her intense and pent-up grief. Upon seeing Damayantī crying while conversing alone with Sudeva, Sunandā anxiously went and informed her mother of the situation by saying, "Sairindhrī, is weeping bitterly in the presence of a brāhmaṇa. Please go and see for yourself."

The queen-mother hurriedly went to where Damayantī and Sudeva were talking. After calling the brāhmaṇa aside, she asked, "Whose wife is this fair and beautiful one, and whose daughter? How is it that she has become deprived of her husband and family, and how have you come to know about her? Please tell me truthfully whatever it is that you know." The brāhmaṇa Sudeva then replied, "There is a virtuous king of the Vidarbhas named Bhēma, and this lady named Damayantī is his daughter. There is another king, the ruler of the niṣādas and the son of Vērasena, named Nala and she is the wife of that righteous soul. After being defeated at dice by his brother and thus deprived of his kingdom, King Nala went away to the forest along with Damayantī, without the knowledge of others. I and many other brāhmaṇas have been wandering all over the earth in search of this couple, and now, Damayantī has been found by me in your son's palace.

"This woman, who is unrivaled in beauty, was born having an auspicious lotus-shaped mole between her eyebrows. Now, that mark appears to be absent, but I think that it is merely covered by a layer of dirt, like the moon hidden behind clouds. Placed there by the creator to indicate Damayantī's fortune and prosperity, that mole still appears to be faintly visible and by this sign and others, I have recognized her as the object of my search."

Upon hearing this, Sunandā washed away the dirt that had been covering Damayantī's mole and thus it became clearly visible, like the moon emerging from behind the clouds. When they saw the auspicious mark, both Sunandā and her mother began crying out of joy and they fondly embraced Damayantī while remaining speechless. Then, as she continued to shed tears, the queen-mother told Damayantī, "From this mole, I can understand that your mother and I are sisters, the daughters of Sudāmā, the Daśama king. She was given in marriage to King Bhēma whereas I was bestowed upon King Viravahu, the king of the Cedis. I
was personally present when you were born at my father's palace. My
dear Damayantī, this is also your home and whatever wealth we possess
belongs to you as well."
Damayantī then bowed down to her aunt with a glad heart and said,
"Even while unrecognized by you, I resided here very happily under your
care. However, since I have been in exile for such a long time, I now
wish to take my leave. I want to go to visit my children, who are living
under the protection of my father. Being bereft of their parents, the
twins must be passing their days in great sorrow. If you wish to do that
which is pleasing to me, then kindly provide me with a vehicle that will
carry me to Vidarbha."
The queen-mother happily agreed and then, with her son's permission,
she sent Damayantī off in a fine palanquin, escorted by many men, and
she also provided Damayantī with the best of food, drink and clothing.
Soon thereafter, Damayantī arrived at Vidarbha, where her overjoyed
family members received her with great honor. After seeing that her
parents, children, relatives, and friends were all well, Damayantī
gratefully worshipped the demigods and the brāhmaṇas with a joyful
heart. King Bhīma, being highly satisfied to once again behold his
daughter, gave the brāhmaṇa Sudeva one thousand cows, much wealth
and a village.

After passing the night, Damayantī approached her mother and said, "If
you wish me to live, then you must seriously endeavor to bring back
King Nala, the best of heroes."
Hearing this, the queen became filled with sorrow, and while shedding
tears, she could not utter a reply. She then approached King Bhīma and
said, "Your daughter is greatly aggrieved on account of separation from
her husband. Giving up all shyness, she has disclosed her mind to me.
Now, send out as many men as possible in search of the righteous King
Nala."
Thereafter, the king ordered many brāhmaṇas to go and search all over
the earth for his son-in-law. When the brāhmaṇas informed Damayantī
of their mission, she instructed them as follows: "Wherever you go, in
every realm and assembly, call out my message: 'O beloved gambler,
where have you gone after cutting off half of my garment and deserting
me in the dead of night as I innocently slept in the forest? As I remain waiting for your return, I am still clad in that dirty half-cloth and am burning with grief. O King, please relent and give an answer to she who is constantly weeping in agony on account of you.'

"My dear brähmaṇas, please speak in this way so that my husband will become inclined to take pity upon me. In addition, you should say, 'My dear king, the wife is supposed to be protected and maintained by the husband. Why then, have you neglected both of those duties? Since you are possessed of fame, good lineage, wisdom and compassion why have you acted so cruelly? I have heard you say that kindness is the highest virtue. Therefore, please have pity upon me, your poor, faithful wife.'

"O brähmaṇas, while calling out this appeal, if anyone answers you, then find out who he is and where he dwells. Quickly bring me news of that person and tell me exactly what he said in reply. Please do not let anyone know that it is I who uttered these words, and do not say that it is unto me that you will return."

Having received these instructions, the brähmaṇas set out in search of King Nala, and thus they traveled to all kinds of towns and villages as well as to the āśramas of ṛṣis and the residences of cowherds. Everywhere, they recited Damayantī's message, but for a long time none of them received any reply. Then, a brähmaṇa named Parṇāda returned to the capital city of the Vidarbhas and informed Damayantī, "I came to Ayodhyā and repeated your words before the King Rūpāṇa. O best of women, when there was no response from anyone at the royal court, in spite of my repeated utterances, I left the assembly with the king's permission. However, after departing, I was accosted by a person named Vahuka, who is engaged as the king's charioteer. Although he had a very unsightly appearance and short arms, Vahuka is nonetheless extremely skilled at managing horses, and he is a master of the culinary art. While shedding tears and sighing frequently, Vahuka first of all inquired about my welfare and then replied to your message as follows: 'Chaste women, even though fallen into distress, remain fixed in their vows and thus attain heaven. Even though deserted by their lords, they do not become angry and thus, the lives of such chaste women are protected as if encased in an armor of their virtue. O brähmaṇa, the aggrieved lady who has sent you here should not become angry, for he that has deserted her
was overwhelmed by misfortune. A beautiful and virtuous woman should not be angry with one that was deprived of his only garment by birds as he tried to secure food. Even though she might have been ill-treated, such a wife should not be offended by her husband who had become bereft of his kingdom and all prosperity and was oppressed by hunger, thirst and fatigue.'

"O princess of Vidarbha, after hearing Vahuka's reply, I quickly came here in order to inform you. Now that you have understood everything, do that which you think to be proper after consulting with your father, King Bhīma."

After taking leave of the brāhmaṇa Pamada, Damayantī tearfully approached her mother in private, and after describing Vahuka's reply, she spoke to her mother as follows:

"With your consent, I shall employ the best of brāhmaṇas, Sudeva, for executing a plan which I have devised for regaining my husband. My dear mother, if you desire my welfare, then please keep this a secret at present, and do not tell King Bhima about my intentions. Let Sudeva go immediately to Ayodhyā in order to summon King Nala."

Later that day, when the brāhmaṇa Parṇāda had gotten up from resting, Damayanti went and worshipped him by giving him profuse wealth in charity. Then she promised, "When my husband comes here, I shall once again reward you even more abundantly, for you have done me invaluable service."

In return, the brāhmaṇa uttered some benedictions for Damayanti's benefit and then returned home, feeling satisfied at the success of his mission. Then, in the presence of her mother, Damayanti, while bearing the burden of practically unbearable sorrow, called for Sudeva and addressed him as follows:

"O brāhmaṇa, please go quickly to the city of Ayodhyā and relay this message to King Rūpārṇa: 'Bhīma's daughter, Damayantī, is going to hold another svayaṁvara and thus all the kings and princes of the world are now assembled at Vidarbha. The svayaṁvara will take place tomorrow, O conqueror of enemies, and so, if it is possible for you, then you should go there without delay. Tomorrow, the princess of unrivaled beauty will choose a second husband for she does not know whether King Nala still lives or not."
Sudeva immediately set out and upon his arrival at Ayodhyā, he told King Ṛtūparṇa all that he had been instructed to say. After receiving the brāhmaṇa's message, the king summoned Vahuka and 'respectfully said, "O Charioteer, you are very highly skilled with horses, and so, if it is possible, then I wish to attend the svayaṁvara of Damayanti after reaching the kingdom of Vidarbha in but a single day." These words entered Nala's heart like a thunderbolt, and thus he felt that it would burst on account of his intense grief. Indeed, Vahuka appeared to be burning in a fire of great anguish as he thought within himself, "Damayanti must be holding another svayaṁvara after having become too overwhelmed by sorrow. On the other hand, out of desperation, she may have devised this daring scheme just for my sake. In either case, it is very cruel for the princess of Vidarbha to hold another svayaṁvara, even after having been deceived by her wretched and sinful husband. It is a fact that women by nature are fickle and unpredictable. My offense was certainly very great, and so perhaps Damayanti has become indifferent towards me in separation. And yet, I cannot believe that the kind-hearted princess, even though suffering greatly on my account, would think of marrying again, especially since she is the mother of two children by me. In any case, whatever Damayanti's intention may be, I shall soon find out by going to the kingdom of the Vidarbhas. In this way, I shall accomplish King Ṛtūparṇa's purpose and thus mine as well."

Having thus made this decision, Vahuka, his heart overburdened with sorrow, spoke to Mahārāja Ṛtūparṇa with folded hands: "O King, rest assured that I shall fulfill your wish by taking you to the capital of the Vidarbhas in just a single day."

Then, being commanded by King Ṛtūparṇa, Vahuka went to the royal stables in order to select the proper horses for the arduous journey. After carefully examining all of the horses, Vahuka selected some that came from the country of Sind. Although these steeds appeared to be very lean, at the same time they were devoid of inauspicious marks and possessed wide cheeks and flaring nostrils. They were endowed with great strength and speed and yet were docile as well, and they had twelve curly hairs indicating their excellence. Upon seeing the horses which Vahuka had chosen after so much consideration, however, the
king became somewhat angry and said, "What is this? Do you wish to joke with me at such a serious time? How can these skinny weak horses run at the great speed which is necessary to carry us such a long distance in a single day?"

Vahuka replied, "Each of these horses has one curl of hair on its forehead, two on its temples, four on its sides, four on its chest and one on its back. O King, there is no doubt in my mind that they can easily accomplish your mission. However, if you wish to choose some other horses, then just point them out, and I shall yoke them to your chariot instead."

King Ṛtūparṇa then said, "Vahuka, you are certainly well-versed in the science of horses, and there is no one as skilled as you in driving them. Therefore, quickly yoke the horses to my chariot which you have ascertained to be capable of carrying us quickly to Vidarbha."

Thereafter, Nala readied the four horses which he had selected and without wasting time, King Ṛtūparṇa mounted upon his chariot, being very anxious to set out. No sooner had the king taken his seat, however, than those lean horses fell down to their knees. Vahuka attentively pacified the horses and raised them up with the reins. Then, after the charioteer Vārṣṇeya had also gotten onto the chariot, Vahuka set off with breath-taking speed. Indeed, being urged on by the disguised King Nala, those steeds suddenly rose up into the sky, leaving King Ṛtūparṇa and Vārṣṇeya practically stunned with wonder. Then, when he heard the distinctive rattling of the chariot and saw Vahuka's expert management of the horses, Vārṣṇeya wondered, "Is this Mātali, the charioteer of King Indra, or is this Mahārāja Nala who is driving? Maybe it just so happens that Vahuka knows the science of chariot-driving on par with Nala, for in terms of skill I can notice no difference between the two. On the other hand, Vahuka appears to be of the same age as Nala. After all, it is a fact that illustrious personalities sometimes traverse the earth in disguise as a consequence of some misfortune or in order to execute a religious purpose. Therefore, this unsightly person may indeed be King Nala, for he possesses the accomplishments of the niśāda ruler."

In this way, Vārṣṇeya, who was King Nala's former charioteer, became absorbed in thought, and King Ṛtūparṇa also felt very glad at heart.
while observing the skill of his driver. Like a bird ranging through the skies, Vahuka quickly crossed over rivers and mountains, forests and lakes. Then, King Rţūparṇa's upper garment suddenly fell from his body and dropped down onto the ground. Without wasting a second, the king told Vahuka, "Please stop the chariot for I want Vărşṇeya to go and recover my lost cloth."

However, Vahuka replied, "We have already traveled eight miles since you dropped your garment and thus it would be impossible for you to find it."

Soon thereafter, King Rţūparṇa saw that they were approaching a vibhitaka tree in the distant forest. In order to display his own talents, the king told Vahuka, "O Charioteer, just witness my great proficiency in making calculations. After all, Vahuka, no one is well-versed in every field of knowledge. The leaves and fruits of this vibhitaka that are lying upon the ground exceed those that are on the tree by one hundred, and one, respectively. The tree holds fifty million leaves and two thousand and ninety-five fruits. Now, quickly examine the tree for yourself in order to ascertain the truth or falsity of my calculations."

Vahuka replied, "O King, you are claiming something which is beyond my ability to verify. Only if I were to go and cut down the vibhitaka tree and then personally count all of the leaves and fruits would I be able to evaluate your calculations. Therefore, let Vărşṇeya take hold of the reins so that we can stop for the time being."

The king then said, "There is no time to spare," but Vahuka humbly implored, "Just wait a few moments. Or, if you are in such a hurry, then continue on without me, making Vărşṇeya your charioteer. From here on, the road to Vidarbha is straight and even."

When he realized that Vahuka was adamant, King Rţūparṇa pacified him, saying, "You are the only worthy charioteer, and indeed it is only because of you that I can even hope to reach the kingdom of the Vidarbhas in time. Vahuka, I am entirely in your hands, and thus it behooves you not to create any unnecessary obstacles for me. You can do whatever you wish, provided that we are assured of reaching our destination before sunrise tomorrow."

Vahuka then promised, "I shall certainly allow you to reach Vidarbha on time, but only after satisfying my curiosity by counting the leaves and
fruits of the vibhitaka tree. Therefore, please allow me to stop the chariot and find out whether your calculations are correct." The king reluctantly agreed, and so Vahuka quickly went and cut down the vibhitaka tree. Then, after carefully counting all of the fruits and leaves, Vahuka was amazed to find out that the king's figures were absolutely correct. Once again, coming before King Ṛtūparṇa, Vahuka exclaimed, "O King, your powers of calculation are most wonderful! I wish to learn from you the art which allowed you to accomplish such a wonderful feat."

Being very eager to continue his journey, the king replied, "This is not a very great thing. My real skill lies in gambling with dice, for in this field, no one on earth is my equal."

Vahuka then said, "O King, impart the science of dice unto me, and in return I shall teach you my complete knowledge of horses."

Ṛtūparṇa was anxious to satisfy Vahuka so that he could resume his journey, and at the same time he was also very interested in obtaining the charioteer's knowledge of horses. Thus, the king agreed to the exchange by saying, "So be it. Receive from me now the knowledge of dice and then later on you can teach me the complete science of horses at leisure."

Ṛtūparṇa then disclosed the art of gambling with dice, and as soon as King Nala received this knowledge, Kali came out from his body while incessantly vomiting the virulent poison of Karkoṭaka. Kali had been afflicted by the combination of the Nāga's poison and Damayantī's curse, but as soon as he left Nala's body, his suffering subsided. King Nala had been possessed by Kali for a long time, and upon seeing his tormentor before him, the niśāda ruler very angrily prepared to curse him in retaliation. While trembling with fear and joining his hands in supplication, Kali then pleaded, "O King, please control your anger and do not curse me. Award me this favor and in return I shall do something to enhance your already glorious reputation. Formerly, when you had deserted her, Damayantī angrily cursed me and thus ever since that time I have suffered greatly while residing within your body. Damayantī's wrath combined with the Nāga's poison caused me to burn day and night in agony. If you forgive my wretched self, who has sought your
protection in great fear, then I shall benedict you as follows: 'Let whosoever recites the history of King Nala become free from all fear on account of me.'"

His compassion having been invoked, Nala controlled his anger and so the frightened Kali, who had remained invisible to others, suddenly disappeared from Nala's sight by entering into the vibhitaka tree. Being freed from Kali's possession, King Nala joyfully remounted the chariot and then urged the horses on toward Vidarbha. On account of its contact with the wicked Kali, the vibhitaka tree has fallen into disrepute ever since that time. Once again, the horses ascended into the sky, as if endowed with wings, and after seeing King Nala recede into the distance, Kali came out of the vibhitaka tree and returned to his own abode. Although he was now freed from Kali's oppression, King Nala did not yet choose to resume his original form of unrivaled masculine beauty.

That evening, when King Ṛtūparṇa arrived at the outskirts of Kuṇḍina, the capital of the Vidarbhas, some people went and informed King Bhīma of his arrival. Then, at the invitation of King Bhīma, Ṛtūparṇa entered the city, and the rattling of his chariot filled the ten directions. King Nala's horses had formerly been brought to Kuṇḍina by Vārṣṇeya. Now, when they heard the distinctive rattle of Ṛtūparṇa's chariot, they became just as delighted as when they had formerly been in the presence of the niśāda king. Damayantī also heard the rattling of Ṛtūparṇa's chariot, which resembled the deep roaring of clouds during the monsoon season, and Bhīma also was surprised to hear this sound. Indeed, even the peacocks on the palace roof and the horses and elephants in the stables remembered that sound and replied by joyfully uttering their respective cries.

At this time, Damayantī said to herself, "If I am not able to once again behold that great personality, King Nala, who is possessed of countless virtues, then I shall surely give up my life. If I am not held in that hero's embrace this very day, I shall certainly cease to exist. If Niśāda, whose voice is as deep at that of the clouds, and who is as powerful as a lion, does not present himself before me today, I will enter into a blazing fire. I cannot recollect even a single wrong that King Nala committed against another person, or a single untruth that he uttered, even in jest. King
Nala is highly exalted, forgiving, and superior to all other kings. He is faithful to his marriage vows and before other women he acts just as if he were a eunuch. In the absence of my dear husband, I have been dwelling upon him in thought day and night and thus my heart feels as if it is about to burst out of intense grief.

Practically bereft of her reason and thus bewailing her fate, Damayantī went up onto the palace roof with the hope of seeing the righteous King Nala. Down below, in the courtyard, she could see King Ṛtūparṇa seated upon his chariot along with Vārṣṇeya and Vahuka. After descending from his chariot, Mahārāja Ṛtūparṇa presented himself before King Bhima, who received him with great warmth and respect. Because the Ikṣvāku king's visit was unannounced and since there was no special occasion being celebrated, King Bhima wondered much at the arrival of such a distinguished guest.

While being honored by his host, King Ṛtūparṇa looked around here and there, and yet he saw no sign that a svayamvara was to be held that day. King Bhima then inquired, "Please tell me, O king of Kośala, what purpose has brought you all the way here from your capital city, Ayodhya?"

The intelligent King Ṛtūparṇa could not see any other kings or princes gathered there, nor did he hear any talk relating to a svayamvara, nor was there an assembly of brāhmaṇas as there would have been on such an occasion. The king of Kośala thus thought about the matter for awhile and then replied, "I have come here simply to pay my respects unto you, O king of the Vidarbhas, and so now my purpose has been served."

King Bhima was astonished to hear such an answer, and so he began wondering about the real reason for Ṛtūparṇa's visit as follows: "Passing by other kingdoms and their exalted monarchs in order to come here and pay me respects does not seem a likely reason for Ṛtūparṇa's visit. Anyway, let me be patient and then I will certainly learn the truth of the matter in due course of time."

After thinking in this way, King Bhima did not grant Ṛtūparṇa his leave, but begged him again and again, "Please take some rest, for you must be exhausted after such a long journey."

Thereafter, Mahārāja Ṛtūparṇa retired to his allotted quarters, along
with Vārṣṇeya and followed by some servants of the royal household. Vahuka then took the chariot to the stables where he unyoked the horses and began tending to them. Meanwhile, after having seen the three visitors, the aggrieved Damayantī thought to herself: "The rattle of King Ṛtūparaṇa's chariot exactly resembled the distinctive thundering sound which King Nala used to create. However, I do not see the niṣāda king present here, and so it must be that Vārṣṇeya had learned the art of chariot driving from him. Then again, perhaps King Ṛtūparaṇa is just as skilled as Nala and thus his chariot produces the same rattling sound." After expressing her doubts in this manner, Damayantī instructed her maidservant, "O Keśinī, go to the stables and ascertain the identity of the charioteer who is tending to Ṛtūparaṇa's horses. Approach him respectfully, and by making the usual inquiries, find out as much as you can about him. Because of an overpowering feeling of mental satisfaction and delight within my heart, I am convinced that this charioteer must somehow be King Nala. After inquiring about his welfare, repeat the words which I had given to the brāhmaṇa Parṇāda, and then carefully remember whatever he says in reply."

As Damayantī watched from the roof, Keśinī cautiously went to the stables and then spoke to Vahuka as follows: "I welcome you, O foremost of men. The princess Damayantī wishes to know for what purpose the three of you have come to Vidarbha, and so please inform her truthfully."

Vahuka replied, "A brāhmaṇa came before the king of Kośala and informed him that Damayantī would he holding her second svаяmvarа. It is for this reason alone that King Ṛtūparaṇa has come here with the help of excellent horses that carried him one hundred yojanas in a single day. I am King Ṛtūparaṇa's charioteer, and my name is Vahuka."

Keśinī then asked, "Who is the third person that has accompanied you and the king, and whose son are you? Under what circumstances did you come to be the charioteer of King Ṛtūparaṇa?"

Vahuka replied, "The person about whom you ask was formerly the charioteer of the virtuous King Nala and his name is Vārṣṇeya. After Nala was sent into exile, Vārṣṇeya went to Ayodhyā to engage in the service of the king. I am very skilled at managing horses and so, when I came to Ayodhyā, King Ṛtūparaṇa immediately appointed me as his
personal charioteer and cook as well."
Keśinī then said, "Perhaps Vārṣñeya has some information about the whereabouts of his former master, King Nala. Has he spoken anything to you in this regard?"
Vahuka replied, "After placing King Nala's children into the care of King Bhīma, Vārṣñeya wandered about at his own will before finally coming to Ayodhyā. He nor anyone else has knowledge of King Nala's whereabouts for, due to calamity, the niṣāda hero wanders over the earth in a form that is bereft of his former beauty. Only Nala himself understands his real identity."
Keśinī then said, "The brāhmaṇa who previously came to Ayodhyā had repeatedly called out the following words of an aggrieved woman: 'O beloved gambler, where have you gone after cutting off half of your faithful wife's cloth and deserting her as she innocently slept within the dense forest? Remaining clad in that dirty half a cloth, she burns with grief throughout the entire day and night while always expecting the return of her husband. O Hero, please relent towards she who weeps incessantly and give her an encouraging answer.'
"Formerly, when you heard the brāhmaṇa speak these words at Ayodhyā, you replied. Now, the princess of Vidarbha wishes to hear once again exactly what it is that you had said."
Nala became very pained at heart while listening to Keśinī, and his eyes filled up with tears. Although burning with grief, Nala repressed his sorrow, and with words that faltered on account of intense emotion, he replied, "Chaste women, even when overwhelmed by adversity, remain fixed in their vows, and thus they are guaranteed an exalted destination in heaven. Even if deserted by their husbands, such chaste women do not become angry, but continue to live, being protected by the armor of their virtue. Since she was deserted by one who was overtaken by great misfortune, having been deprived by birds of his only garment after the loss of his kingdom and prosperity, this virtuous lady should not be offended."
While speaking, Nala could not restrain his emotions, and thus he suddenly began to weep profusely. Keśinī then returned to Damayantī and related to her everything that had taken place. While hearing from her maidservant, Damayantī became all the more anxious for her
suspicion that Vahuka was indeed King Nala seemed all but certain. Damayantī then said, "O Keśinī, go to the stables once again while remaining silently by Vahuka's side carefully notice everything about his conduct. Whenever he does something extraordinary observe all the details and then report back to me what you see."

Keśinī returned to the royal stables and after carefully observing Vahuka's behavior for some time she reported back to Damayantī. The maidservant informed her mistress, "O Princess, never before have I seen or even heard of anyone having such control over material nature. Whenever Vahuka came to a low passageway, he did not have to bend down, for upon seeing him approach, the doorway itself would increase in height in order to let him go through without impediment. King Bhima had provided varieties of food for Vahuka to eat and some pots had been placed there so that he could wash the ingredients and cook. When Vahuka simply looked at these pots, they filled up with water as if helping him to wash the vegetables. Then, when he wanted to begin cooking, Vahuka held up a bunch of dry grass to the sun and immediately it burst into flames. Then, as he engaged in cooking, I saw that sometimes Vahuka touched the fire and yet was not even slightly burnt. Thereafter, I watched Vahuka pick up some flowers and then press them with his hands. Miraculously, the flower were not crushed, but became even more beautiful than before. After witnessing all of these wonders, I came here quickly to inform you of everything."

After hearing this, Damayantī began to consider that she had already recovered her long lost husband. From Keśinī's descriptions, she became convinced that Vahuka could not be anyone other than King Nala, in spite of his difference in bodily features. As tears of joy filled her eyes, Damayantī told Keśinī, "Please go once again, and without Vahuka's knowledge, bring me some food he has prepared."

Once more, being ever-desirous of accomplishing the wishes of her mistress, Keśinī approached Vahuka's room, and after secretly taking something which he had cooked, she returned to Damayantī. When the princess of Vidarbha, who had formerly eaten the niṣāda King's cooking, tasted the food, she became all the more convinced that the unsightly charioteer was actually her husband, and thus she wept aloud with an
aggrieved heart. Then, after wiping her face, Damayantī next sent her two children to Vahuka along with the servant Keśinī. When he saw the young boy and girl, Vahuka immediately recognized them to be Indrasena and Indrasenā, and so he eagerly embraced them. Then, while taking the twins upon his lap and caressing them fondly, Vahuka began to weep on account of his long repressed grief. The next moment, however, Vahuka realized that he had betrayed himself, and so he put the children aside. He told Keśinī, "This boy and girl very much resemble my own, and thus I could not help but cry upon unexpectedly seeing them. Now please go away and do not come here any more. If you continue to visit me frequently like this, people will get the wrong impression and blame us."

Keśinī then quickly returned to Damayantī and informed her of Vahuka’s agitation upon seeing the two children. With a heart burdened by heavy sorrow and filled with great desire to see king Nala, Damayantī next sent Keśinī to her mother with the following message: "Suspecting Vahuka to be in reality my husband, King Nala, I have tested him in various ways. The only doubt that remains in this regards is his appearance, which is quite unsightly. Now, I wish to see Vahuka for myself and so either permit him to enter the palace or let me go to his room. My dear mother, please make this arrangement, whether it be with or without the knowledge of my father."

After hearing Damayantī's message from Keśinī, the Queen dismissed her and then went and presented the matter to her husband. King Bhima then consented that Vahuka could be brought to his daughter's apartment, and so the charioteer was summoned to the palace on some pretext. When Vahuka then unexpectedly saw Damayantī before him, the overpowering grief that welled up within caused him to shed incessant tears. Damayantī also became afflicted with great pangs of anguish upon seeing Vahuka weeping before her. Still wearing the single piece of reddish cloth, having matted hair and covered with dirt, Damayantī said, "O Vahuka, have you ever met a person who, in spite of being acquainted with religious duties, has gone away, deserted his innocently sleeping wife in the forest? Who, except the virtuous Nala could do such a thing to his poor, sinless wife? In what way was I guilty in the eyes of that king, making him think it fit to leave me there alone
and helpless in the desolate forest? Why should he, whom I chose leaving aside the demigods themselves, abandon his loving and devoted wife and mother of his two children? In front of the sacrificial fire and the demigods, he had taken away my hand and vowed, 'I am truly yours.' O great hero, where was that sacred vow when you deserted me?"

As she spoke, tears poured forth from Damayanti's eyes, and the more that Nala gazed upon his aggrieved wife, the more his heart softened toward her. While restraining his tears, however, Nala replied, "Neither the loss of my kingdom nor my deserting you in the forest were acts of my own volition. I was possessed by Kali and thus forced to act helplessly under his influence. While wandering in the forest, lamenting in separation from me, you had cursed Kali, and as a result, he began to burn with pain while continuing to reside within me. Fortunately, that wretch has now left me on account of my vows and austerities, and thus I have been able to come here, and it is only for your sake that I have done so. Alas, is there any chaste woman other than yourself who would forsake her loving and devoted husband in order to marry again? At the command of your father, messengers have been traveling over the earth, declaring, 'Bhima's daughter will, of her own accord, choose a second husband who is worthy of her.'"

"Upon receiving this news, King Ṛtūparṇa eagerly departed and with my assistance he was able to reach here in one day."

While trembling with fear on account of Nala's harsh words, Damayanti replied, "O ruler of nīṣādas, please do not hastily judge me to be at fault, for I had chosen you as my only lord, passing over even great demigods. It was only to induce you to come here that I had brāhmaṇas go out in all directions, singing my message in the form of a ballad. After a long time, the brāhmaṇa Parṇāda found you residing at the royal court in Ayodhyā, and it was upon his return that I devised this plan to bring you here. I knew that except for yourself, no one in this world could travel the one hundred yojanas from Ayodhyā in a single day on a chariot. O King, while touching your feet, I swear that never have I even thought of committing a sinful act. May the all-pervading air, as well as the sun and the moon be my witnesses and may they take away my life if I have ever proved unchaste to you, even within my mind."

Being so addressed by Damayantī, Vāyu suddenly announced from the
sky, "O Nala, I tell you truly that this woman has not done anything wrong. Indeed, by her glorious activities, Damayantī has enhanced the reputation of her dynasty. We have been the witnesses and we have been Damayantī's protectors throughout the entire three years which she lived in separation from you. It is only for your sake that she announced her so-called second svayaṃvara, for, but yourself, no one on earth is capable of traveling one hundred yojanas in a single day. O King, now you have once again obtained Bhīma's daughter and she has also recovered you after so much suffering. Without entertaining the least suspicion, O Nala, be once again united with Damayantī."

At the conclusion of Vāyu's testimony, drums were heard resounding in heaven and showers of flowers fell from the sky upon Nala and Damayantī while fragrant breezes began to blow. As he beheld these wonders, King Nala cast aside all of his doubts regarding his wife. Taking out the celestial garments that were given to him by the Nāga, King Nala put them on and thus instantly regained his original handsome form. When Damayantī saw the real Nala standing before her, she immediately embraced him and began to weep uncontrollably. King Nala returned Damayantī's embrace and then embraced his two children, and while doing so, he experienced a most exquisite delight within his heart. As she buried her head within her husband's broad chest, Damayantī sighed again and again as she recalled the unbearable miseries which she had underwent. For a long time, Nala continued to embrace the ragged and soiled princess of Vidarbha, and meanwhile, the Queen, who had watched without their knowledge, went and informed King Bhīma of all that happened. Bhīma then said, "Let Nala remain undisturbed today and tomorrow I shall see him after his bath and morning prayers, with our daughter at his side."

Nala and Damayantī happily spent the night together, narrating all of the incidents which had occurred during their three years of separation. Thus, in the fourth year after the loss of his kingdom, Nala was once again united with his wife, and together they began passing their time, intent upon making each other happy. Having recovered her lord, Damayantī once again blazed forth with beauty and splendor, her anxieties dispelled and her heart swelling with joy.

The next morning, Mahārāja Nala, who was now royally dressed and
decorated with jeweled ornaments, presented himself, along with Damayanti, before King Bhima. Nala humbly offered his obeisances unto his father-in-law, as did Damayanti, and in return, King Bhima received him just like a dear son, honoring him greatly. Indeed, there arose an uproar of delight throughout Kuṇḍina when news of King Nala's return spread, and the citizens began to celebrate the occasion by decorating their city with colorful flags and garlands of flowers. When King Rūparṇa learned that Vahuka was actually Mahārāja Nala, and that he was now reunited with Damayanti, he called for the niśada hero. King Rūparṇa begged for forgiveness from Mahārāja Nala, and Nala also asked the Ikṣvāku king to excuse him in return. The intelligent king of Kośala, who was well-versed in the art of speaking, then said, "It is by good fortune that you have regained your wife after a long separation, and so now happiness is once again yours. O Nala, while dwelling with me in disguise, I hope that you were not mistreated or offended by me. If I have committed any fault out of ignorance, it behooves you to now forgive me."

Nala then replied, "O King, you never slighted or offended me in the least and thus, not even a tinge of anger has awakened within me on your account. Indeed, I passed my days so comfortably, with all of my desires fulfilled, that I resided with you more happily than I used to live in my own palace. You have always been my dear friend and relative, but from now on, I shall find even greater delight in your company. Now, if you so desire, I can instruct you in the science of horses and thus repay you for having taught me the art of dice-playing."

Thereafter, King Rūparṇa received the complete knowledge of horses from Mahārāja Nala after performing the ordained rituals, and he then departed for his own kingdom, employing someone else as his charioteer. King Nala continued to reside at Kuṇḍina for one month, and then, after taking permission from his father-in-law, Bhima, he set out for the kingdom of the niśadas. Driving a white chariot and accompanied by a small army consisting of sixteen elephants, fifty horses and six hundred foot-soldiers, the highly enraged Nala entered his former capital and at once approached his brother Puṣkara. Nala challenged him, "I have once again acquired great wealth and so I have returned, being very eager to play dice with you. Let Damayanti and all else that I possess become the
stake against the kingdom which you formerly won from me. And let the loser become the slave of he who comes out victorious. Let the play begin without delay, for, having once won at gambling, it is one's duty to not to refuse a rematch. My dear brother, if you do not like the idea of competing with dice, then let us fight with weapons. O Puṣkara, you must choose one or the other; either throwing the dice in the gambling hall, or bending the bow on the battlefield!"

Being very proud and sure of his success, Puṣkara laughingly replied, "O niṣāda, it is by good fortune that you have earned more wealth with which to gamble. I can understand that this wealth, along with your wife, Damayanti, are now destined to be won by me. Finally, the beautiful princess of Vidarbha will serve me just as the Apsarās wait on King Indra! O Nala, I have been anxiously waiting for you to return, because I cannot derive any pleasure from gambling with persons who are outside a blood relationship with me. After winning the beautiful Damayanti this very day, I shall consider myself to be highly successful, for her image has always dwelled within my heart."

When Nala heard these bragging words, he felt like cutting off Puṣkara's head at once with his sword. Although his eyes were red with rage, Nala managed to smile and then replied, "First of all let us play. Why do you speak like this now? After defeating me and making me your slave, you will certainly have the right to say whatever you like."

Thereafter, the gambling match commenced, and with a single throw of dice, Nala won back his entire kingdom, along with the life of his brother. The compassionate Nala smilingly said, "The whole kingdom is now indisputably mine, and you, O worst of kṣatriyas, you cannot even cast your glance upon the princess of Vidarbha. Along with your entire family, you are now reduced to the status of Damayanti's slave. O great fool, my former defeat at your hand, was not your own doing, although this is unknown to you. You certainly became very proud after taking away my kingdom, but actually, all that transpired was done under the influence of the wicked Kali. For this reason, I shall not hold you responsible, but instead, I shall give you your freedom to live as you choose. Indeed, I will grant you a share of our paternal kingdom as well as great wealth, so that you may live happily. Above and beyond this, I shall once again treat you as my very own brother, without any less
In this way, Nala forgave his brother and then, after embracing him again and again, he gave Puṣkara permission to depart for his own capital. In turn Puṣkara offered his obeisances unto Nala and then spoke as follows with folded hands:

"Let your fame be immortal and may you live happily for ten thousand years! I shall forever be indebted, for you have given me both life and refuge."

Puṣkara continued to reside with Nala for one month and was treated with great respect by him. Then, accompanied by a large army and many servants, Puṣkara happily departed for the kingdom which had been allotted to him by the magnanimous King Nala. All of the citizens were overwhelmed with joy to have their beloved King Nala back. After coming before Nala with folded hands, the subjects, headed by the state officers, said, "O King Nala, we are truly thankful on this auspicious day, for we have once again obtained our ruler. Just as Indra illuminates the assembly of demigods and the moon brightens the starlit sky, so you are the foremost of all monarchs."

While the citizens celebrated his return by holding a great festival, King Nala went with a large army and escorted Damayantë and their two children back to the niśāda kingdom. Thereafter, Nala and Damayantë continued to pass their time together in great happiness and royal opulence. Nala once again became the most illustrious among the kings of Jambūdvipa, and thus he ruled over the earth, performing numerous sacrifices and giving abundant rewards to the brāhmaṇas.

Brḥadaśva then concluded, "O King, just like Nala, you shall regain your rightful kingdom and live there very happily along with your relatives. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, if we compare your exile with that of King Nala, we see that you are in a far better position, for you are living happily in the forest along with your wife and brothers, and you have the association of very illustrious brāhmaṇas. Therefore, why should you lament? After hearing this story of Nala and Damayantë, you should understand the futility of mere exertion as a means for counteracting the course of destiny. Since all living beings are subordinate to the
supreme will of Providence, no one should become overly elated while enjoying prosperity, nor should one become too despondent while facing life's inevitable adversities.

"O King, I know of your great fear that once again, upon the completion of your period of exile, you may be challenged to gamble at the dice-board. It so happens that I am in possession of the complete knowledge of dice-playing, with all of its intricacies. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, because I am very pleased with you, I shall now impart unto you that science."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was very happy to learn the art of playing dice from Brähadaśva, and after imparting this knowledge, the great rṣi departed. Soon, thereafter, some ascetics came to Kāmyakavana from the Himālayas. When they met Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, the rṣis informed him, "O King, your brother Arjuna is now engaged in performing severe austerities, the likes of which we have never before seen! Indeed, he is maintaining his body and soul together by eating air and nothing else!"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira felt great distress upon hearing about Arjuna's harsh existence and so, after the departure of those rṣis, he consulted with the brāhmaṇas who were accompanying him, hoping to gain some mental relief. Actually, without Arjuna, none of the Pāṇḍavas could be happy, and thus it appeared that Arjuna was their sole refuge. Indeed, sometimes Draupadī would tell Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "Due to separation from Arjuna, I feel so aggrieved that wherever I turn my eyes, the forest also seems to bear a despondent aspect."

Bhīma commented, "Without Arjuna, everything seems to be void," and so Nakula and Sahadeva suggested, "Since we feel so unhappy at Kāmyakavana due to remembering how Arjuna used to live here with us, we should move to a new place."

After hearing these expressions of sorrow, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became even more morose. Nārada Muni then suddenly arrived there, and so everyone stood up in order to worship the great sage amongst the demigods. Then, after he had been respectfully seated, Nārada Muni said, "My dear king, please tell me what it is that you desire. What is there that I can do for you?"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Nārada, if you are simply satisfied with us, then I feel as if all of my desires have been fulfilled. Still, since we have been fortunately blessed by your association, the opportunity of
hearing from you should not be wasted. Therefore, please describe to us the merit which is attained by visiting the various holy places of pilgrimage.

Nārada then narrated: "O King, once, long ago, Bhīṣma had performed worship of the pītrs in the association of great sages near the source of the river Gaṅgā. At that time, Pulastya appeared there, and Bhīṣma became highly delighted upon witnessing the ṛṣi's extraordinary beauty and splendor. Indeed, after worshiping Pulastya with an offering of arghya, Bhīṣma expressed his desire to engage as the ṛṣi's fully surrendered servant. Pulastya was very pleased with Bhīṣma's submissive attitude, so, in return, he offered to grant Bhīṣma any desired benediction. Bhīṣma, who was very emaciated due to having performed severe austerities, then replied, 'O foremost of the sages, I am fully satisfied by just seeing you! However, since I have some doubt regarding the tīrthas and their potency, I will take advantage of this opportunity by requesting you to enlighten me on the subject.'

Pulastya then replied, "O son of Gaṅgādevī, to achieve merit by performing sacrifices, one must possess great wealth. On the other hand, by traveling to holy places of pilgrimage, even an impoverished man can accumulate tremendous pious credit. Indeed, the merit that is achieved by visiting the holy places is greater than that which is obtained by the performance of sacrifice!"

Thereafter, Pulastya described innumerable holy places, one after another, and the merit which is achieved by visiting them. About Puṣkara, Pulastya said, "This glorious tīrtha is intimately related to Lord Viṣṇu, and it is equal to the sum total of one hundred billion ordinary holy places. One who bathes in the Puṣkara lake, is immediately liberated from the cycle of repeated birth and death."

Pulastya then related the history of Rāma-hrada as follows: "At this holy place, Lord Paraśurāma dug five lakes and then filled them with the blood of the kṣatriyas that He had killed. Thereafter, with that blood, the son of Jamadagni offered oblations unto His forefathers. When the pītrs became satisfied with Paraśurāma, they visibly appeared there in the sky, in order to express their pleasure. Then, when the pītrs offered Him a benediction, Paraśurāma replied, with folded hands, 'May I always take pleasure in the performance of austerities and may I become freed
from all of the sinful reactions for having killed so many kṣatriyas. In addition, please grant that these lakes may become celebrated all over the three worlds as a holy place of pilgrimage.'

"The pītrās granted these boons and then informed Paraśurāma, 'You should not think that you had incurred sinful reactions by killing the kṣatriyas. The truth is that those kings were slain as a result of their own misdeeds, and you were only an instrument in the hands of Destiny.'

"Next, Pulastya described Sapta-Sarasvatī and said, 'Here, a rṣi named Mankanaka had resided. One day, he happened to cut his hand with a blade of kuśa-grass, and from out of the wound came vegetable juice instead of blood. The rṣi was so amazed to see this that he began to dance then and there with great joy. Indeed, as Mankanaka did so, all of the moving and nonmoving living entities that resided there also began to dance along with him. The demigods and rṣi then went and reported the matter to Lord Śiva, for they considered Mankanaka to be very proud of his so-called greatness. Thereafter, in response to the demigods' request that he make Mankanaka stop, Lord Śiva approached the rṣi and asked, "Why are you dancing?"

Being intoxicated with his so-called happiness, Mankanaka pointed to his hand and replied, "Just see! I am dancing because vegetable juice is flowing from my wound!"

Lord Śiva then said, "O Rṣi, look at me!" And as Mankanaka looked on, Lord Śiva pressed his thumb with the tip of his finger so that from out of the wound came ashes as white as snow. Upon seeing this, Mankanaka became ashamed of his own prowess and so fell at the feet of Lord Śiva. Then, after worshipping Lord Śiva wholeheartedly, Mankanaka begged, "O Lord, please benedict me in such a way that my inclination toward asceticism will never decrease."

Lord Śiva replied, "O Rṣi, by my grace, your ascetic prowess shall increase a thousand-fold. Indeed, from this time onward, I will personally reside here along with you in this āśrama."

Pulastya then continued by saying, "One who simply recites the glories of all these holy places or who visits them in his imagination, also receives great rewards. If one simply makes up his mind to go to the forest of Naimiṣa, then one-half of his sins are immediately eradicated. And, if he actually enters that holy place, the other half of his sinful
reactions also become destroyed without delay. Prayāga is said to be the most sacred of all tīrthas within the entire three worlds, and bathing there at the confluence of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā confers upon one the highest merit. In the Satya-yuga, all of the tīrthas exhibited their full potency. In the Tretā-yuga, Puṣkara excelled all others. In the Dvāpara-yuga, Kurukṣetra becomes the most prominent. And, in the Kali-yuga, the Gaṅgā is considered to be the most sacred of all the holy places. One who bathes in the Gaṅgā, or at Prayāga, Kurukṣetra or Puṣkara, purifies his dynasty for seven generations past and seven generations in the future. Indeed, for as long as one is in contact with the Gaṅgā, he is regarded to be living directly in heaven. O Bhīṣma, just as there is no other holy place like the Gaṅgā, so there is no other Lord like the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa!

After saying this, Pulastya disappeared from the vision of Bhīṣma, who then began to wander all over the earth, visiting the holy places of pilgrimage which had been described to him.

Nārada Muni then concluded his discourse by saying, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhīra, if you lead the brāhmaṇas on a similar tīrtha-yātṛā, then you will earn even more merit than that which was achieved by Bhīṣma. There are many great rṣis who reside at these holy places, such as Vālmīki, Kaśyapa, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, Asita, Devala, Mārkaṇḍeya, Bhāradvāja, Vasiṣṭha, Vyāsadeva and Durvāsā, and all of them are anxiously awaiting your arrival. My dear king, Lomasa Rṣi will soon come to you for the purpose of guiding you on a tour of all of these sacred spots. By going on tīrtha-yātṛā, you will not only be able to pass the period of separation from Arjuna quite happily, but your prowess will become greatly strengthened, enabling you to regain your kingdom after killing your enemies."

Nārada Muni then departed and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra, whose brothers had already suggested that they leave Kāmyakavana, went to Dhaumya and said, "O best of brāhmaṇas, due to feeling intense separation from Arjuna, my brothers and I would like to move somewhere else. Actually, it is upon Arjuna alone that all of our hopes rest for defeating our powerful enemies. Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa and Aśvatthāmā have already been installed as the commanders of the Kaurava army, and each of them is invincible. Even a greater cause for fear, however, is Karna, for
he appears to me to be just like the flames of the great fire which rages at the time of the dissolution of the universe! Karna's arrows are like the tongues of those flames, and the slapping of his leather-sheathed hand is just like the crackling of the fire! The dust that is raised on the battlefield is like the smoke and Duryodhana's urging on of Karna is just like a wind that fans the flames! O Dhaumya, I am sure that the Karna-fire will consume all of my warriors, for in comparison, they are just like heaps of straw!

"Our only hope is Arjuna, for he is just like a mass of dark bluish clouds that are being driven by the Krsna-wind! Arjuna's celestial weapons are like lightning, his Gandiva bow is like an all-auspicious rainbow, and his white horses are like cranes that fly beneath the dark clouds. Only Arjuna is capable of extinguishing the Karna-fire by means of his torrents of arrowy showers!"

Upon seeing how depressed and anxious the Pndavas were, Dhaumya thought it wise to describe to them all of the holy places which are located in the four directions. Then, at the end of his discourse, Dhaumya concluded by saying, "Simply hearing about these tirthas awards one a great deal of merit and relieves one from all kinds of distress. Then, what to speak of actually visiting these holy places of pilgrimage, for by doing so one receives 100 times more pious credit! Of all the holy places, Badar, the abode of Nara and Narayana, is the foremost. My dear king, you should visit all of these sacred tirthas, for not only will you acquire great merit, but you will relieve your anxiety-filled mind as well."

As Dhaumya was thus speaking to the Pndavas, Lomasra Rshi arrived there. Maharaja Yudhishthira and his brothers very respectfully received Lomasra Rshi and worshipped him with great veneration. Then, as the great sage sat comfortably, surrounded by the brhmanas and the Pndavas, Maharaja Yudhishthira politely inquired about his purpose for coming to Kamyakavana. Lomasra Rshi then explained, "O King, in the course of my wanderings I happened to come to the abode of Indra. There, I was exceedingly surprised to see how Arjuna was sitting upon the royal throne next to the king of heaven himself. Indra then ordered me to come here and describe to you all of Arjuna's wonderful
achievements. Not only has your brother received the best of celestial weapons, including the brahmaśīra of Lord Śiva, but he has also become a master of music and dance under the guidance of the son of the Gandharva Viśvāvasu. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, Indra's exact message to you is this:
"O son of Dharma, you can rest assured that Arjuna will very soon return to you. First, however, he must accomplish a great task on behalf of the demigods, which even they themselves are unable to perform. After Arjuna return's to you I shall do something that will relieve you of your intense fear of Karṇa. In the meantime, as you await your brother's return, you should engage yourself in performing austerities, and under the guidance of Lomasa Ṛṣi, visit all of the holy places of pilgrimage.'
"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna also gave me a message to deliver to you. He urges you to visit all of the holy places of pilgrimage and to give away profuse charity in order to earn great religious merit. My dear king, I have already completed two tīrtha-yatras, and now, in your association, I shall commence the third."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O foremost of ṛṣis, how fortunate I am to have been thought of by King Indra! Actually, I had already made up my mind to visit all of the holy tīrthas after hearing about them from Nārada Muni and Dhaumya. Therefore, I am ready to set out as soon as you give the command."
Lomasa then suggested, "My dear king, I think that you should only take a small retinue with you, for the journey which we are about to embark on is very arduous."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then sent back to Hastināpura all of those brāhmaṇas who could not easily bear the pangs of hunger and thirst, the fatigue of prolonged travel, and the severity of freezing winter. He also sent back those brāhmaṇas who were attached to eating sweets, cooked food or meat, and also all of the non-brāhmaṇas who had followed him out of a sense of loyalty. Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas spent three more nights at Kāmyakavana and then, early the next morning, they prepared to depart. At this time, the few remaining brāhmaṇas approached Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and pleaded, "O King, please allow us to accompany you on this tour of the holy places, for it is a rare opportunity for us. Being under your and Lomasa Ṛṣi's protection, we
will not be afraid of the Räkşasas which one inevitably meets along the way."

Mahäräja Yudhişṭhira consented and then, just as the party was about to set out, Śrīla Vyäsadeva arrived there along with Nārada Muni and Parvata Muni. Mahäräja Yudhişṭhira worshipped these three great rṣis with the utmost veneration and then had them comfortably seated. Desiring to encourage the Pāṇḍavas, these foremost of rṣis said, "My dear king, it will be a great boon for you to travel to all of the holy places of pilgrimage. In this way, your heart will become purified of all kinds of material contamination and all of the doubts which you have harbored will be banished from your mind, once and for all."

Thereafter, having once again worshipped Śrīla Vyäsadeva, Nārada Muni and Parvata Muni, the Pāṇḍavas set out at an auspicious moment. The royal sons of Kuntī and Mādrī had matted hair and they wore impenetrable armor over their dress of deer-skin and tree-bark. While carrying their weapons in their hands, the Pāṇḍavas were followed by the brähmaṇas and also fifteen chariots, numerous servants headed by Indrasena, as well as cooks and all of the necessary paraphernalia. Then, as he went along the forest path, Mahäräja Yudhişṭhira began to converse with Lomasa Rṣi by expressing his great and ever-present doubt. The king said, "O great sage, I do not think that I am bereft of all pious merit and yet I am suffering more than any king in history. On the other hand, my enemies, who are completely devoid of all good qualities and bereft of all moral sense, are seen to be prospering. How can this be?"

Lomasa Rṣi replied, "O King, a person may apparently prosper by sinful means, but such success is only temporary and thus illusory. After a brief period of prosperity, a sinful, foolish and puffed-up person is invariably vanquished. Long, long ago, the demigods carefully observed all religious principles while visiting innumerable holy places of pilgrimage. In this way, they attained to a high standard of prosperity. On the other hand, since they were very proud, the asuras did not prosper. Then, because of their conceit, the asuras became very angry at their misfortune and from that anger arose all kinds of sinful propensities. As a result, the asuras eventually became totally shameless and thus all good behavior was discarded by them. Having thus become completely bereft of all good
sense, the *asuras* fell more and more into adversity and so, upon seeing this, Kali possessed them. In this way, the Daityas became completely vanquished whereas the virtuous demigods prospered beyond all imagination."

In this way, Lomasa encouraged Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra as they went along the forest path, and he concluded his discourse by saying, "O King, just like the Daityas, the sons of Dhrūtarāṣṭra have become the slaves of evil and ignorance. Therefore, you can rest assured that in the very near future they will meet with destruction."

Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas visited many places of pilgrimage, and at each holy place they bathed ceremoniously and then gave profuse charity to the *brāhmaṇas*. After visiting Naimiṣa, Prayāga and many other *tīrthas*, the Pāṇḍavas arrived at the Brahmaṇāra and they decided to reside there for four months in order to follow the regulations of Cāturāṣṭra. At Brahmaṇāra, a ṛṣi named Samanātha described to the Pāṇḍavas the great sacrifice of King Gaya which had been performed there long ago: "This sacrifice was distinguished by the mountains of food which were distributed. Indeed, there were hills of cooked rice by the thousand, lakes full of *ghee*, and rivers of yogurt. All kinds of sweets and delicacies were prepared daily and then distributed to everyone who attended the sacrifice. Even up to this very day there are 25 mountains of food remaining here and all of the living entities who witnessed that great sacrifice have not felt a desire to eat ever since."

When the party arrived at Duryaja, the abode of the great sage Agastya, Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra inquired about how the ṛṣi had formerly killed the demon Vātāpi. In reply, Lomasa Ṛṣi narrated the story as follows: "The two Daityas, Ilvala and Vātāpi were brothers and they resided at the city named Maṁimati. Once, Ilvala requested a *brāhmaṇa* to enable him to beget a son who would become as glorious as Indra, the king of heaven. However, when the *brāhmaṇa* refused to do so, Ilvala became a hater of *brāhmaṇas* from that day onward.

Thereafter, by utilizing his mystic powers, Ilvala would transform his younger brother into a ram and then offer the cooked flesh to an invited *brāhmaṇa*. Then, after the *brāhmaṇa* had eaten Vātāpi in the form of a ram, Ilvala would loudly call for his younger brother. The demon Ilvala had a special power so that whomever he called for would immediately
come before him. Thus, upon being summoned, Vātāpi would tear open the brāhmaṇa's stomach and then appear before Ilvala in his original form. In this way, the wicked Ilvala killed many thousands of brāhmaṇas over a long period of time.

Meanwhile, once upon a time, Agastya Rṣi happened to come upon his deceased ancestors as they were hanging head-downward in a pit. When Agastya inquired about their miserable condition, the brāhmaṇas replied, "You should know that we are suffering because there is no offspring to continue our dynasty. Only if you can beget a good son will we be saved from having to suffer in hell."

Agastya assured his ancestors that he would act for their benefit, and thereafter, he began to think about how his family line could be perpetuated. It so happened, however, that Agastya could not find any girl whom he considered to be a suitable mate. Thus, at last, he took various bodily parts from diverse creatures which he thought to be very beautiful, and with them he created a very excellent girl. At this time, the king of the Vidarbhas was undergoing austerities for the purpose of begetting children, and Agastya Rṣi arranged that the girl he had created would take birth as his daughter.

In due course of time, when the girl was born, she was given the name Lopamudrā, and as she quickly grew up, she became extraordinarily beautiful. Then, even though Lopamudrā was the daughter of a king and was served by hundreds of beautiful maidservants, she attained to the age of puberty without anyone having asked for her hand in marriage. Actually, it was because she was so highly qualified and beautiful that no one dared to ask for Lopamudrā's hand, being afraid of incurring her father's wrath.

When the king saw that his daughter had grown up so that her beauty exceeded even that of the Apsarās in heaven, he began to think seriously about to whom she could be given in marriage. Agastya Rṣi could understand that Lopamudrā had reached marriageable age and so he approached the king of Vidarbha in order to ask for the girl's hand. However, as soon as the king heard Agastya's request, he fainted away at the very thought of his daughter living the life of an ascetic. Then, upon regaining his senses, the king approached the queen for advice. He did not want to give his daughter to Agastya but at the same time he did not
dare to refuse and thus incur the ṛṣi’s displeasure. The queen was also bewildered by the dilemma, however, and thus she simply remained silent after hearing the king’s words. Then, when she understood the situation, Lopamudrā approached her parents and said, "My dear mother and father, simply bestow me upon the ṛṣi without further ado and thus save yourselves from all this grief."

At last, the king did as his daughter had advised. After receiving Lopamudrā as his wife, Agastyā ṛṣi immediately ordered her, "O Princess, you must throwaway all of your royal garments and dress yourself in tree-bark and deerskin."

Lopamudrā obediently did as she was told and thereafter, she began to follow Agastyā in his life of austerity while residing at Gaṅgādvārā (Hardwar). With the passage of time, a great bond of love developed between the two. Then, one day as Agastyā gazed upon Lopamudrā while she was emerging from the river after having bathed, he began to greatly appreciate her beauty, service and self-control. It was Lopamudrā’s time for conception and so Agastyā called for her and expressed his desire to unite with her in sexual intercourse. Then, with folded hands, Lopamudrā bashfully but lovingly replied, "O Lord, I am only willing to unite with you on a royal bed after dressing and decorating myself very nicely. You as well must be handsomely dressed, wearing garlands and jewels."

Agastyā replied, "O Princess, I am not wealthy like your father, and so this is not possible for me."

Lopamudrā was adamant, however, and she insisted, "O foremost of ṛṣis, I am sure that with your ascetic prowess you can create whatever you like."

Agastyā then admitted, "What you have said is certainly true. However, I am not very eager to diminish the power of my austerities for such a purpose. Therefore, please order me in such a way that I need not suffer any loss of prowess."

Lopamudrā was not willing to give up her determination, and so she replied, "My dear husband, the time for my conception will not last long. Therefore, it is up to you to somehow fulfill my desire and at the same time not diminish your ascetic merit."

Finally, Agastyā said, "I shall go out and search for wealth. In the
meantime, remain here and wait for me."
Agastya then went to the kingdom of Srutarvan, knowing him to possess great opulence. When the king learned of the rṣi's arrival, he came out of his palace along with his ministers in order to respectfully receive him. Then, after offering Agastya Muni arghya, the king inquired with folded hands, "O great sage, what is the purpose of your visit? I await your order and so please let me know what service I can render unto you."
Agastya replied, "O King, please give me some wealth, but not so much that others will become deprived by your gift."
Mahārāja Srutarvan replied, "O Rṣi, my income and expenditures are now equal and thus I have no excess funds."
Agastya could understand that if he took wealth from this king, then the citizens would be deprived. Taking Srutarvan with him, Agastya next went to visit Mahārāja Vradhanasva. When the king understood that Agastya Muni had arrived, he came out of his palace and offered both him and Srutarvan arghya as well as water for washing their feet. Then, when Vradhanasva inquired from Agastya about the purpose of his visit, the rṣi said, "O King, please give me some wealth, but only so much as will not give harm to others."
Mahārāja Vradhanasva also explained how his income and expenditures were equal and then he told Agastya, "I will leave the matter in your hands. Now, order me as you feel fit."
Once again, Agastya was unwilling to take anything, for he considered that his acceptance of charity would deprive the citizens. Thereafter, he took both kings and went to Mahārāja Trasaddasyu, the son of Purokutsa in the Ikṣvāku line. This highly opulent king received his quests with great respect. Then, when Trasaddasyu inquired from Agastya about the purpose of his visit, the rṣi once again said, "I have come to ask for wealth, but not to the extent that others will be deprived."
However, Mahārāja Trasaddasyu also explained that he had no excess funds and so Agastya was unwilling to take anything from him. The three kings then suggested, "Let us go to the Dānava Ilvala for he possesses a vast amount of wealth. O Rṣi, if you beg from Ilvala, then your mission will surely be accomplished."
Thus, Agastya, Srutarvan, Vradhanasva and Trasaddasyu all went to where Ilvala was staying. The Dänava king and his ministers received and worshipped his guests with great respect and then prepared the meat of a ram in order to feed them. Srutarvan, Vradhanasva and Trasaddasyu could understand that this meat was actually Vätāpi, however, and so they became very fearful. Agastya then assured them by saying, "O Kings, please do not worry, for I myself shall eat the asura."

Thereafter, as Agastya sat down to eat along with the three kings, Ilvala came and smilingly distributed the food. Then, when his host's back was turned, Agastya Rṣi ate up all of the meat from his own plate and those of the kings as well. Then, when the meal was over, Ilvala began to loudly call for his younger brother Vätāpi. However, the only response was that a loud burp came forth from Agastya's mouth, making a resounding sound. Then, as Ilvala anxiously called for Vätāpi again and again, Agastya laughed heartily and then informed his host, "Your brother will not come out this time, for he has already been digested by me."

Upon hearing this, Ilvala became very aggrieved. Then, hoping to appease Agastya, Ilvala came before him with folded hands, followed by his ministers, and said, "O great ṛṣi, please tell us why you have come here."

Agastya then explained, "O Dänava, I am in need of wealth. Since these kings were unable to spare anything, I have come to you. Now, please give me as much wealth as you can, without depriving anyone else."

Ilvala replied, "O ṛṣi, if you are able to tell me what I am thinking in my mind to give you, then you may take it without further ado." At this, Agastya correctly replied, "You intend to give each king 10,000 cows and an equal number of gold coins. In addition, you are thinking of giving me double this amount, as well as a golden chariot and two swift horses."

After hearing this, the surprised Ilvala gave away all of these things with a sad heart. Agastya and the three kings then mounted upon the chariot after loading up the gold coins, and very quickly they reached the ṛṣi's āśrama. With Agastya's permission, Srutarvan, Vradhanasva and Trasaddasyu then departed for their respective kingdoms. When the ṛṣi happily presented to Lopamudrā all that she had requested, she in turn requested, "Please beget in me a very powerful child."
Agastya then asked, "O Princess, would you like to have 1,000 sons, or 100 sons who are each equal to ten of them? Or would you like to have ten sons who are each equal to all 1,000 combined?"

Lopamudrā replied, "I desire to have only one son, for an exalted person is far better than innumerable mediocre or evil ones."

Agastya then united with his wife and after impregnating her, he left her at his āśrama and retired to the forest. Thereafter, the child who was thus conceived remained in his mother's womb for seven years before finally coming out. After birth, this boy was given the name Drḍhāśyu and even as a very small child he would help his father by carrying sacrificial wood. For this reason, Drḍhāśyu was also given the name Idhmavāha. In this way, Agastya not only rescued his ancestors from hellish suffering, but above and beyond this, he enabled them to obtain their desired destinations.

Lomasa then informed Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, here on the banks of the Gaṅgā is the very āśrama where Agastya Ṛṣi had formerly resided."

Next, when the Pāṇḍavas arrived at Bhṛgu-tīrtha, on the banks of the River Vadhūṣara, Lomasa Ṛṣi related the following history: Once, Paraśurāma came to the city of Ayodhyā in order to see Lord Rāmacandra. Out of curiosity, Paraśurāma wanted to test Lord Rāmacandra's strength, thinking that there could be no one superior to himself. When Mahārāja Daśaratha learned of Paraśurāma's arrival, he sent his eldest son out of the city in order to receive him with all respect. However, when Lord Rāmacandra came before Paraśurāma, the son of Jamadagni immediately challenged Him to string the exceedingly stiff bow which he held in his hands. At this, Lord Rāmacandra quickly grabbed the bow right out of Paraśurāma's hands and then, after stringing it with ease, He gave it a fearful twang. Lord Rāmacandra then inquired, "O Ṛṣi, is there anything else which you would like for me to do?"

Paraśurāma then gave Lord Rāmacandra a powerful arrow and said, "Draw the bow all the way back to your ear if you are able to do so." At this, Lord Rāmacandra criticized Paraśurāma by saying, "O brāhmaṇa, why are you so proud and haughty?"

Then, after giving Paraśurāma divine eyes, Lord Rāmacandra revealed to
him His Universal Form. Paraśurāma was thus astonished to behold how all of the demigods, their planets, and the space in between were situated in that gigantic body of the Lord, and at this time, Rāmacandra released the mighty arrow which He had placed upon the bowstring. As soon as Lord Rāmacandra discharged that terrible shaft, the entire earth began to tremble, and showers of meteors and rain fell from the sky while terrifying sounds could be heard in all directions. Then, after taking away all of Paraśurāma’s energy and thus causing him to faint onto the ground, the arrow returned to the hands of Lord Rāmacandra. Thereafter, when Paraśurāma finally regained consciousness, he went and bowed down at the lotus feet of Lord Rāmacandra. The Lord then ordered Paraśurāma to go to the Mahendra mountains, and thus the son of Jamadagni departed, humiliated and powerless. At last, after he had performed severe penances for one full year, the pitṛs appeared before Paraśurāma and informed him, "O brāhmaṇa, you acted very improperly in the presence of Lord Viṣṇu. Therefore, we advise you to go to the river Vadhūśara, for by bathing there you shall regain your lost prowess."

Lomasa Rṣi then said, "O King, this is the very place where Paraśurāma took his bath. Now, if you, your brothers and Draupadī also bathe here, then, like Paraśurāma, you will regain all that was deceitfully taken away by Duryodhana."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was eager to hear more about Agastya Muni and so Lomasa Rṣi obliged with the following story: In the Satya-yuga there lived a race of very powerful Dānavas named Kālakeyas, who were under the leadership of Vṛtra. After being repeatedly harassed by the Kālakeyas in battle, King Indra took the demigods with him and approached Lord Brahmā. Then, as the demigods stood before him with folded hands, Lord Brahmā said, "O best of the celestials, I already know everything about what you intend to say. Now please listen to me as I reveal the means of killing Vṛtrāsura. Approach the great rṣi Dadhīci and ask him to give you his bones. From his bones you will be able to manufacture a powerful thunderbolt that will enable Indra to destroy his enemy."

Thereafter, the demigods went to the āśrama of Dadhīci and they were astonished to behold that the rṣi blazed forth with ascetic splendor just
like a second sun. When the demigods then begged for his bones, Dadhici readily agreed to renounce his body for their sake. Indeed, after accepting the proposal, the rṣi gave up his life then and there as the demigods looked on in amazement. The demigods then took the bones from Dadhici’s dead body and brought them to the celestial craftsman, Tvaṣṭā. From these bones Tvaṣṭā manufactured a powerful thunderbolt which Indra then very respectfully received from his hands. Thereafter, being supported by all of the demigods, Indra approached Vṛtrāsura, who was surrounded by the Kālakeyas. These Dānavas were as huge as mountains and as the fierce battle raged severed heads began to fall from the skies like so many fruits shaken from a tree. Indeed, within a short time, the demigods ran away from the battlefield out of fear and even Indra himself felt helpless. In this distressed condition, the king of heaven took shelter of Lord Nārāyaṇa, who is the only one competent to award complete fearlessness to all living beings. Being always willing to come to the aid of his devotees, Lord Nārāyaṇa empowered King Indra and his thunderbolt by enhancing them with a portion of His unlimited energy. Then, following the Supreme Lord's example, the demigods and brahmārṣis also donated portions of their energies to Indra, and when Vṛtrāsura understood this, he angrily let out a tumultuous roar that shook the entire earth. Indra also became overcome by fear upon hearing this terrifying sound, but being determined to kill his enemy, he hurled his thunderbolt with great force. Because that weapon had been endowed with transcendental potency, Vṛtrāsura fell down dead and thereafter, the demigods were able to easily defeat the disheartened Kālakeyas. Some of the Dānavas were able to flee with their lives, however, and they took shelter in the ocean. Then, being urged by a strong desire to gain revenge, the Kālakeyas discussed amongst themselves about how the entire three worlds could be annihilated by them. At last, the Dānavas concluded that all of the rṣis should be killed since ascetic merit is the root support of the universe. Thereafter, while using the ocean as their base, the Kālakeyas began to invade the forest at night in order to devour the rṣis residing there. Finally, so many brāhmaṇas were slaughtered that sacrificial performances practically ground to a halt, throwing human society into chaos. No one could understand how the brāhmaṇas were being killed,
however, because the Kālakeyas would come in the dead of night and then return to the fathomless ocean.
The demigods also became greatly afflicted due to the halt in sacrificial performances and so, at last, Indra sought the shelter of Lord Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṇṭha. Thereafter, while standing before Lord Nārāyaṇa with folded hands and glorifying Him with poetic prayers that described His transcendental pastimes, the demigods spoke as follows:
"O Lord, many times in the past You protected the universe by assuming various forms of incarnations. Now, once again, the earth is afflicted with great danger as the brāhmaṇas are being slain by some unknown cause. Indeed, because of the resultant disruption of sacrificial performances, our existence is also being threatened."
After hearing the demigods' appeal, Lord Nārāyaṇa replied, "O Celestials, it is the Kālakeyas who are slaughtering the brāhmaṇas. Because they have taken up residence in the ocean, these Dānava can only be attacked if the sea is first of all dried up. Go now and solicit the help of Agastya Ṛṣi, for he is the only one who is capable of performing such a monumental feat."
The demigods then went to Agastya Ṛṣi's āśrama without delay. While coming before the illustrious son of Mitra and Varuṇa, the demigods glorified his previous heroic deeds, such as the time when he had stopped the Vindhya mountain from increasing in height with the desire of challenging the sun.
At this point, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira interrupted Lomasa Ṛṣi in order to request him to narrate this story: Once, the Vindhya mountain became envious of how the sun honored Mount Meru by circumambulating it and so he requested Sūrya to respect him in the same way. However, the sun-god replied, "It is not by my own choice that I circumambulate Mount Meru. I have been ordered to do so by the Creator." Being thus tactfully refused, Vindhya became very angry, and so, in order to take revenge, he began increasing in size in the hopes of obstructing the sun, moon and stars. All of the demigods then went to try and appease Vindhya but the mountain simply kept on expanding without paying them any heed. Next, the demigods approached Agastya Muni and requested him to somehow stop the Vindhya mountain from increasing in size. In response, Agastya took his wife, and after approaching the
Vindhya mountain, he said, "I must travel to the south and so please stop expanding in order to give me passage. Indeed, please do not increase your size until after my return so that I may not be put into difficulty." Out of respect for the great Rṣi, Vindhya agreed to stop expanding and even until this day Agastya has not returned from the south. After going off on this tangent in order to satisfy Mahārāja Yudhiśṭhira's curiosity, Lomasa continued his narration about the Kālakeyas: "When the demigods came before Agastya, as instructed by Lord Nārāyaṇa, the Rṣi asked them the purpose of their visit. The demigods then described the Kālakeyas' persecution of the brahmaṇas and requested, 'O Sage, if you kindly drink up the entire ocean, then we shall be able to defeat these Dānavas who are residing there.' Considering that such an act was meant for the welfare of the entire universe, Agastya agreed to the proposal. Then, when the great sage approached the shore of the ocean, accompanied by all of the demigods and Rṣis, many others also came there in order to witness the historic event. Agastya first of all ordered the demigods to prepare themselves for battle. Then, as the residents of the entire universe looked on in utter amazement, he proceeded to drink up the ocean. Indeed, as the Rṣi was thus engaged, all living entities glorified him with exclamations of wonder while the residents of the higher planets showered down flowers. Thereafter, when the ocean became completely dry, the demigods took up their favorite weapons and began to slay the Kālakeyas with great enthusiasm. Actually, these demons were already oppressed by the wrath of the sages and thus they could not resist the attack of the powerful demigods. At last, most of the Kālakeyas were killed, and then the few survivors tore open the surface of the earth in order to take shelter in the lower planets. After having thus vanquished the Dānavas, the demigods worshipped Agastya Rṣi with great veneration and then requested, 'Now, kindly let the water once again fill up the ocean.' However, Agastya replied, 'The water which I drank has already been digested by me. Therefore, you will have to think of another means for refilling the ocean.' At this, the demigods became very depressed, for they were unable to think of any other way to fill up the sea. Then, after simply offering their obeisances unto Agastya Muni, they departed for the abode of Lord
Brahmā. Lord Brahmā listened to what the demigods had to say, and then he informed them, "The ocean will again become filled up with water only when, at some distant future date, King Bhāgirathī accomplishes a wonderful feat. In the meantime, you had better just go about your normal business."

As the demigods awaited the time when the ocean would once again become filled with water, Sagara appeared in the line of Ikṣvāku and then later on came to rule over the entire earth. Being without a son, Mahārāja Sagara once took his two wives and went to Mount Kailāsa in order to execute severe austerities. After some time, Lord Śiva was pleased to appear before the king. Being overjoyed, Mahārāja Sagara fell at the lord's lotus feet in full submission and then begged, "O chief of all the demigods, kindly award me a son so that my dynasty will be perpetuated."

In response to Sagara's anxious plea, Lord Śiva said, "O King, because of the astrological influence that was prominent at the moment you submitted your request, one of your wives will give birth to 60,000 sons who will perish in their youth. Your other wife will produce just one son, but he will be the one to perpetuate your family line."

Having said this, Lord Śiva disappeared from the sight of Mahārāja Sagara, and thereafter, the king and his wives returned to Ayodhyā, delighted at the prospect that success would soon be achieved. Then, in due course of time, after having conceived, one queen gave birth to a son who was as luminous as a demigod, whereas the other delivered something that looked exactly like a pumpkin. Then, as Mahārāja Sagara was just about to throw this apparently useless substance away, a voice from the sky announced, "O King, do not act so rashly and thus abandon your offspring. Take out the seeds from this pumpkin and preserve them in steaming-hot pots of ghee, for by this process you shall receive 60,000 sons."

Mahārāja Sagara did as he was directed and as a result, in due course of time, 60,000 sons actually emerged from the clay pots. These children were all very powerful, and they had the ability to fly in the sky. Unfortunately, however, they were very wicked and cruel by nature. Because the sons of Sagara were very envious of everyone, they became a
cause of terror for all living beings. Indeed, even the demigods were harassed by them, and so, at last, the celestials approached Lord Brahmā for shelter. In response to their appeals, Lord Brahmā assured the demigods that their tormentors would soon be destroyed as a result of their own misdeeds. After thus pacifying the demigods, Lord Brahmā dismissed them.

Some time after this, Mahārāja Sagara began the performance of an aśvamedha-yajña, and thus the challenge-horse began to roam at will all over the earth under the protection of his 60,000 sons. When the horse came to the dry ocean, however, it suddenly vanished from sight. Sagara's sons then concluded that someone must have stolen the challenge-horse and thereafter, they returned home in order to report the matter to their father. Mahārāja Sagara then sent his sons out to search all over the earth for the sacrificial horse. And yet, in spite of looking everywhere, the sons of Sagara could not find the horse and so they again returned home disappointed. However, when the 60,000 princes reported their failure to Mahārāja Sagara with folded hands, the king became highly enraged and so commanded them, "Go out and search once more, and this time, do not return home until you have found the sacrificial horse!"

Thereafter, as the sons of Sagara wandered over the earth, they came to a deep crevice in the middle of the waterless ocean. Suspecting u1ai the challenge-horse could have been hidden somewhere within, the sons of Sagara began to excavate the crevice by using huge picks and axes. In this way, a great hole was dug and in the process, the heads and limbs of numerous snakes, Rākṣasas and asuras were severed. Still, even after digging and digging for a long while, Sagara's sons found no clue of the challenge-horse's whereabouts. At last, however, as they dug in the northeastern comer of the ocean, the 60,000 princes managed to penetrate all the way to the lower planetary systems. There, they saw the greatly effulgent sage, Kapila, sitting in meditation, and nearby, the sacrificial horse roaming at will.

Without paying any heed to the exalted incarnation of Godhead, however, the delighted princes simply grabbed the horse and prepared to return home. This negligence gave Lord Kapiladeva an opportunity to make a show of exhibiting His transcendental anger. After suddenly
assuming a terribly ferocious feature, Lord Kapiladeva's body sent forth blazing flames of fire that burnt the sons of Sagara to ashes. Nárada Muni then went and informed Mahārāja Sagara of this, and upon hearing the news, the king became overwhelmed with great sorrow. Sagara then remembered how the premature deaths of his sons had already been predicted by Lord Śiva, and thus at last he became somewhat pacified.

Mahārāja Sagara's son by his second wife was named Asamañjasa. Being extremely cruel and wicked, however, Asamañjasa used to grab the village children by the throat and then, as they screamed out in terror, he would throw them into the river, making them drown. The mortified citizens then assembled together and went to Mahārāja Sagara and pleaded with him to save them from the hands of his demoniac son. Sagara thought over the matter at great length, and then, at last he ordered that Asamañjasa be banished from the kingdom. Asamañjasa's son Aṁśumān was very pious however, and so the king kept him under his care.

After the demise of his 60,000 sons, Mahārāja Sagara called for Aṁśumān and said, "My dear grandson, because of the loss of my sons, the banishment of your father, and the interruption of my horse-sacrifice, I have become plunged into an ocean of grief. Therefore, please go and retrieve the sacrificial horse and thus save me from a hellish destination."

Aṁśumān then went to the place where the waterless ocean had been excavated. After entering the passage which had been dug by his uncles, Aṁśumān came to the spot where Lord Kapiladeva was seated, and there, he saw the horse nearby. Aṁśumān submissively bowed down his head at the lotus feet of the Lord and then explained how he had been sent by his grandfather. Kapiladeva became very pleased with Aṁśumān and so, in response, he urged him to accept a benediction. Aṁśumān then requested, "O Lord, kindly let me return this sacrificial horse to my father. In addition, please grant that my uncles who were burnt to ashes will be delivered from their suffering condition."

Lord Kapila granted these boons and then informed Aṁśumān, "O Prince, your grandson will be the one who delivers your uncles by bringing the celestial Gaṅgā down to earth."
Thereafter, Amśumān returned to his father and presented to him the sacrificial horse. When Mahārāja Sagara heard that his sons would be delivered in the near future, he gave up his bitter grief and then successfully completed the sacrifice. Finally, in his old age, Mahārāja Sagara decided to retire to the forest and so he installed his grandson Amśumān upon the royal throne in order to rule over the earth. Later on, Amśumān begot a son named Dilīpa. When Dilīpa heard of the tragedy that had befallen his forefathers, the sons of Sagara, he tried his best to bring the celestial Gaṅgā down to earth. However, Dilīpa failed to do so, and when he was ready to retire to the forest, he installed his son Bhāgīrathī upon the royal throne.

Hoping to obtain the grace of Gaṅgādevī, King Bhāgīrathī performed very severe austerities. Then, after 1,000 celestial years had passed, the goddess personally appeared before King Bhāgīrathī in order to fulfill his cherished desire. After bowing down before Gaṅgādevī and expressing his great joy, King Bhāgīrathī said, "O Goddess, I desire that my forefathers may be delivered by having your water sprinkled upon their ashes. For this purpose, kindly descend upon the earth so that the sons of Sagara can at last attain their heavenly destination."

Gaṅgādevī agreed to fulfill Bhāgīrathī's wish but then said, "O King, my descent to the earth will only be possible if Lord Śiva sustains the force of my falling water. Therefore, you must first endeavor to gratify Lord Śiva so that he will agree to perform this task."

King Bhāgīrathī then went to Mount Kailāsa and began to execute difficult austerities for achieving the favor of Lord Śiva. Finally, after a long time, Lord Śiva appeared before Mahārāja Bhāgīrathī in order to grant his desire. Then, when Lord Śiva ordered him to summon Gaṅgādevī, King Bhāgīrathī concentrated his mind upon the celestial goddess. Without delay, the water of the Gaṅgā began to fall from the sky, to the amazement of all who beheld the spectacle. Indeed, all the great demigods and rṣīs had assembled in order to witness Gaṅgādevī take her historic leap. At last, when Gaṅgādevī reached the earth, after having been sustained upon Lord Śiva's head, she requested King Bhāgīrathī to direct her to the spot where the ashes of Sagara's sons lay. Mahārāja Bhāgīrathī then mounted upon his chariot, and as he proceeded through various lands, the Gaṅgā followed him. At last, after
covering the ashes of Sagara's sons, the water of the Gaṅgā filled up the entire ocean, thus fulfilling the prediction of Lord Brahmā.

In this way, Lomasa Ṛṣī concluded the narration which had evolved from Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra's desire to hear about Agastya's heroic deeds. Thereafter, when the Pāṇḍavas came to Rṣabha Hill (which is also referred to as Hemakūṭa), they witnessed many unusual occurrences. Indeed, as soon as someone spoke, volleys of stones rained down from the hill. Everywhere, the recitation of the Vedas could be heard although no one was seen to be present! Just by being there, everyone in the party became depressed in mind and physically ill as well. Finally, the Pāṇḍavas inquired about all this from Lomasa and so the Ṛṣī replied, "There is a sage named Rṣabha who lives at this place, dedicated to the performance of meditation. He used to become very angry whenever someone would disturb him and so, at last, he ordered the hill to shower down stones and direct a fierce wind at anyone who would come and make noise. Therefore, let us all restrain our speech completely for as long as we remain here."

Next, when the party arrived at the river Khusiki, everyone bathed and thereafter, Lomasa Ṛṣī pointed out the āśrama of Rṣyaśṛṅga. Prajāpati Kaśyapa had a son named Vibhandaka who used to perform austerity on the banks of a large lake. Once, as he was washing his mouth by the side of that lake, Vibhandaka happened to see the foremost of Apsarās, Urvaśī, pass by. Simply by beholding her extraordinary feminine beauty, the Ṛṣī became so agitated by lust that he involuntarily discharged his semen. Then, as the semen fell into the lake, a female deer who was drinking water there swallowed it along with the water and as a result she became pregnant. This was actually not an ordinary deer, but the daughter of a demigod who had been cursed. Lord Brahmā had assured her that she would become freed from her curse after giving birth to a saintly son, and thus it came to be that Rṣyaśṛṅga was born from her womb. This child had a deer's horn on his head, and he was accepted by Vibhandaka as his own son and then raised by him in complete isolation so that he never saw a third person.

The king of Aṅga at this time was named Romapāda, and he was a very good friend of Mahārāja Daśaratha. However, out of self-interest, King
Romapāda once lied to the brāhmaṇas and, as a result, they rejected him. Being without a priest, Romapāda abandoned his sacrificial performances and because of this, Indra stopped pouring rain upon his kingdom, causing the citizens a great deal of suffering. At last, Romapāda approached some of the brāhmaṇas and asked them to prescribe a means for once again bringing rain to his kingdom. These brāhmaṇas then said, "O King, this drought has been brought on by the displeasure of the brāhmaṇa community. Therefore, if you atone for your former offense and are able to please the brāhmaṇas by doing so, and if you bring the great sage Rṣyaśṛṅga to your kingdom, then rainfall will be assured."

Thereafter, Mahārāja Romapāda went to the forest and performed the proper atonement for his sin. When the brāhmaṇas thus became pleased with him, Romapāda returned to his capital, Campā, and then called for a meeting of his ministers so that a plan could be devised for bringing Rṣyaśṛṅga to his kingdom. This was not an easy task, for it was known that Rṣyaśṛṅga's father would never allow him to have the association of others. At last, however, a very clever plan was devised in order to allure the innocent boy. Mahārāja Romapāda then summoned a number of young and beautiful prostitutes, and, after they had assembled he said, "You must go to the forest, and utilizing your feminine arts to the best of your abilities, lure the sage Rṣyaśṛṅga back to my palace."

Upon hearing this, however, the women became very afraid of being cursed by the āśi's father. They were also afraid of Mahārāja Romapāda, and so the prostitutes piteously pleaded, "O King, what you are asking us to do is beyond our power to accomplish."

Romapāda was adamant, however, and so at last, the elderly madam conceded, "We shall attempt to bring the āśi here, but only on the condition that you unstintingly provide us with everything which is required to execute a plan I have conceived."

Romapāda readily consented and then, after taking from the king a large quantity of wealth, enjoyable articles, and the services of many engineers and workmen, the madam departed for the forest along with her bevy of young and beautiful girls. When the party came to the vicinity of Vibhandaka's āśrama, the madam ordered the engineers to construct a wonderful floating hermitage that was decorated with
artificial trees and stocked with all sorts of facilities for sense gratification. Indeed, when it was complete, the floating āśrama looked so pleasing and attractive that it seemed to be a creation of the madam's mystic power. The floating hermitage was then moored near to Vibhandaka's āśrama, and thereafter, when the madam understood that the ṛṣi had gone out, she sent her very intelligent and beautiful daughter there.

After entering Vibhandaka's āśrama, the young prostitute saw Ṛṣyaśṛṅga seated there and so she approached him while inquiring with very sweet words about his welfare. The innocent ṛṣi's son had no conception of 'female' and so in response, he said, "O brāhmaṇa, you are so beautiful and splendidous! I can thus understand that you are worthy of my worship. Please take your seat here and I shall bring you some fruit and roots as well as water for washing your feet. Where do you live? What kind of austerity are you undergoing?"

The prostitute replied, "O ṛṣi, I live quite close by, just on the other side of this hill. It is not my custom to accept obeisances or water for washing my feet. Instead, I welcome whoever I meet by tightly embracing them in my arms."

While the prostitute was thus speaking, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga came before her with a nice offering of fruit. However, after grabbing the fruit from the ṛṣi's hands, the prostitute threw them aside and then gave him some delicious sweets and other cooked foods which she had brought. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga had never tasted such delicacies, and upon eating them he admitted that they were indeed very pleasing. The girl then gave Ṛṣyaśṛṅga some drinks that were as sweet as heaven and then very fragrant garlands and a costly garment to put on. As Ṛṣyaśṛṅga engaged himself in enjoying these gifts, the prostitute began to laugh and play before him with a ball in a very enticing manner. Then, all of a sudden, that most young and lovely girl came and embraced Ṛṣyaśṛṅga very tightly in her arms. And, the next moment, letting him go, she assumed a very bashful air and began to glance at him very lustily while moving here and there. Indeed, again and again the talented prostitute pressed the ṛṣi's body to hers until at last she became convinced that his heart had become captivated. When she thus saw that Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was fully under her control, the clever prostitute took her leave on the pretext of having to attend to her
sacrificial performances.

After the departure of his new acquaintance, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga became completely overwhelmed by lusty desires and thus he lost control of his mind and senses. Indeed, he felt such a strong attraction for his new friend that in her absence the entire world seemed void. Soon thereafter, Vibhandaka returned home, and when he saw his son sitting in a distracted mood, he intelligently inquired, "My dear boy, has someone visited our āśrama in my absence?"

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga then described as follows the young 'brāhmaṇa' who had come to him: "O Father, he had two exceedingly beautiful balls of flesh on his chest that were very plump, soft and without hair. Just by hearing his sweet voice and seeing his beautiful face, my innermost heart has become captivated. The brāhmaṇa embraced me in his arms and he touched his mouth to mine. He also gave me wonderful things to eat and drink which I had 'never before experienced. Indeed, after taking a drink, it seemed as if the ground was moving beneath my feet! Now, my heart is burning due to separation from that beautiful brāhmaṇa. O Father, let me go and invite him to live with us. In this way, he and I can practice all of these wonderful austerities together."

Vibhandaka then replied, "My dear son, you have met a Rākṣasa who assumed a very beautiful form just to obstruct you in your life of austerity. These demons take delight in such mischief and so you must be very careful not to have any more dealings with them."

After saying this, Vibhandaka went out to search for the woman who had visited his āśrama. However, even after combing the area for three days, the rṣi could not find her and so he returned home. Then, one day soon thereafter, Vibhandaka went to the forest in order to gather some fruit. Taking advantage of this, the young prostitute once again came there and as soon as Ṛṣyaśṛṅga saw her he became exceedingly glad at heart. The rṣi's son then said, "O beautiful one, let us quickly go to your āśrama before my father returns home and chastises me!"

The prostitute then led Ṛṣyaśṛṅga to where the floating hermitage was anchored. Thereafter, as all of the women continued to entertain Vibhandaka's son, the hermitage was set free to float down the river until at last it reached the kingdom of Aṅga. Immediately upon Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's arrival, rain began to pour down profusely. Mahārāja
Romapāda then went out to receive Rṣyaśṛṅga and at that time he gave his daughter Śāntā to the ṛṣi in marriage. Still, Romapāda knew that Vibhandaka would become enraged as soon as he learned of all this. Thus, in order to pacify the ṛṣi, the king first of all ordered that all of the fields be plowed along the road which led to his kingdom. Then, he had innumerable cows placed in the pasturing grounds there. Finally, Mahārāja Romapāda instructed the cowherd men, "When the great sage Vibhandaka comes along this road, inquiring about Rṣyaśṛṅga, just inform him that all of these fields and cows belong to his son and that you are his faithful servants."

Meanwhile, when Vibhandaka returned home and found that his son was missing, he immediately became filled with rage. Intuiting that this mischief might be the work of the king, Vibhandaka quickly proceeded toward Campā, determined to burn him and his entire kingdom to ashes with his wrath. However, while on the road, Vibhandaka became very hungry and tired and so he stopped at a village of cowherds. These cowherd men treated Vibhandaka to a royal reception and then, in response to the ṛṣi's inquiries, they said, "O Sage, this land and these cows all belong to your son Rṣyaśṛṅga. Indeed, it was he who arranged for this nice reception in expectation of your arrival."

Vibhandaka then quickly proceeded to the capital city of Aṅga, and upon his arrival he saw that his son and daughter-in-law were residing there in great opulence. Vibhandaka became pacified by seeing his son so happily situated, and so he allowed him to remain at the palace of his father-in-law until the birth of his first child. Later on, after Śāntā gave birth to a son, Rṣyaśṛṅga took his wife and child along with him and returned home to his father.

Lomasa Ṛṣi then said, "My dear sons of Pāṇḍu, you are standing on the very spot where the great sage Vibhandaka had lived."

Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas continued their tīrtha-yāatra, and when they came to a certain forest, Lomasa Ṛṣi told Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "It was here that Lord Paraśurāma performed a great sacrifice and then gave away the entire earth as dakṣina to his priest, Kaśyapa. However, the earth became very aggrieved on account of this, and so she came to Paraśurāma and said, "O Lord, it is not proper for you to give me away to a mere human being. Therefore, in order to foil your attempt, I shall go
at once to the bottom of the Garbhodaka ocean where the lower planets
are situated."
"Kaśyapa then performed another sacrifice in order to appease mother
earth. At last, the goddess of the earth, Bhūmi, became satisfied with the
rṣi and so she rose up from the water and appeared at this very spot in
the form of a sacred altar. O son of Kuntī, if you look carefully, then you
can see that the land here is just like a great altar that stretches all the
way to the shore of the ocean. Now, my dear king, if you traverse this
land and then bathe at the seashore, you will gain great prowess as a
result. There is a particular prayer which you must offer unto the Lord
of the universe before ascending this altar, however, and there are also
certain rituals which you must perform for your safety. Otherwise, if one
were to ascend this altar heedlessly, the land would immediately merge
into the sea. This would be the earth's responses to being touched by
such a mere mortal of unclean soul!"

After bathing in the sea, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers traveled
to the Mahendra Hill. The Pāṇḍavas offered their respects unto the
numerous rṣis residing there and then passed the night. The next
morning, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira took the opportunity to inquire from
the great sage Akṛtavraṇa, who was a great devotee of Lord Paraśurāma,
"O Rṣi, is there any way whereby we can have the audience of the son of
Jamadagni at this holy place?"
Akṛtavraṇa replied, "My dear king, your presence here is already known
to Lord Paraśurāma and since he is very pleased with you, you shall be
able to meet Him very shortly. Lord Paraśurāma gives His audience
twice in a month to all of the rṣis who are living here, and tomorrow
night is the next scheduled darśan."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was highly delighted to receive this news, and he
then requested, "O great sage, please narrate to us in detail Lord
Paraśurāma's pastime of annihilating all of the kṣatriyas twenty-one
times."
Akṛtavraṇa very happily consented and began narrating as follows: Long
ago, Arjuna, the son of Kṛtavīrya, was the king of the Haihayas. Due to
benedictions which he had received from Lord Dattātreya,
Kṛtavīryārjuna became endowed with 1,000 arms and also a golden
chariot that could travel anywhere the driver decided to go. Arjuna became overly proud of his gifted prowess, however, and so he used to mount upon his chariot and proceed to harass all classes of beings throughout the universe. At last, the demigods and great ṛṣīs approached Lord Viṣṇu and requested Him to kill the puffed-up king. In response, Lord Viṣṇu assured the demigods that He would soon do the needful and, after dismissing them, He went to Badarī, His preferred abode for performing austerities.

At this time, there was a king named Gāḍhi who was living a retired life in the forest. While thus engaged in executing austerities, Gāḍhi begot a very beautiful daughter named Satyavatī, and when she grew up, Ricīka, the son of Bhṛgu, asked for her hand in marriage. King Gāḍhi felt obliged to give his consent, but since he was not actually happy to have his daughter marry the ṛṣī, he made the following condition: "It is our family custom that when a daughter is given away, the bridegroom must provide a dowry of 1,000 swift brown horses."

Ricīka Muni then approached Varuṇa and after explaining the reason for doing so, he begged for the required horses. Varuṇa gave his consent and so, when these horses later on emerged from the waters of the Gaṅgā, Ricīka presented them to King Gāḍhi and thus attained Satyavatī as his wife. Then, one day, when Bhṛgu Muni came to see his son and daughter-in-law, he became pleased to offer Satyavatī a benediction. Taking advantage of this golden opportunity, Satyavatī requested, "May both my mother and myself be blessed with sons."

Bhṛgu gave his approval and then explained, "When the time of your conception arrives, you and your mother must observe the proper ceremony for achieving a male child. Then, when the ritual is completed, your mother must embrace a pipul tree and you must embrace a fig tree. Now, here are two pots of sweet rice which are mixed with herbs which have been carefully gathered from all over the universe. This one is for you to eat and this one is for your mother. If you do exactly as I have instructed, your desires shall be fulfilled."

After saying this, Bhṛgu Muni disappeared from that place then and there. Later on, however, when their times of conception arrived, Satyavatī and her mother exchanged pots of sweet-rice and embraced the trees which were meant for the other. Bhṛgu Muni knew all this by
dint of his mystic vision, and so he at once came to Satyavatí and said, "O Daughter-in law, you have been deceived by your mother and thus, even though your son will be born into a brāhmaṇa family, his nature will be that of a kṣatriya. On the other hand, your mother's son, although born in a kṣatriya family, will be endowed with brahminical qualities."

Upon hearing this, Satyavatí pleaded, "O great rṣi, please let it be my grandson who is endowed with the nature of a kṣatriya. Kindly allow my son to possess brahminical qualities."

Bhrigu Muni agreed to this concession and then, in due course of time, Satyavatí gave birth to Jamadagni, who displayed a very saintly character. Jamadagni quickly mastered the Vedas and the complete science of weapons became automatically manifest to his understanding. After marrying Reṇukā, the daughter of King Prasenajit, Jamadagni begot five sons, of whom Rāma was the youngest.

Once upon a time, Reṇukā became desirous of enjoying with a Gandharva king, Citraratha. Jamadagni could understand how his wife had been mentally unchaste and so he commanded Rāma to kill her along with his disobedient brothers. Jamadagni then became very pleased when Rāma executed this difficult order and so offered Him a benediction. At this, Rāma requested His father to revive the lives of His mother and brothers and the rṣi happily obliged. Later on, Rāma killed Kārtavīryārjuna after the latter had stolen Jamadagni’s kāmadhenu. Then, in retaliation, Arjuna's sons killed Jamadagni while Rāma was away from the āśrama. When Paraśurāma returned home and saw His slain father, He angrily vowed to put an end to the entire kṣatriya race. Rāma then went to Māhiṣmatī and killed the sons of Arjuna and thereafter, He massacred all other kṣatriyas. From the blood of these kings, Rāma created five lakes and later on, after performing a great sacrifice and handing over the earth in charity to Kaśyapa, he retired to Mount Mahendra in order to perform severe austerities.

In this way, Akṛṭavrāṇa narrated the pastimes of Lord Paraśurāma. Then, at the appointed time, the warrior incarnation of Godhead appeared to the Pāṇḍavas and the rṣis who resided there. The Pāṇḍavas very respectfully worshiped Paraśurāma and in return, the son of Jamadagni praised them and requested them to spend the night at His
abode. The next morning, the Pāṇḍavas departed for the south, and while going along, they bathed at innumerable holy places. Finally, the Pāṇḍavas arrived at Prabhāsa, where they decided to remain for twelve days, subsisting upon only water. When Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma heard that the Pāṇḍavas were staying at Prabhāsa, they quickly came there, accompanied by many other Yadu heroes. Upon seeing the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadē, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma felt very sad that they had become so lean and dirty due to performing austerities and laying down upon the bare ground. Finally, after being welcomed with great love and devotion, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma seated Themselves in the midst of the Pāṇḍavas. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then began telling the two Lords all about his wanderings and how Arjuna had gone to the abode of Indra for obtaining celestial weapons. The Yadus were very eager to hear about the Pāṇḍavas' activities, but at the same time, they could not help but cry aloud upon seeing their miserable condition. Lord Balarāma then vented His grief by saying, "How lamentable it is to behold how the mighty Pāṇḍavas have fallen into such adversity! Could it really be that virtue brings about a good result whereas evil causes only bad? If this were actually so, then how is it that the Pāṇḍavas are suffering so much while the Dhātarāṣṭras are enjoying themselves in the midst of royal opulence?"

Sātyaki then responded, "My dear Balarāma, it is not proper for You to lament like this when the Pāṇḍavas have such powerful allies! We should immediately go to Hastināpura and after forcibly taking away the kingdom from Duryodhana, deliver it back to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Even if Yudhiṣṭhira is determined to fulfill his vow of living in exile, then Abhimanyu can rule the kingdom until the return of the Pāṇḍavas from the forest."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "What you say is very heroic, but Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira would never accept the kingdom unless it was won by his own prowess."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira himself then declared, "What Lord Kṛṣṇa has said is absolutely correct! Therefore, we should all be patient, and when Kṛṣṇa desires, then the sons of Dhrṛtarāṣṭra will certainly be defeated and I shall regain my kingdom. My dear heroes of the Yadu dynasty,
please return to Dvārakā now and wait for that time to come."

The Pāṇḍavas and Yādavas then bid each other farewell, and thereafter, when the tīrtha-yātra arrived at the river Narmadā, Lomasa Rṣi related the following story: The son of Bhṛgu, named Cyavana, used to perform austerities on the shore of a lake that is situated near the banks of the Narmadā river. Because he remained completely motionless for a long period of time, Cyavana became covered over by a huge anthill as well as numerous creepers. While the rṣi was in this condition, King Śaryāti once came there along with his 4,000 wives and his only daughter, Sukanyā, who was surrounded by her many maidservants. While everyone was busy enjoying themselves, the innocent young Sukanyā happened to see the anthill as she was playfully engaged in breaking twigs off from the trees. Cyavana Muni could see the beautiful Sukanyā as she played before him, and he became very eager to enjoy her. Indeed, the rṣi even called for Sukanyā in a low voice, but it seems she could not hear him. Then, when Sukanyā's glance fell upon the rṣi's eyes, which were peering out from the anthill, she wondered what the glowing objects were and she then childishly pierced them with a sharp twig. This caused Cyavana Muni great pain and so he angrily retaliated by obstructing the king's soldiers from passing urine. When this difficulty became known to Mahārāja Śaryāti, he could understand that it was due to some offense committed against the great rṣi. Thus, he made inquiries to find out who had made such a mistake, and at last, Sukanyā admitted that she had pierced something in the anthill that looked like two glow-worms. Upon hearing this, Śaryāti immediately went and begged pardon for his daughter's ignorant behavior and Cyavana responded by saying, "O King, I will forgive Sukanyā only if she is given to me in marriage."
When he heard this, Mahārāja Śaryāti gave Sukanyā in marriage to Cyavana Muni without the least hesitation, and thus the old rṣi became very pleased with the king. Thereafter, Śaryāti and his wives returned to their capital city, while Sukanyā remained in the forest in order to faithfully engage in the service of her husband. Then, one day later on, the Āśvinī-kumāras happened to see Sukanyā as she was coming out of the river naked having just completed her bath.
Being charmed by her exquisite beauty, they approached Sukanyā and inquired about her identity. Then, when Sukanyā explained that she was the wife of Cyavana Muni, the astonished heavenly twins asked, "Alas, how is it possible that your father bestowed such a sweet young girl upon an old man who is practically on the verge of death? My dear girl, your youth is just budding and your loveliness would attract the attention of any male. Why don't you give up your invalid husband and accept one of us? In this way, you will rescue your precious youth and beauty from passing away fruitlessly."

However, the chaste Sukanyā replied, "My dear sirs, I would never even consider such a thing! Therefore please do not entertain any doubts regarding my faithfulness towards my husband."

The Aśvīnī-kumāras were actually pleased to see Sukanyā's purity and chastity and so they informed her, "O Princess, we are celestial physicians of great skill! We can make your husband youthful if, in turn, you agree to accept anyone of us three after we perform the transformation."

Sukanyā then went to Cyavana Muni and explained to him the Aśvīns' proposal. Being very eager to regain his youth, Cyavana readily consented and so Sukanyā went back and informed the Aśvīnī-kumāras to go ahead with their plan. The heavenly physicians then instructed, "Go and bring your husband to the edge of this lake and we will wait here for you."

Thereafter, when Sukanyā brought her aged and invalid Cyavana Muni to the lake, the twin Aśvīns took hold of him and then plunged into the water. Just a moment later, all three once again emerged from the lake, possessing identical youthful forms. Thus, when the confused Sukanyā had to choose her husband, she hesitated at first. However, at last she was able to understand which of the three was Cyavana Muni by observing one of his familiar traits. This pleased Cyavana Muni very much and so he told the Aśvīnī-kumāras, "In return for your favor, I shall one day utilize my ascetic power in order to enable you to drink the soma-rasa in the presence of Indra himself, even though you are not qualified to do so."

The Aśvīnī-kumāras were very happy to hear this, and thereafter, they returned to their heavenly abode. Then, some time later on, when
Mahārāja Śaryāti heard that Cyavana had been transformed into a youth, he joyfully went to visit the Muni in the forest. The ṛṣi greeted his father-in-law with great respect, saying, "My dear king, I wish for you to perform a great sacrifice, and I myself will officiate as the chief priest."

The king happily agreed to this proposal and so, on an auspicious day, the sacrifice commenced and all of the demigods came to attend. Then, at one point during the sacrificial performance, Cyavana Muni picked up a pot of soma juice with the intention of offering it to the Aśvinī-kumāras. Understanding this, Indra forbade Cyavana by saying, "O ṛṣi, because they are physicians, the Aśvinī-kumāras are not fit for drinking this celestial beverage."

Cyavana replied, "O king of heaven, the twin Aśvins did me a great favor by awarding me a youthful body. Besides, they are certainly considered to be demigods and thus they should be given the same facilities as their peers."

Indra then argued, "Physicians are mere servants! These so-called demigods often take on human forms in order to roam about the earth and thus they cannot be equated with other exalted residents of heaven."

Although Indra remained adamant, Cyavana Muni was prepared to ignore him and so, at last, he picked up the soma-rasa in order to offer it to the twin Aśvins. Indra became very angry upon seeing this impudence and so he threatened, "If you go ahead and make this offering, in spite of my having forbade you, then I shall kill you with my thunderbolt!"

However, Cyavana merely smiled, and without even hesitating, he continued to offer the soma-rasa to the Aśvinī-kumāras. Indra then quickly took up his thunderbolt but Cyavana paralyzed his arm before he could release it. Then, as Indra remained paralyzed, Cyavana finished offering the soma-rasa to the heavenly physicians. Indeed, Cyavana was also so enraged with Indra that he uttered some mantras which created a huge demon named Mada for the purpose of killing him. This demon was so large that no one could estimate his dimensions, and his lower jaw extended high into the sky. The demon Mada had four fangs which were each 1,000 yojanas long and his powerful arms also extended for 100 yojanas. The demon's mere glance was so frightening that he appeared
ready to devour the entire universe at any moment. Then, while roaring tumultuously, Mada suddenly rushed toward Indra in the hopes of devouring him with his wide-open mouth. Upon seeing his imminent destruction, the panic stricken Indra pleaded, "O Cyavana, O best of the ṛṣis, please save me! In return I shall allow the Aśvinikumāras to drink the soma-rasa during all sacrificial performances from this day forward. I had only forbidden them so that I could witness your wonderful prowess and cause your fame to be spread all over the three worlds."

Indra's words pacified Cyavana Muni and so he made the demon Mada desist from attacking the king of heaven. Then, in order to engage the ferocious monster that he had created, Cyavana Muni distributed him ("mada" means "intoxication") among liquor, women, gambling and field-sports (as well as mental games, i.e. speculation). Thereafter Cyavana Muni offered Indra his share of the soma-rasa and then brought the sacrifice of King Śaryāti to a successful completion.

Lomasa Rṣi then pointed out to the Pāṇḍavas the very lake beside which Cyavana Muni had performed his austerities. The tīrtha-gātrā then journeyed on, and after some time, Lomasa Rṣi pointed out the place where Mandhātā had formerly performed sacrifices. He then narrated the following history:

There was a great king in the line of Ikṣvāku named Yuvanāśva who performed 1,000 horse sacrifices and ruled the entire earth, but unfortunately, he had no son. At last, Yuvanāśva handed over the rule of the kingdom to his ministers and then retired to the forest in order to perform austerities. Then, once thereafter, while fasting, Mahārāja Yuvanāśva became extremely thirsty at night. At this time, the ṛṣis in the forest were in the process of performing a ritual that was meant to enable the king to obtain a son. Because it was night, however, the brāhmaṇas were all fast asleep. Practically dying of thirst, Mahārāja Yuvanāśva wandered about the āśrama in search of water and indeed, again and again, he softly called out, "Will someone please bring me something to drink!" However, no one heard the poor king. Mahārāja Yuvanāśva then spotted the jar of consecrated water which the queen was supposed to drink in order to conceive a child. However, because he was overwhelmed by the pangs of thirst, the king picked up
the jar without even thinking and then drank the cool water to his full satisfaction. Early the next morning, when the sages awoke, they found that the sanctified water was missing, and in answer to their inquiries, the truthful Yuvanāśva admitted his fault. The chief rṣi then said, "O King, that water was empowered with the merit which I had acquired from my austerities. It was meant to enable you to receive a powerful son but by destiny, you have drunk the water instead of your queen and thus it will be you who brings forth the child! However, do not fear, for we shall perform a special sacrifice which will ensure that you give birth to the child without experiencing any labor pains."

Finally, after 100 years, a son was born from the left side of Mahārāja Yuvanāśva. King Indra then came there out of curiosity to see the child. When the demigods accompanying him asked, "O Lord, what will the baby suck on?" The king of Heaven replied, "He can suck on me." After saying this, Indra put his forefinger into the baby's mouth, and because the child received nectar in this way, he became exceptionally strong and grew up to be thirteen cubits tall (a cubit is about a foot and a half). The boy was given the name Mandhātā (he shall suck me), and on the very day of his birth all knowledge automatically came to dwell in his understanding, and a wonderful bow, arrows and armor came into his possession. Indra then enthroned Mandhātā as the emperor of the whole world, and throughout his reign, the son of Yuvanāśva performed innumerable inconceivable acts. Once, after there had been a terrible drought for twelve years, Mahārāja Mandhātā caused the rain to fall without taking help from King Indra.

Next, Lomasa Ṛṣi described the history of King Somaka: "This king had 100 wives and yet, because of his destiny, he could not obtain even a single son, although he tried to the best of his ability. Finally, however, in his old age, Somaka received a son named Jantu. Although born from the womb of one queen, this boy somehow or other had been produced by the combined effort of all 100 co-wives. Thus, all of the 100 mothers used to surround the baby and supply him with all comforts of life. Then, one day, an ant happened to bite the small boy on his hip and so he began to cry loudly because of the pain. The mothers surrounding the crib also became distressed because of this and when they proceeded to wail, the tumultuous sound reached the ears of the
king.
Mahārāja Somaka then sent a servant to find out the cause of the disturbance, and after receiving the news, he went into the inner apartments in order to soothe his crying son. Then, when he came out, Mahārāja Somaka said unto his priest and ministers, "It is a great misfortune that I have only one son, for now I can see how flickering life is for mortal human beings! Isn't there any way that I can obtain 100 sons so that I will not have to remain in such anxiety?"
The priest then told Somaka about a particular sacrifice that could be performed and so the king replied, "Just do whatever is necessary! I am prepared to perform this sacrifice at all costs!"
The priest then explained, "In order to perform this sacrifice you will have to contribute your son Jantu. When his fat is offered to the demigods by being placed in the sacrificial fire, your queens will smell the smoke. In this way, they will each conceive a powerful son and one of these will be Jantu himself, reborn with a golden mark on his back."
Mahārāja Somaka immediately ordered that the sacrifice be performed. However, when everything was ready and the priest prepared to begin, the mothers came and attempted to save their son by grabbing onto his right hand in order to drag him away from the sacrificial arena.
Although the queens wept piteously, the priest snatched the boy away from them, and after killing the child, he offered the fat into the sacrificial fire. The queens were then made to come and smell the smoke, and after doing so, they fainted away due to intense grief. Still, all of the queens became pregnant, and after ten months, 100 sons were thus born. Jantu himself was the first to emerge from the womb of his former mother and he came to be loved by all of the queens even more than their own sons, for he was superior to his brothers and he had a wonderful golden mark on his back.
In due course of time, the priest passed away, as did Mahārāja Somaka. Then, while en route to heaven, the king could see that his former priest was suffering terribly in hell and so he went and inquired about the cause for this. The priest then explained, "O King, my fiery torment is the result of having performed a human sacrifice on your behalf."
After hearing this, Somaka went to Yamarāja and requested, "O lord of death, please let me suffer in hell instead of my family priest, for the
 However, Yamarāja replied, "O King, one cannot suffer or enjoy the results of another person's actions. You are headed for a heavenly destination and so it would be better for you to forget all about the brāhmaṇa’s sufferings." Somaka then argued, "Since both the brāhmaṇa and myself had performed the same act, we should suffer or enjoy the same result. Therefore, whether in heaven or in hell I only wish to remain where my priest is."

Since the king was so insistent, Yamarāja finally agreed that he could suffer in hell along with the brāhmaṇa before attaining to his heavenly destination. Somaka thus spent some time in hell and thereafter, both he and the brāhmaṇa went to heaven in order to share the rewards for their past pious deeds.

Lomasa Ṛṣi then pointed out to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira the sacrificial arenas of former illustrious kings such as Yayāti, Bhārata and Marutta. Thereafter, as they stood upon the very spot where King Marutta had performed his sacrifice, Lomasa Ṛṣi told Yudhiṣṭhira, "While bathing here, one is enabled to envision the entire universe."

After hearing this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira eagerly went to take his bath, and at that time he was actually able to see throughout the entire three planetary systems, including his brother Arjuna, who was residing in heaven along with Indra. The Pāṇḍavas then continued their journey until they came to the place where Dakṣa had formerly performed his sacrifice. Lomasa Ṛṣi then said, "Dakṣa had given the benediction that whoever dies at this place will attain to heaven. Therefore, you can see that thousands of aged persons are still coming here in order to give up their material bodies."

When they arrived at the kingdom of the niśādas, Lomasa Ṛṣi pointed out, "Here is the place where the river Sarasvati enters the earth so that these lowly people cannot see her or touch her."

Then, after some time, Lomasa Ṛṣi said, "O King, here is where the river Sarasvatī once again becomes visible. After joining with the other rivers, the Sarasvatī flows on and on until it finally reaches the sea." Then after traveling for some distance downstream, Lomasa Ṛṣi suddenly pointed out, "Here is the place where Vasiṣṭha had tried to drown himself after tying his limbs together with stout ropes."
Then, when the party arrived at the sacrificial arena of King Uṣīnara (Śibi), Lomasa Ṛṣi narrated the following story: Once, Indra and Agni decided to test the exalted qualities of Mahārāja Śibi and for that purpose the king of heaven assumed the form of a hawk while the god of fire took the form of a pigeon. Being chased by the fierce hawk, the pigeon fearfully flew into the sacrificial arena of Mahārāja Śibi and then took shelter on the king's thigh. Upon seeing this, the hawk pleaded, "O saintly monarch, do not act unrighteously by denying me my ordained food."

Mahārāja Śibi replied, "I cannot possibly forsake this poor pigeon who is trembling with fear. He has taken shelter of me and to betray one who seeks protection is considered to be just as sinful as killing a brāhmaṇa or a cow."

The hawk then argued, "O King, if I do not eat this pigeon then I may starve to death, and thus my poor wife and children will also perish. Therefore, to protect one living entity at the cost of so many others is certainly not an act of virtue!"

Mahārāja Śibi then said, "You are speaking very nicely on the subject of morality, especially considering that you are a mere bird. Still, how can you advocate that I perform the sinful act of forsaking one who has taken shelter of me? My dear hawk, if you are afraid of starving, then I will offer you any other food you like, such as the meat of a deer or a buffalo."

However, the hawk rejected this proposal by saying, "The Creator has ordained that the pigeon is to be the food for hawks. Therefore, I do not care to eat any other animal." Mahārāja Śibi then declared, "I am willing to give you anything that you desire in exchange for the life of this pigeon. I can give up my entire kingdom, but I shall never forsake this pigeon who has taken shelter of me."

The hawk then suggested, "O noble king, if you are willing to cut off from your own body the flesh equal to the weight of this pigeon, then I shall be satisfied with that."

After hearing this, Śibi began to cut off his own flesh, after having put the pigeon onto one side of a scale. Miraculously, however, no matter how much flesh the king cut off from his body and put onto the scale,
the weight of the pigeon remained more. In this way, again and again Mahārāja Śibi had to cut off more from his body until at last, he became entirely devoid of flesh. When he thus saw that he was unable to keep his promise, the king next placed the remainder of his skeletal body on to the scale. At this, the hawk revealed that he was Indra in disguise and the pigeon similarly revealed himself to be Agni, (Vaiśvānara). The two demigods then told Mahārāja Śibi, "O King, we came here just to test your exalted character. Now, you can rest assured that you will become eternally famous for this extraordinary act of charity, and you will go to reside eternally in heaven after the end of this present life."

King Indra and Agni then restored Śibi's body so that it became even more handsome and sweetly-scented. After doing so, they departed for their heavenly abodes. They also informed the king that a son named Kapāṭāramaṇ would be born from his right thigh.

When the Pāṇḍavas came to the hermitage of Śvetaketu, Lomasā Rṣi narrated this interesting history:

There was once a ṛṣi named Udālaka, who had a very devoted disciple named Kahoda. As reward for his disciple's long and selfless service, Udālaka gave him his daughter Sujāta in marriage, as well as mastery over the śāstra. In due course of time, Sujāta became pregnant. Then, once, as Kahoda was reciting the śāstra at night, the embryo within the womb addressed him by saying, "By your grace I have become well-versed in the Vedic literatures, even while residing in my mother's womb. However, I beg to inform you that by dint of my acquired knowledge, I can understand that your recitations are faulty."

Kahoda was surrounded by his disciples and so, when he was insulted in this way, he became very angry and cursed his unborn son by saying, "Let you come out of your mother's womb with a body that is crooked in eight places."

Thus, when Kahoda's son was born, he was given the name Aṣṭāvakra (crooked in eight parts). While Aṣṭāvakra was still residing within the womb, Sujāta had once complained to her husband that since they were practically impoverished, he should endeavor to acquire some wealth. Thus, at his wife's behest, Kahoda traveled to the court of King Janaka. While there, however, he was defeated in debate by a court paṇḍita
named Vandin and because of the conditions decided upon, he was thrown into the river and drowned as a consequence. When Udālaka heard the news of his son-in-law's death, he told his daughter to keep this a secret from her son after his birth. Thus, Aṣṭāvakra never heard about Kahoda, but instead, he regarded Udālaka to be his father, and Udālaka's son Śvetaketu to be his brother. Then, once, when Aṣṭāvakra was twelve years old, Śvetaketu came and pulled him off of Udālaka's lap. When Aṣṭāvakra started crying, Śvetaketu then informed him, "My dear nephew, Udālaka is not your real father." This greatly pained Aṣṭāvakra, and so he ran crying to his mother and demanded, "O foolish woman, tell me truthfully who my real father is." Sujāta also became very aggrieved upon hearing her son say this, but since she was afraid of Aṣṭāvakra's curse, she told him all about Kahoda. Then, after hearing about his father's death, Aṣṭāvakra suggested to Śvetaketu, "My dear uncle, let us go to the court of King Janaka so that we can hear the interesting philosophical debates that are constantly taking place amongst the brāhmaṇas there. In this way, I think that we can increase our knowledge greatly."

Śvetaketu agreed and so, shortly thereafter, the two departed. However, when they reached the sacrificial arena of Mahārāja Janaka, Aṣṭāvakra was refused entry by the gate keeper since Vandin had laid down the law that only elderly, learned brāhmaṇas could be admitted. Upon hearing this, Aṣṭāvakra told the gatekeeper, "The mere number of years that have passed since one's birth does not constitute one's real age. Wisdom and learning are what determine a person's maturity and thus, even though I am only twelve years old, I should be admitted into this sacrificial arena. I want to debate with Vandin about the nature of realization of the Supreme Absolute Truth. Now, please let me enter so that I can defeat him!"

After hearing this impressive speech, the gatekeeper allowed Aṣṭāvakra to approach Mahārāja Janaka in order to plead his case for himself. After coming before the king and glorifying his great sacrificial performance, Aṣṭāvakra said, "O pious ruler, I have come here in order to destroy Vandin with my arguments as the sun vanquishes the light of the stars! brāhmaṇas are to be allowed passage at all times, at all places and under all circumstances. Therefore, please grant me permission to
enter your assembly."
King Janaka replied, "O brāhmaṇa, you entertain hopes of defeating Vandin only because you are ignorant of his powers of speech. Already, this great scholar has defeated many, many eminent and learned brāhmaṇas."
Aṣṭāvakra then declared, "This Vandin has never entered into debate with a person the likes of myself, and it is for this reason alone that he thinks himself to be a lion and thus roars like one. Today, however, he shall lay down vanquished, like a disabled cart on the highway whose wheels have collapsed."
Mahārāja Janaka then questioned Aṣṭāvakra with complicated riddles and the son of Kahoda gave unerring and unhesitating replies that were filled with grave meaning. Indeed, even Ganeśa must have paused to ponder over these questions and answers, thus giving Śrīla Vyāsadeva some additional time to prepare the next verses within his mind! Mahārāja Janaka was highly astonished after hearing Aṣṭāvakra's words and so he thought, "This boy cannot be an ordinary human being! He appears to be the foremost of all persons gifted with the art of speech!"
In this way, Aṣṭāvakra received the king's permission to enter the sacrificial arena, and so without delay, he angrily approached Vandin and challenged, "I have come to debate with you about the nature of the Absolute Truth. Now, answer my questions and I shall answer yours!"
Thereafter, a fierce competition ensued as an exceedingly intricate philosophical debate on Absolute knowledge proceeded between Vandin and Aṣṭāvakra. Externally, each put forward their views by composing a verse in relation with progressive numbers, i.e. one, two, three, etc. Internally, the two opponents put forward their respective arguments in such an intricate symbolic way that it appeared that no third earthly being could understand the meanings! In essence, however, Vandin tried to put forward the theory that ultimately everything is one undifferentiated truth, whereas Aṣṭāvakra correctly proved that the Supreme Soul and the individual living entities are eternally existing in an inconceivable way that is simultaneously one and different.
Vandin began by saying, "Only one fire blazes forth in many shapes; only one sun illuminates the entire world; only one hero is the king of all celestials (Indra); and only one is the lord of the Ṛta (Yamarāja)."
Aṣṭāvakra then said, "Two friends, Agni and Indra, ever move together; the two great celestial sages are Nārada and Parvata; the Aśvinī-kumāras are indeed twins; two is the number of wheels on a chariot; and it is a couple, husband and wife, that have been ordained to live together."

Vandin then said, "Three kinds of created beings are produced by actions; three Vedas direct the sacrificial performances; at three times such sacrifices commence; and three are the superintending Deities of this world."

Aṣṭāvakra then said, "There are four āśramas followed by the brāhmaṇas, four are the orders that perform sacrifice; four are the cardinal directions; and four is ever the number of legs of a cow."

Vandin then said, "There are five senses and five objects of the senses; there are five kinds of sacrifices which householders are enjoined to perform; five locks of hair are said to be on the heads of the Apsarās; and five principal sacred rivers are known in this world."

Aṣṭāvakra then said, "It is said that six cows are to be given away when a sacrificial fire is ignited; there are six seasons in a year; six stars make up the constellation Kṛittikā; and if the mind is included then the number of senses is six."

Vandin then said, "There are seven kinds of domesticated animals; there are also seven groups of wild animals; seven great rṣis reside near the top of the universe; and seven strings are there on the musical instrument vīnā."

Aṣṭāvakra then said, "Eight legs has a śarabha which preys upon lions; there are eight Vasus; there are eight principal Upaniṣads; and eight-fold is the yoga system which is meant for linking oneself with the Supreme Person."

Vandin then said, "There are nine mantras chanted while igniting the fire for worshipping the pītrās; creation of the universe is divided into nine categories; there are nine primary numbers used in all calculations; and nine-fold is the process of devotional service."

Aṣṭāvakra then said, "There are ten directions all around, up and down; for ten months women bear the embryo within their womb; ten is the number of knowledge-acquiring and working senses; and by multiplication often one gets hundreds, thousands, etc."

Vandin then said, "There are eleven Rudras among the demigods; there
are said to be eleven objects which are enjoyable to living beings; eleven also are the transformations which living beings undergo; and eleven varieties of sacrificial stakes are generally employed."

Aṣṭāvakra then said, "There are twelve months in a year; twelve varieties of minor sacrifices also exist; there are twelve Ādityas in heaven, and twelve are considered to be the great mahājanas who know the real purpose of religion."

Vandin then said, "The thirteenth lunar day is considered to be the most auspicious; there are thirteen islands on earth...." At this point, Vandin stopped speaking for his intelligence could go no further.

Aṣṭāvakra then completed Vandin's śloka by saying, "Thirteen sacrifices are presided over by Keśi; and thirteen are devoured by Aticchandhas (the long meters) of the Vedas." Upon seeing Vandin silently sitting there with his head hung down in shame, the crowd let out a loud roar. King Janaka and all of the brāhmaṇas then approached the victorious boy in order to congratulate him and worship him. Aṣṭāvakra then declared, "Because Vandin demanded that his defeated opponents be drowned in the river, he must now meet with the same fate!"

At this, Vandin claimed, "I am the son of Varuna and because my father is now engaged in performing a twelve-year sacrifice, I had dispatched these prominent brāhmaṇas there to witness it. Look now, and you shall be able to see that those very same brāhmaṇas are returning here in order to pay their homage to Aṣṭāvakra."

Aṣṭāvakra then said, "It is I who have delivered these brāhmaṇas! Now, since I am the victor, I insist that Vandin be cast into the river. Everyone knows that one who is pure cannot be burned by the fire. Similarly, if Vandin is actually the son of Varuṇa, then he should have no fear of drowning."

King Janaka then agreed that Aṣṭāvakra could do with Vandin as he pleased. At this Vandin retorted, "I do not have any fear and so you can throw me into the river at once if you so desire. Now, look Aṣṭāvakra, here is your long-lost father!"

At that moment, all of those brāhmaṇas who had been defeated by Vandin and drowned arose from the river while being worshipped by Varuṇa. Kahoda then told Mahārāja Janaka, "O King, I can now practically understand why the śāstra again and again emphasizes the
importance of begetting a good son. That which I could never have achieved has now been accomplished by Åstāvakra."

Thereafter, Vandin took King Janaka's permission and then voluntarily entered the river. Åstāvakra went and worshipped his father while all of the brāhmaṇas who had been rescued worshipped him in return.

Åstāvakra then returned home with his father and uncle, and, being very pleased, Kahoda then said, "My dear son, I want to go now and bathe in the river."

As soon as Åstāvakra plunged into the water, all of his crooked limbs became straight and thus from that time on the river has been called Śamaṅga. Lomasā Rṣi then urged the Pāṇḍavas to bathe there and while doing so he said, "This is also the place where Indra became freed from all sinful reactions after having killed Vṛūṣasura."

Thereafter, as the Pāṇḍavas continued their pilgrimage tour, Lomasā Rṣi pointed out innumerable places of interest. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was always delighted on hearing narrations of the Supreme Lord's pastimes and those of godly persons as well. Thus, Lomasā Rṣi next related this ancient history:

Bhāradvāja and Raivyā were good friends and they used to reside together in the same āśrama. Raivyā had two sons named Arvavasu and Parāvasu, and all three were very well versed in the Vedas. Bhāradvāja's only son was named Yavakri, and they were more inclined to the performance of austerities. Although their interests were thus different, Bhāradvāja and Raivyā had been close friends since childhood.

Yavakri could see that he and his father were not as respected by the community of brāhmaṇas as were Raivyā and his sons, so finally, with an aggrieved heart, he began to perform very severe austerities for the purpose of acquiring Vedic knowledge. Indeed, Yavakri's austerities became so intensified that even Indra became alarmed. At last, the king of heaven approached Yavakri and asked, "O son of Bhāradvāja, for what purpose are you performing such severe penances?"

Yavakri replied, "O Lord, I want to acquire a more thorough knowledge of the Vedas than anyone has ever possessed. However, because I do not want to follow the time consuming process of learning the Vedas from a teacher, I am performing austerities in order to quickly achieve my goal."
Indra then said, "O ṛṣi, this is not the way to acquire Vedic knowledge! Therefore, you should approach a qualified guru. I warn you that if you do not do so, then your austerities may very well end in self-destruction." After advising Yavakri in this way, Indra departed. However, the determined ṛṣi went back to performing austerities as before. When Indra saw this, he became highly agitated and so he once again appeared to Yavakri and declared, "You shall never fulfill your desire to gain Vedic knowledge by these means!"

However, Yavakri replied, "If you will not grant me the fulfillment of my aspiration, then I shall increase my austerity by cutting off my limbs and offering them into the sacrificial fire!"

Thereafter, Indra departed. Then, after deliberating over the matter at great length, he finally thought of a way to make Yavakri desist from his terrible vows. After assuming the form of an aged and diseased brāhmaṇa, Indra went to the place where Yavakri would come daily to take his bath in the water. There, he began to construct a dam by throwing handfuls of sand into the water. When Yavakri came there and saw what the brāhmaṇa was doing, he laughed heartily and then inquired, "My dear sir, what is it that you hope to accomplish?"

The brāhmaṇa replied, "I am going to block the flow of the Gaṅgā so that from now on, people will be able to cross the river without using a boat."

At this, Yavakri advised, "You should give up this impossible task and take to something more practical!"

The brāhmaṇa then smilingly said, "The task that I have undertaken is no more impractical than your attempt to acquire the Vedas!"

Upon hearing this remark, the intelligent Yavakri could understand that the brāhmaṇa was actually Indra in disguise. Therefore, he requested, "My dear king of heaven, please grant me a benediction so that my endeavor will be fruitful."

At last, Indra relented by saying, "O ṛṣi’s son, I shall enable both you and your father to excel in Vedic knowledge. Now that I have granted you this boon, please return home and inform Bhāradvāja of this."

After Indra had departed, Yavakri returned home and announced, "O Father, due to a benediction that I have received from Indra, both of us will become highly learned in Vedic knowledge."

However, Bhāradvāja replied by warning his son, "My dear Yavakri, now
that your long cherished objective has been achieved, you will certainly become very proud and callous. As a result, you may very well ultimately meet with destruction! In order to illustrate to you the reality of such a danger, I shall narrate to you a nice story.

"Once, there was a ṛṣi named Vāladhī. It so happened, however, that his son died, and so Vāladhī began to perform extremely severe austerities in the hopes of obtaining a son who would be immortal. Finally, the demigods agreed to award Vāladhī such a son but at the same time they said, 'O Rṣi, since he cannot be immortal exactly as we are, your son will have to be immortal in some conditional way.'

"Upon hearing this, Vāladhī requested, 'Let my son's life depend upon the existence of these mountains here. In other words, for as long as these mountains continue to exist, let my son also live.'

"The ṛṣi had made this request because he considered that mountains continue to exist almost eternally. The demigods granted Vāladhī's wish and thereafter, a son was born to the ṛṣi and he was given the name Medhāvī. This boy was highly irritable by nature and when he learned of his extraordinary birth, he became very puffed-up. Having lost all good sense, and considering himself to be invulnerable, Medhāvī began to take pleasure in insulting the great sages. Indeed, for this purpose, he used to travel all over the world and then, at last, the enraged ṛṣis cursed him to be burnt to ashes. However, due to Medhāvī's acquired benediction, this curse proved to be ineffectual. Then, a ṛṣi named Dhannusakṣa, who understood the mystery of Medhāvī's birth, employed some huge buffaloes to shatter to pieces the mountains upon which his life depended. Thus, with the destruction of those mountains, Medhāvī also perished, causing his father Vāladhī to lament greatly."

Bhāradvāja then concluded, "My dear son, it is the nature of young ṛṣis to become very proud after they receive benedictions. As a result, they are often seen to perish within a very short time. My dear Yavakri, you must very carefully avoid insulting my friend Raivya, for he is very powerful and irritable."

Yavakri replied, "My dear father, do not worry, for I shall always act with the greatest respect toward Raivya."

However, in spite of such assurances, Yavakri soon became very puffed-up and fearless and thus he took delight in insulting other ṛṣis. Then,
once, as he wandered about simply for this purpose, Yavakri came to the äśrama of Raivya and there, he saw the rṣi's daughter-in-law seated alone. Yavakri became very lusty upon beholding this beautiful young girl and so he shamelessly asked her to accept him then and there. This girl, the wife of Parāvasu, was certainly afraid of Yavakri's curse, but at the same time, she was confident of Raivya's prowess. Thus, she tricked Yavakri by taking him to a secluded place and then tying him up with strong ropes.

Thereafter, when Raivya returned to his äśrama, he found his daughter-in-law shedding tears. After consoling her, the rṣi inquired about the cause of her grief, and so the girl told him about the behavior of Yavakri. Upon hearing this, Raivya became so enraged that he immediately tore out one of his matted locks, empowered it with some mantras, and then threw it violently into the sacred fire. At once, a girl who exactly resembled the wife of Parāvasu sprang from out of the flames and awaited the rṣi's command. Raivya then plucked out another matted lock and offered it as before so that from out of the fire emerged a terrible demon. As both creatures stood before him with folded hands, Raivya ordered, "Go at once and kill the rascal, Yavakri!"

The girl first of all went to Yavakri and freed him from his bondage. Then, using her feminine charms, she took away his water-pot, thus rendering him unclean. Thereafter, the demon rushed at Yavakri with an upraised spear, and so the rṣi's son got up and ran toward a small pond that was situated nearby. Yavakri knew that if he could touch some water then he would be able to counteract the demon by his curse. However, upon coming to the pond, Yavakri found that it was dry and so next, he ran to a nearby river. Astonishingly enough, this river was also devoid of water, and so Yavakri hurried to another stream. And yet, even though he approached many such streams and rivers, Yavakri found that all of them had dried up. At last, the panic-stricken rṣi returned home and attempted to enter his father's sacrificial room. However, a blind śūdra doorman blocked his entrance, and then, as he was grappling with the guard, the demon came there and hurled his spear. Thus, with his heart pierced, Yavakri fell down dead upon the ground, bathed in his own blood. After accomplishing his mission, the demon returned to Raivya and then, with the rṣi's permission, he began
to reside happily along with the female who had also been created from the fire.

Thereafter, when Bhāradvāja returned home, he found that the sacrificial fire did not greet him as usual. Fearing some mishap, Bhāradvāja inquired about this from his doorman and in response, the śūdra confirmed the rṣi’s fears by saying, "Your son had gone to the āśrama of Raivya. Now, he is laying here dead, having been slain by a powerful demon."

Bhāradvāja quickly went and embraced the dead body of his only son and then wept very bitterly. Gradually, as he thought over the callous behavior of Raivya, Bhāradvāja became inflamed with rage and so cursed the rṣi by saying, "You shall soon meet with your end, being accidentally killed by your eldest son!"

Then, as he continued to lament, Bhāradvāja thought as follows: "Those who are childless are actually fortunate, for they never have to experience the unbearable grief which one feels upon the death of his son! Alas! How unfortunate I am, for I have foolishly cursed my dearest friend, due to becoming overwhelmed by grief and anger!"

Indeed, Bhāradvāja lamented for a long while and then, after cremating Yavakri’s body, he also mounted the funeral pyre. At this time, a king named Bṛhadyumna commenced the performance of a great sacrifice and the two sons of Raivya, Arvavasu and Parāvasu, went there to assist. Once, while the sacrifice was in progress, Parāvasu decided to return home in order to see his wife. Then, as he approached the āśrama in the dead of night, Parāvasu happened to come upon his father, who was dressed in deerskin. Being overcome by drowsiness and on account of the dense darkness, Parāvasu mistook Raivya to be a deer and so he killed him in order to protect himself. After realizing his horrible mistake, Parāvasu cremated his father’s body and then quickly returned to the sacrificial arena. After explaining to his brother what had happened, Parāvasu said, "My dear Arvavasu, please undergo on my behalf the necessary atonement for the sin of killing a brāhmaṇa. I can complete this sacrifice unassisted, whereas you cannot, and so this seems to be the best arrangement."

Arvavasu agreed and so, without delay, he went to the forest and executed the prescribed atonement. Thereafter, when Arvavasu
returned to the sacrificial arena, his malicious brother advised Bṛhadyumna, "O King, this killer of a brāhmaṇa should not even be seen! Therefore, what can be said of allowing him to enter the sacrificial arena?"

Upon hearing this, Bṛhadyumna ordered his gatekeepers to turn away Arvavasu. With great agitation, Arvavasu tried to explain the actual situation, but he was nonetheless driven away by the guards. Although highly aggrieved, Arvavasu did not simply lament, however. After going to a lonely forest, he took shelter of the sun-god while commencing the performance of very severe austerities. Within a short time, the mantra for worshipping the sun-god became automatically manifest to Arvavasu and then, soon thereafter, Agni personally appeared before him, accompanied by many of the demigods.

The demigods then took Arvavasu to the sacrificial arena of King Bṛhadyumna and after dismissing Parāvasu, they installed him as the chief priest. Then, when Agni offered him a benediction, Arvavasu said, "O Lord, kindly allow my father to be brought back to life without any remembrance that Parāvasu had killed him. In addition, let my brother be absolved from all sin for having mistakenly killed his father. Finally, please arrange for Bhāradvāja and Yavakri to be brought back to life and let the mantra which was revealed to me for worshipping the sun-god become glorified all over the world."

Agni granted all of these boons and then, he gave Arvavasu other benedictions as well. Thereafter, when all of the aforementioned persons came back to life, Yavakri inquired from the demigods, "How was it that Raivya was able to kill me, in spite of my great austerities and Vedic wisdom?"

In response, the demigods warned Yavakri, "You had better never act so impudently again! By the mercy of Indra, you had mastered the Vedas effortlessly. On the other hand Raivya had done so with great labor after satisfying his spiritual master. It is for this reason alone that Raivya is more powerful than you."

After saying this, the demigods left that place in order to return to their heavenly abodes. Lomasa Ṛṣi then pointed out Yavakri's āśrama to the Pāṇḍavas and thereafter, they continued on their pilgrim's journey.

Finally, after visiting innumerable holy places, the Pāṇḍavas approached
the regions of Kuvera in the Himālayas, which also serve as the abode of Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Gandharvas and Kimpuruṣas. At this point, Lomasa Ṛṣi warned Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "From now on you must act very cautiously by controlling your mind and senses, for the regions which we shall pass through are normally inaccessible to human beings."

Thereafter, as the party proceeded toward Kailāsa, they came to the source of the Gaṅgā, which flows there in seven courses. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had been considering Lomasa Ṛṣi's words of caution and with this in mind he addressed Bhīma, saying, "My dear brother, you must very carefully restrain yourself and not give way to hunger and thirst. Or, perhaps it is better if you wait for me at the source of the Gaṅgā, along with Sahadeva, Draupadī, the brāhmaṇas, the charioteer, cooks, servants and animals. I shall go on ahead with only Nakula and Lomasa, subsisting upon minimal food and undergoing strict vows."

However, Bhīma replied, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, I am not going to stay behind! I am fully dedicated to you and since there are so many Rākṣasas roaming about these regions I must be there to protect you. Besides, you know that all of us have hopes of seeing Arjuna. Even though we may have to proceed on foot, this does not pose a problem, because I can carry the twins and Draupadī when they become too tired."

At this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira praised Bhīma and happily accepted him as their carrier. Lomasa Ṛṣi then said, "O King, we are now at the base of the Gandhamādanā mountain, which can only be ascended by dint of one's acquired spiritual merit of austerity."

While Lomasa Ṛṣi and the Pāṇḍavas were thus conversing, the king of the Pulindas named Suvahū came to meet them. The Pāṇḍavas had arrived at the border of his kingdom and so Suvahū showed them great respect. In return, the Pāṇḍavas remained with Suvahū for some days, just to accept his kind hospitality. Then, after leaving behind all of their servants headed by Indrasena, as well as their other attendants, the Pāṇḍavas set out for the Himālayas, hoping to gain a sight of Arjuna. Indeed, as they went along the path, the Pāṇḍavas again and again expressed their intense grief due to separation from Arjuna, for they regarded him to be their sole refuge for gaining back their kingdom. With burning hearts, the Pāṇḍavas constantly remembered the insults
which they had received from the Kauravas, Śakuni and Karṇa and how they had been deprived of their kingdom by deceitful means. On one occasion, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira made this interesting remark, "Only those persons who are impure are bothered by flies, mosquitoes or reptiles."

Lomasa Ṛṣi then said, "We shall soon be approaching Mount Mandara, near the banks of the Alakanandā River. Because this is the sporting ground of the demigods, we must always remain very cautious."

When the party came to what appeared to be a great white mountain, Lomasa Ṛṣi explained, "This hill is actually the bones of Narakaśura, who was killed long ago by Lord Viṣṇu for the benefit of Indra. Because the great demon's remains were placed on top of a mountain, they resemble a huge hill. Narakaśura had performed severe austerities for 10,000 years in an attempt to overthrow the king of heaven so he could occupy that post. Lord Indra fearfully took shelter of Lord Viṣṇu, who is the ultimate resort of everyone, and out of His causeless mercy, the Lord appeared before the king of heaven and killed the great demon."

Lomasa next narrated one of the appearances of Lord Varāha: Once, during the Satya-yuga, Lord Viṣṇu assumed the post of Yamarāja. As a result, there were no deaths while the birth rate remained unchanged. Because of this, a great population explosion ensued, not only in the human society, but in the animal kingdom as well. Finally, the earth became so overburdened that she sank down 100 yojanas below the surface of the Garbhodaka ocean. Indeed, the earth-goddess practically lost consciousness on account of the severe pain caused by the pressure of her excess weight, and at last, she helplessly began to take shelter of the almighty Lord Viṣṇu. Lord Viṣṇu then mercifully replied to the earth's prayers for protection and assured her that He would lighten her load. Thereafter, the Lord assumed the transcendental form of a one-tusked boar. Then, after expanding Himself greatly, when Lord Viṣṇu lifted up the earth with His tusk, the entire universe became so agitated that even the demigods became afraid. Without understanding the cause of the universe's disturbed state, the demigods approached Lord Brahmā, because he is considered to be the knower of everything. Then, as they stood before him with folded hands, the demigods said, "O Lord, please tell us why this great agitation has suddenly occurred within
the universe. How can we protect ourselves from this dangerous situation?"
Lord Brahmā replied, "My dear demigods, you have nothing to fear. This disturbance is caused by Lord Viśṇu Himself, who has assumed the form of a gigantic transcendental boar in order to lift up the over-burdened earth from the Garbhodaka Ocean."
After hearing this, the demigods desired to go and worship Lord Varāha and so they inquired, "Where can we find the Supreme Lord of all creatures and our eternal master?"
Brahmā then informed the demigods, "The Lord in His boar incarnation is now resting at the Nandana garden after having re-established the earth in her proper orbit."
Thereafter, the demigods hurriedly went to the Nandana-kāna, and after glorifying the Supreme Lord with the choicest of select prayers, they happily departed for their abodes.
While carrying only their weapons, the Pāṇḍavas proceeded through mountainous regions and came upon numerous lakes, rivers and forests which were the habitat of Kinnaras, Apsarās, Siddhas and Gandharvas. Then, as the Pāṇḍavas entered the vicinity of the Gandhamādāna mountain, a violent wind suddenly arose, causing dust and dry leaves to cover all directions. Indeed, it soon became so dark that nothing could be seen and then the Pāṇḍavas soon lost track of each other. Many large trees came crashing to the ground and everyone began to wonder if the devastation of the world was at hand.
While groping with their hands in the dark, the Pāṇḍavas took shelter in different places out of fear of the violent winds. Bhīma and Draupadī took cover underneath a great tree while Yudhiṣṭhira and Dhaumya took shelter in a dense forest. Carrying the sacred fire, Sahadeva hid himself underneath a big rock, while Nakula, Lomasa and the other brāhmaṇas stood beneath trees. Then, when the winds died down, and the dust began to settle, torrents of rain suddenly ensued, accompanied by streaks of lightning and claps of thunder. As a result, the entire area soon became flooded with rivers of muddy water. Then, after a long time, when the rains finally subsided, the Pāṇḍavas came out from their shelters and assembled together.
Resuming their journey, the Pāṇḍavas went along the path toward
Gandhamādana for about two miles when Draupadī suddenly sank to
the ground, having fainted due to exhaustion. Nakula ran to support her
and then, as the others quickly gathered around, Yudhiṣṭhira took
Draupadī upon his lap and lamented bitterly how she had to undergo so
much hardship for his sake. Then, as Yudhiṣṭhira was condemning
himself, Dhaumya and the other brāhmaṇas came there and consoled
him. Draupadī was then made to rest while Nakula and Sahadeva
massaged her tender feet with their rough hands which bore scars from
contact with their bowstrings.
Thereafter, while gazing at the lofty mountains ahead, Mahārāja
Yudhiṣṭhira wondered how they would ever cross over them. Bhima then
suggested that either he or his Rākṣasa son could carry them all and so
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira ordered him to summon Ghaṭotkaca. Indeed, as
soon as he was thought of, the son of Hiśimbi came there and presented
himself before the Pāṇḍavas with folded hands. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira
then instructed Ghaṭotkaca to carry Draupadī and urged him to stay
close to the ground so that she would not become frightened.
Ghaṭotkaca then suggested that he call upon hundreds of other Rākṣasas
so that everyone, including all of the brāhmaṇas, could be carried.
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira consented and thus the party soon continued on
their way with Rākṣasas carrying everyone except Lomasa, who
traversed the path of the Siddhas by dint of his own power.
Thus, by traveling through the sky, the Pāṇḍavas quickly passed over
many mountainous regions inhabited by Kimpuruṇas, Kinnaras,
Gandharvas, Uttara-Kurus, and wild animals including rurus. In this
way, the foremost of mountains, Kailāśa, soon came into view, and
beside it could be seen the āśrama of Nara and Nārāyaṇa, which was
inhabited by numerous great sages. After purifying themselves,
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers approached the ṛṣis at
Badarikāśrama and they were welcomed with a nice reception. The
Pāṇḍavas along with the thousands of brāhmaṇas who accompanied
them then took up residence at the abode of Nara and Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣis,
expecting to see the return of Arjuna at any time. During the day, the
Pāṇḍavas spent their time roaming about in the beautiful forests along
with Draupadī. There were many heavenly lakes nearby which were
filled with lotus flowers and lilies, and the branches of the trees there
bent down to the ground due to the weight of their fruit. The celestial Gaṅgā with its cool and crystal-clear waters flowed nearby as well and thus the surrounding scenery was incredibly delightful to the mind and senses of all who beheld it.

On the sixth day of the Pāṇḍavas' residence at the abode of Nara and Nārāyaṇa, it so happened that a wind blowing from the northeast carried an effulgent, thousand petaled lotus flower of heavenly fragrance and dropped it near to where Draupadī was seated. With great delight, Draupadī picked up the lotus-flower and then brought it to Bhīma and said, "I will give this one to Yudhiṣṭhira. Oh, how I wish that you would bring me many more of these lotus flowers so that I can take them back to decorate our cottage at Kāmyakavana."

Thereafter, as Draupadī went to present the lotus flower to Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma eagerly set out with the desire of pleasing his dear wife. Facing the wind, and holding his bow and arrows in hand, Bhīma began to fearlessly ascend the Gandhamādāna mountain. Indeed, he appeared just like a maddened elephant going through the forest. As Bhīma kept his sights on the flowering peaks, his fatigue became mitigated by the heavenly fragrance which was carried down by the gentle breezes. Bhīma rushed impetuously through the forest, pushing aside the bushes and creepers, and the deer simply gazed at him with grass hanging out from their mouths, for they were unacquainted with fear.

Being very eager to fulfill Draupadī's desire and to return soon to his elder brother, Bhīma smashed down many trees and crushed the wild animals that stood in his path. Thus, herds of wild elephants began fleeing in fear and when Bhīma roared loudly, the lions came out of their dens. Along with some of the elephants, these lions angrily rushed at Bhīma, having been urged on by their mates. At heart, however, these animals were so frightened of Bhīma that they passed stool and urine simultaneously. With a few slaps, Bhīma killed some of the animals and then he began to use one elephant to kill another. While the smaller animals fled in fear and the birds flew up into the sky, their cries mixed with Bhīma's roars, causing the animals that resided even in far-distant places to become disturbed with fear.

After killing numerous elephants and lions, Bhīma continued on,
knocking down all of the trees that stood in his way. Then, when he saw some aquatic birds flying upward with wet wings, Bhéma headed in that direction and thus soon came upon a large heavenly lake filled with lotus flowers and encircled by golden banana trees. First of all, Bhéma dove into the water and played there for some time like a maddened elephant. Then, after coming out of the water, he blew upon his conchshell as loud as he could, and when that sound mixed with his loud shouts and the slapping of his arms, it resounded throughout the heavens. Lions began to roar in response and when the elephants heard these roars, they cried out of fear.

Thereafter, Bhéma continued to ascend the mountain in search of the particular lotus flowers which were desired by Draupadí. Hanumān then came there and laid down on the narrow path which lead to heaven. Hanumān knew that Bhéma was his brother and thus he desired his welfare. Hanumān was afraid that Bhéma might be defeated or cursed for storming into heavenly regions and so he blocked the path in order to impede him. In this way, Hanumān lay down as if overcome by drowsiness and while yawning, he slashed his tail so that the thundering sound echoed throughout the mountain caves. Indeed, due to the slashing of Hanumān's tail, the mountain-peaks began to crumble, and when Bhéma saw this and heard the awesome sounds, his hair stood up on end. Bhéma looked here and there, trying to find out the cause of this disturbance, and while doing so he came upon Hanumān, whose body glowed with great effulgence. Letting out a loud shout, Bhéma fearlessly approached Hanumān, but the monkey hero simply half-opened his eyes and glanced at him indifferently. Then, in a soft voice, Hanumān said, "I am ill and was sleeping here quite peacefully. Therefore, why did you awaken me? You are a rational human being and so you can understand virtue. Why are you needlessly killing so many living creatures when you should be showing kindness to them instead? I warn you not to proceed further on this path because the regions ahead are accessible only to those who performed austerities. These areas are meant for the demigods and not mere mortals. Spend some time here and rest awhile. Then, after having refreshed yourself, you can return to where you have come from."

Bhéma then introduced himself and also asked about Hanumān's
identity. "I am simply a monkey," Hanumān replied, "and I will not allow you to pass, for to do so will mean your destruction."

Bhīma did not like these words and so in response he threatened, "O Monkey, either you let me pass or else face the consequences!"

The monkey replied, "I am too sick to move. However, if you like, then you can jump over me." Bhīma then said, "I will not do that. The Supreme Lord as Paramātmā dwells within everyone's body and I do not want to disregard Him. Otherwise, I could have leapt over this entire mountain, just as Hanumanjumped to Laṅkā."

The monkey inquired, "Who is this Hanumān?" Bhīma replied, "He is my brother and the hero of the epic Rāmāyaṇa which describes the pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Rāmacandra which He performed on this earth long ago. Being endowed with all mystic perfections, Hanumān easily jumped 100 yojanas across the sea to Laṅkā. O monkey, I am equal to my brother in all respects and so you had better move aside or else witness my prowess as I send you to the abode of Yamarāja!"

Hanumān knew that Bhīma was intoxicated with pride on account of his great strength. Thus, he did not become angry, but simply said, "You should have compassion upon me in consequence of my old age. I do not even have the strength to get up and so please just move my tail aside. Then, you shall be able to pass."

After hearing this, Bhīma thought, "I will grab this stupid monkey by the tail and then hurl him to the abode of Yamarāja!" Thus, while smiling slightly, Bhīma casually grabbed onto Hanumān's tail with his left hand. However, much to his amazement, Bhīma could not even move the monkey's tail an inch. Bhīma then grabbed onto the monkey's tail with both hands. And yet, even though he exerted his full strength so that his eyebrows contracted, his eyes began to roll and his entire body became covered with perspiration, Bhīma could not move the monkey's tail an inch. At this, Bhīma became completely humiliated. With great bashfulness, he then approached Hanumān, and after bowing down before him, he begged for forgiveness with folded hands. Bhīma submitted himself to the monkey as a surrendered disciple and then he once again asked him to identify himself. This time, the monkey replied, "I am indeed Hanumān; the son of the wind-god Vāyu, begotten through
the wife of the monkey-chief Keśarī."

Thereafter, Hanumān recounted many of his wonderful pastimes in the association of Lord Rāmacandra, and then, he concluded by telling Bhīma, "I have been blessed to live for as long as Lord Rāmacandra's glories are sung on the earth. Ever since Rāmacandra's disappearance, I have been residing at this place, and by the mercy of Mother Sītā, all enjoyable objects have been amply supplied to me. The Apsarās and Gandharvas daily sing the glories of Lord Rāmacandra for my pleasure, and I take great delight in passing my time in this way. My dear Bhīma, I have obstructed your path for your own good, for the lake which you are searching for is inaccessible to mortals."

Bhīma then affectionately bowed down before his elder brother and said, "O Hanumān, I am so fortunate just to be able to see you! Now that I have gained this opportunity, kindly show me the gigantic form which you had assumed in order to jump over the ocean to Laṅkā." However, Hanumān replied, "In the Tretā-yuga, when Lord Rāmacandra had appeared, the state of affairs were quite different from what they are now. Everything has diminished greatly with the passage of time and so I can no longer exhibit such a colossal form. In each of the four yugas, the conditions are radically different, and the land, rivers, trees, demigods and sages all conform to the characteristics of the particular age."

Bhīma then said, "I would like very much to hear about the characteristics of each of the yugas."

Hanumān then explained, "During the Kṛta-age, (kṛta means perfect) everyone was one hundred percent religious. At that time there were no demigods, demons, Gandharvas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas or Nāgas. There was no buying or selling and no one had to engage in manual labor since all necessities of life were produced simply by being thought of. There was no greed, malice, pride, envy, fear or hypocrisy in the Satya-yuga and thus there were no disputes. Everyone engaged in the worship of Lord Nārāyaṇa as He appeared in His white incarnation. Next, in the Tretā-yuga the Lord in His reddish incarnation introduced the process of sacrifice because virtue had diminished by one-fourth. In this age, people began to devise the means for obtaining their objectives since the necessities of life were not automatically produced as before. Now, in this Dvāpara-yuga, the Lord has incarnated as your relative, Kṛṣṇa. This
appearance of the Supreme Lord is very special for He has come in His original form, which is the source of all other expansions of Godhead. In this age, piety has decreased by one-half and thus lust, diseases and natural calamities have increased."

"O Bhíma, in the upcoming age, the Kali-yuga, the human beings will gradually exhibit all bad qualities, and because of this, there will be a great fear of scarcity. Lord Kṛṣṇa will once again appear at the beginning of the age, although He will cover His original feature by assuming the form of a devotee. Taking a golden form of indescribable beauty, the Lord will personally demonstrate the path of pure devotional service by inaugurating the saṅkīrtana movement, the congregational chanting of the holy names of the Lord. Now, you should return to your brothers for they are certainly awaiting for your return with great anxiety."

However, Bhíma insisted, "O Hanumān, unless I am able to witness your gigantic form, I shall not be able to leave satisfied."

Upon hearing this, Hanumān smiled and then he began to expand his body until it reached the gigantic proportions which he had assumed while taking his monumental leap to Laṅkā. Thus, in order to satisfy his brother, Hanumān became as big as a mountain, and he also exhibited his coppery eyes and sharp teeth. When Bhíma saw this terrible form, he became struck with wonder and his hair stood on end. Due to the great effulgence of this wonderful form, Bhíma had to close his eyes, and he felt as if he were no more than an insignificant fly in comparison to his illustrious brother. Then, Hanumān smilingly informed Bhíma.

"Factually I am able to go on expanding my body as much as I like. Indeed, when I face my enemies, my size increases automatically according to the necessity."

Bhíma's mind began to reel as he gazed upon Hanumān's terrible form. Then, as he felt himself becoming more and more bewildered, Bhíma at last requested, "My dear Hanumān, please resume your smaller form, for I cannot bear to see this wondrous feature of yours any longer! My mind is becoming stunned and thus I feel that I am losing my equilibrium!"

At this, Hanumān contracted his size until he again appeared as before. Then when he regained his composure, Bhíma asked with great curiosity, "O Hanumān, why is it that Lord Rāmacandra had to personally fight with Rāvana? It appears that you could have single
handedly killed all of the Rākṣasas and destroyed the entire city of Lāṅkā!"
In a solemn voice, Hanumān replied, "What you say is true. Rāvaṇa was no match for me, but I did not want to kill him for that would have obscured the fame of my eternally worshipable Lord, Śrī Rāmacandra."
After saying this, Hanumān pointed out to Bhīma the path which led to the Saugandhika guarded by fierce Yakṣas and Rākṣasas. Therefore, you must not try to take any lotus flowers by force. First, win the favor of the demigods by offering them suitable prayers. Then, your desire will easily be fulfilled."
Then, in order to fulfill his duty as an elder brother, Hanumān briefly discoursed on the subject of morality and while doing so he said, "Performing sacrifices, studying the Vedas and giving in charity are common activities for the three twice-born classes. However, teaching, officiating at sacrifices and receiving charity are acts to be engaged in only by brāhmaṇas. O Bhīma, in confidential matters, one should never consult a woman, a drunkard, a boy, a greedy person, one who is mean-minded, or one who displays signs of insanity. It is the duty of a kṣatriya to protect and chastise his subjects without being influenced by lust, anger, greed or malice."
Hanumān then embraced Bhīma with great affection, and at once, Kuntī's son found that all of his fatigue became mitigated and his bodily strength increased. Then, as tears came to his eyes, Hanumān said, "O Bhīma, it has been a great pleasure for me to meet you. Because you are a human being, you have reminded me of Lord Rāmacandra, for He had appeared in a human-like form. Please remember me from time to time, and take a benediction from me so that your meeting with me may not be fruitless. If you so desire, I can immediately go and kill all of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Or else, I can arrest Duryodhana and then bring him back to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira."
Bhīma replied, "O Hanumān, I think that our victory has already become assured just by having received your well-wishes. Therefore, the only benediction which I shall request is that I and my brothers may always remain under your protection."
Hanumān then said, "I will help you by positioning myself upon Arjuna's flagstaff. By my ferocious roars I shall diminish the strength of your
enemies and thus Arjuna will easily be able to kill them."

After saying this, Hanumān suddenly disappeared from view. Bhīma then continued to ascend the Gandhamādana mountain and while going along the path his mind remained absorbed in thoughts of Lord Rāmacandra and Hanumān. The sun had reached the meridian when Bhīma finally arrived at a very beautiful lake wherein grew innumerable golden Saugandhika lotus-flowers that were effulgent like the sun. Feeling that his goal had at last been achieved, Bhīma first of all drank some of the cool, clear water and then he prepared to gather the celestial lotus-flowers. This lake was located within the personal pleasure-garden of Kuvera, however, and thus it was being guarded by thousands of Rākṣasas known as Krodhasvas. When these Rākṣasas saw Bhīma enter the lake in order to pick the lotus flowers, they came before him and demanded, "Who are you? Why have you come here?"

Bhīma introduced himself and then said, "I have come here to pick some of these lotus flowers at the behest of my dear wife, Draupadī."

However, the Rākṣasas informed him, "You must first of all take permission from Kuvera before you touch even a single lotus flower! What to speak of you, even the demigods and great rṣis must obtain such consent! We warn you that if you try to ignore our good advice, then you will certainly meet with destruction!"

At this, Bhīma replied, "I do not see any Kuvera present here and so what is the question of taking his permission? Indeed, even if Kuvera were here, I would not do so, for it is not the business of kṣatriyas to beg permission from anyone! Besides, this lake belongs to Nature and not to any particular person and thus it is open to use for all living creatures." Having said this, Bhīma dove into the lake and the Rākṣasas, who were enraged on account of his impudence, rushed forward to seize him. At this, Bhīma quickly came out of the water and took up his mace in order to face his assailants. Then, as the Krodhasvas angrily surrounded him, Bhīma began to smash their heads and limbs while roaring ferociously again and again. Bhīma, who could not be slain in battle by mere prowess, soon killed 100 of the Rākṣasas and so the rest ran away in fear. Bhīma then once again plunged into the lake and after drinking its nectareous water, his strength became revived. Thereafter, Bhīma began
to pick the glowing golden lotus flowers while the Krodhasvas came before Kuvera and informed him of the intruder. Kuvera simply smiled, however, and replied, "Let Bhīma take as many lotus flowers as he likes. Do not worry, I already knew about his arrival before you came here."

Upon hearing this, the Krodhasvas gave up their anger and then returned to the Saugandhika lake. Meanwhile, after Bhīma had left in order to ascend the Gandhamādana mountain, a violent wind had arisen, accompanied by loud thundering sounds, and meteors began to fall from the sky. Due to dust raised by the wind, all directions became enveloped in darkness and birds and animals cried out with shrill voices. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then told his brothers, "Prepare yourselves to fight, for these omens indicate that a battle is about to take place."

It was only then that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira realized that Bhīma was absent. Then, in answer to the king's inquiries, Draupadi explained how Bhīma had gone off in order to search for the Saugandhika lotuses. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then ordered Ghaṭotkaca, "Let you and your fellow Rākṣasas carry us on your backs so that we can follow Bhīma's path."

Thus, the Pāṇḍavas, Lomasa and all of the other brāhmaṇas started to ascend the Gandhamādana mountain, riding upon the backs of the Rākṣasas. Thereafter, when they arrived at the Saugandhika lake, they saw Bhīma within the water and numerous slain Krodhasvas strewn along the shore. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira immediately went and embraced his brother saying, "My dear Bhīma, what have you done?! You must never act so rashly again, for you may offend the great demigods!"

Thereafter, everyone began to enjoy themselves by swimming in the celestial lake, and at this time the Krodhasvas returned and bowed down before Lomasa, Yudhiṣṭhira and the others with great humility. The Pāṇḍavas then took up residence at the Saugandhika lake for some time, anxiously awaiting the return of Arjuna. Then, one day, as Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was conversing with his brothers and recalling all of the places of pilgrimage which they had visited, he said to Bhīma, "I wonder if we could somehow visit the abode of Kuvera."

Just then, a voice from the sky announced, "O King, you shall not be able to see Kuvera's abode just now. Therefore, please descend from this mountain and return to the āśrama of Nara and Nārāyaṇa. From there,
you should go to the āśrama of Vṛṣapaṁvā and then visit the hermitage of Ariṣṭāsenā. Rest assured that later on you will get the opportunity to meet Kuvera himself."

When the voice fell silent, a fresh and fragrant breeze began to blow while flowers rained from the sky. Thus, everyone was amazed, and at Dhaumya's urging, the Pāṇḍavas immediately turned back towards Badarikāśrama.

Then, one day, as the Pāṇḍavas were residing at Badarī, a Rākṣasa named Jaṭāsura suddenly carried off Yudhiṣṭhira, Nakula, Sahadeva and Draupadī. This Rākṣasa had remained in the company of the Pāṇḍavas in the guise of a brāhmaṇa, just waiting for the opportunity to take away their weapons and rape Draupadī. Bhīma was away hunting at this time, and Ghaṭotkacā and the other Rākṣasas had also wandered off into the forest. Lomasa Rṣi and all of the brāhmaṇas had gone to the river in order to take their bath and collect flowers.

After assuming a monstrous form, Jaṭāsura had carried away the three Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī. Sahadeva then managed to free himself and while reaching for his sword, he cried out for Bhīma. At the same time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira tried to give the Rākṣasa some good instruction by saying, "According to the codes of morality, friends, those who give food or shelter, and those who confide in one, should never be harmed. Therefore, it would have been more virtuous if you had fought with us fairly instead of having acted with duplicity. Then, if victorious, you could have carried away Draupadī."

After saying this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira utilized his mystic power to make himself heavier, and thus Jaṭāsura could not proceed very quickly. At this time, Sahadeva challenged the Rākṣasa to fight, but just then, Bhīma appeared on the scene with his club in hand. Bhīma then declared, "I had long before understood that you were a Rākṣasa by the way you kept greedily gazing at our weapons. I did not kill you because you were our guest; besides, you had adopted the dress of a brāhmaṇa and you had not offended us in any way. Now, however, the time has arrived for you to breathe your last!"

Being thus challenged, Jaṭāsura fearfully put down his three captives and prepared himself for fighting. Thereafter, Bhīma and Jaṭāsura rushed at
each other and a fierce wrestling match took place. Nakula and Sahadeva angrily came to their brother's aid, but they were forbidden by their elder brother. After tussling with each other for some time, Bhīma and Jaṭāsura began to uproot giant trees and smash each other with them while shouting frightfully. However the surrounding land soon became devoid of trees and thus the two began to fight with rocks. When all stones had also become depleted, the fight continued with bare fists. Then, at last, after a long duel, Bhīma smashed his fist down upon the demon's neck, making the demon dizzily reel backwards. Taking advantage of this, Bhīma then grabbed hold of the Rākṣasa, picked him up over his head, and threw him violently to the ground, smashing all of his limbs. Then, simply with his elbow, Bhīma struck off the head of Jaṭāsura, and upon seeing this, all of the brāhmaṇas who had come there to watch congratulated him with exclamations of joy.

Soon thereafter, the fourth year since the departure of Arjuna came to an end. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then called his brothers together and suggested that they move from Badarī to the Śveta mountain, for it was known that Arjuna would descend there after the fifth year. Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas took the permission of the brāhmaṇas and set out, sometimes proceeding on foot, and sometimes on the backs of the Rākṣasas. Finally, after traveling for seventeen days, the party reached the āśrama of Vṛṣaparvā. After taking a short rest, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers came before Vṛṣaparvā, who in turn welcomed them as if they were his own sons. In order to reciprocate Vṛṣaparvā's hospitality, the Pāṇḍavas continued to reside there as his guests for seven days. Then, before concluding their journey, the Pāṇḍavas entrusted all of the brāhmaṇas as well as their excess paraphernalia to the care of Vṛṣaparvā. At this time, Ghaṭotkaca and the other Rākṣasas departed after assuring Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira that they would return whenever needed.

The Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī, along with only Dhaumya and Lomasa, then set out, and after walking along the mountain slopes for four days, they reached the Śveta mountain. Amazingly enough, in spite of so much walking, the Pāṇḍavas and even Draupadī did not feel the least bit fatigued. From the base of the Śveta mountain, the awesome Gandhamādana mountain could be seen in the distance, and within the
surrounding forests, the Pāṇḍavas saw innumerable trees overladen with fruits and flowers and many varieties of exotic birds. There were also lakes filled with fragrant lotus flowers that were surrounded by intoxicated bees, and because of the forest's exquisite beauty. Vidyādharas, Siddhas, Kinnaras and other minor demigods frequented the spot. While going along the forest path, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra took delight in pointing out the various trees and flowers to Draupadī and in this way, without ever tiring of the forest's great beauty, the Pāṇḍavas reached the āśrama of Ariṣṭāsenā.

When the Pāṇḍavas entered the hermitage, they saw that the rṣi was so emaciated on account of his severe austerities that he was practically a walking skeleton. Ariṣṭāsenā already knew all about his illustrious guests by dint of his mystic vision, and so he respectively received them. Then, after seating the Pāṇḍavas, Ariṣṭāsenā inquired, "O King, I hope that you are properly fulfilling all of your duties, especially toward your parents and the brāhmaṇas."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "O foremost of rṣis, I am acting virtuously to the best of my ability."

Ariṣṭāsenā then pointed to Mount Kailāsa and warned, "O King, it is not possible to go any further than this because these regions which lie ahead are only meant for the enjoyment of the demigods. If anyone dares to transgress this limit, then he is invariably killed by the Rākṣasas. These mountain peaks are the domain of Kuvera and he comes there every evening in order to enjoy himself in the association of the Apsarās. My dear Yudhiṣṭhīra, please remain here with me until the return of Arjuna. Do not dare to intrude into the realm of the celestials."

The Pāṇḍavas honored Ariṣṭāsenā's words and so they took up residence with him on the slopes of the Himavān. In this way, the entire fifth year passed as the Pāṇḍavas engaged themselves in listening to the discourses of Lomasa Rṣi. One day, after the Pāṇḍavas had resided with Ariṣṭāsenā for some months, Garuḍa suddenly came to a nearby lake and carried off a big Nāga. Due to the force of the wind which was created by the flapping of Garuḍa's wings, the entire mountain began to tremble and many tall trees plummeted to the ground. The Pāṇḍavas were struck with wonder while beholding this thrilling incident, and at this time the wind carried some heavenly flowers of five colors and dropped them
onto the ground nearby. Draupadī had never seen such lovely flowers and because she had become enamored with them, she addressed Bhīma tauntingly in the hopes of fulfilling her desire. First of all the clever Draupadī referred to some of Arjuna's heroic exploits and then she pleaded, "Dear husband, I would like to see the peaks of the Gandhamādāna mountain from where these flowers have fallen. Although Arjuna is not here, I still have hopes that you can take me there after killing all of the Rākṣasas. I want to roam about the heavenly abode of Kuvera which is filled with indescribably beautiful flowers."

Bhīma had powerful broad shoulders, reddish eyes, and a neck like the whorl of a conchshell. With a gait like that of a lion, he fearlessly rushed toward the peaks of the Gandhamādāna mountain, after having taken up his bow, sword, and mace. As she watched Bhīma depart like a maddened elephant, Draupadī felt great delight, for she expected that her object would soon be accomplished.

Thereafter, when Bhīma reached the top of the mountain, he beheld the city of Kuvera, which was adorned with palaces made of crystal and which was surrounded by walls of gold. Upon seeing this wondrous sight, Bhīma stood motionlessly with wide-open eyes for some time while supporting himself with his bow. Then, after recalling the words of Draupadī, Bhīma twanged his bowstring, slapped his arms, and loudly blew upon his conchshell, causing the hair of all the Yakṣas to stand up on end. After quickly taking up their weapons, the Yakṣas and Rākṣasas rushed out from the city and attacked Bhīma so that a great battle ensued. Although surrounded by innumerable warriors who showered their weapons upon him, Bhīma remained undaunted and retaliated by piercing his adversaries with his own torrents of arrows. Finally, after the heads and limbs of many Yakṣas and Rākṣasas were severed, the survivors began to flee in fear, leaving aside their maces, spears, swords and axes. At this, Manimān, the commander-in-chief to the army and a personal friend of Kuvera, began to abuse the cowardly soldiers. Then, being inflamed with great rage, he rushed at Bhīma, desiring to end the conflict without further delay. Bhīma pierced Maṇimān in the side with three choice arrows, and in
retaliation, the Yakṣa hero hurled his mighty mace. Bhīma dexterously avoided the blow, but in the meantime, Maṇimān threw an iron club that crashed into his right arm, giving him severe pain. Still, when Maṇimān next released a dart, Bhīma smashed it to pieces and then rushed at his foe. All of a sudden Bhīma then jumped high into the air and while shouting loudly, he hurled his mace with great force. As a result, Maṇimān's body became completely smashed so that he fell down dead onto the ground. The remaining Yakṣas and Rākṣasas, after witnessing the death of their leader, quickly fled toward the abode of Kuvera.

Meanwhile, the other Pāṇḍavas had heard the sound of loud shouts echoing throughout the mountain caves. Then, when they found that Bhīma was absent, they became filled with great anxiety. Entrusting Draupādi to the care of Ariṣṭāsenā, the Pāṇḍavas quickly took up their weapons and then began to climb the Gandhamādana mountain. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Nakula and Sahadeva reached the mountain's summit, they saw the victorious Bhīma and strewn all around were the innumerable Yakṣas and Rākṣasas that had been slain by him. Feeling great relief, the Pāṇḍavas rushed to embrace their heroic brother. Then, after they were all seated, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira admonished Bhīma by saying, "You should never again act so rashly, for what you have done is certainly very displeasing to the demigods."

As Bhīma sat thoughtfully, reflecting over the words of his elder brother, the surviving Yakṣas and Rākṣasas came before their master. With great agitation and while crying out in distress, they explained to Kuvera how a human being had trespassed into his territory and killed many great heroes, including Maṇimān. When the lord of wealth heard about the death of his very dear friend, he became highly inflamed with anger and his eyes became red with rage. Kuvera was not willing to forgive Bhīma for this second transgression and so he called for his chariot and then set out to fight.

While flying through the sky on his puspaka chariot, Kuvera was praised by hosts of Gandharvas and followed by 1,000 huge Yakṣas. Kuvera and his associates soon alighted upon the surrounding mountain peaks, but when the lord of wealth saw the Pāṇḍavas before him and considered the mission which they were to execute on behalf of the demigods, he
gave up his wrath. Then, when the Yakṣas saw that their master was pleased, they also became pacified.

Although Mahārāja Yudhīśṭhira, Nakula and Sahadeva immediately bowed down before Kuvera, Bhīma fearlessly stood ready to fight if need be. Kuvera then said to Mahārāja Yudhīśṭhira, "O King, please do not be angry with your brother, nor feel any shame because of his impudence. The destruction of all these Yakṣas and Rākṣasas was predestined and thus Bhīma's role was only instrumental. If you so wish, you and your brothers may dwell here for some time in order to enjoy yourselves in these heavenly surroundings."

Then, addressing Bhīma, Kuvera said, "O son of Vāyu, I do not mind that you have disregarded my authority in order to please Draupadī, for by this act you have freed me from Agastya's terrible curse."

Mahārāja Yudhīśṭhira then inquired about the curse and so Kuvera explained the incident as follows:
"Once, I went to Kuśasthali in the company of innumerable Yakṣas in order to attend a meeting of the demigods. While flying through the sky, we passed over the ṛṣi Agastya, who was seated on the banks of the river Yamunā, facing the sun with upraised arms. Out of haughtiness and stupidity, my friend Maṇimān passed stool on Agastya's head and so the enraged ṛṣi cursed me by saying, "O lord of wealth, your friend and all of your soldiers will one day be killed by an earthly mortal. However, when you see that human being, you will become freed from your share of the sinfull reaction."

Kuvera then desired to impart some good instructions unto Mahārāja Yudhīśṭhira and while doing so, he said, "My dear king, you should understand that there are five factors which lead to the successful execution of all endeavors: patience, ability, time, place and prowess. Only one who possesses all five of these attributes can continue to rule over earth for a long period of time. Bhīma is certainly powerful and fearless, but at the same time he is ignorant of duty, haughty, impatient and he has a childish mentality. Therefore, you should always keep him in check. Arjuna, on the other hand, is not only powerful but he is a reservoir of all good qualities, such as self-restraint, charity, intelligence, modesty, truthfulness, and unwillingness to perform any abominable act. You can rest assured that Arjuna is well and is residing happily in the
abode of Indra. Your grandfather, Śantanu, is also dwelling with the king of heaven, and he has inquired about your welfare. After remaining here for awhile, you should return to the āśrama of Ariñöäsena. Do not worry, for I shall instruct my associates to always look after you and give you all protection."

Thereafter, when Kuvera stopped speaking, Bhéma came and bowed down before him, and thus the lord of wealth became very pleased. Kuvera then brought back to life all of the Yakṣas and Rākṣasas that had been killed by Bhéma, since the duration of Agastya's curse had expired. Then, as the Pāṇḍavas stood before him with wonder-struck expressions, Kuvera assured them that Arjuna would return very shortly. Finally, the lord of wealth departed by coursing through the skies on his puspaka chariot, followed by all of the Yakṣas. The Pāṇḍavas spent a few nights on the summit of the Gandhamādana mountain, enjoying the Yakṣas' hospitality, and then they returned to the āśrama of Ariñöäsena.

One morning, after the Pāṇḍavas had paid their respects unto Lomasa, Dhaumya and all of the brahmās, Dhaumya took Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira by the right hand and began to describe all of the regions which were visible from their elevated vantage point. First, Dhaumya pointed to Saṇyamanī, the abode of Yamarāja in the South. Then, to the North, he pointed to Mount Meru, on top of which stands the assembly of Lord Brahmā. East of Mount Meru, Dhaumya pointed to the abode of Lord Nārāyaṇa and said, "This realm is made of spiritual nature, and it is inaccessible to even the great sages and demigods. Lord Nārāyaṇa is the primeval Lord and the cause of all causes, and one who attains to His transcendental abode never again comes back to this material world."

As they continued to reside at the āśrama of Ariñöäsena, many Gandharvas, rṣis and others came there to visit the Pāṇḍavas. While anxiously awaiting the return of Arjuna, the brothers passed their time by either roaming in the forest, or else in the company of the brahmānas, reciting the Vedas and performing other religious duties. Still, on account of their intense feelings of separation, every day and night appeared to the Pāṇḍavas to be as long as an entire year.

Then, one day, while the Pāṇḍavas were sitting together, absorbed in
thought of Arjuna, the chariot of Indra suddenly appeared overhead, illuminating all directions. Arjuna was seated along with Mātali, and when the Pāṇḍavas saw him decorated with flower garlands and golden ornaments, their joy knew no bounds. The celestial chariot then alighted nearby and after getting down, Arjuna first of all went and offered obeisances to Dhaumya, then to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and then Bhima. Nakula and Sahadeva bowed down before their elder brother and thereafter, when Arjuna went to meet Draupadi, the Pāṇḍavas worshipped Mātali and circumambulated Indra's chariot. Finally, Mātali took his leave and departed, and then Arjuna presented some precious jewels and ornaments to Draupadi which he had received from his father, the king of heaven. Everyone then sat down around Arjuna, and since they were all exceedingly eager to hear about his experiences, he narrated briefly some of the incidents before retiring that night.

After arising the next morning, Arjuna went to offer his respects unto Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Then, suddenly, a clamor of musical sounds along with the rattling of numerous chariots was heard overhead. King Indra then appeared in the sky, followed by hosts of Gandharvas and Apsarās. After he had alighted from his chariot, the king of heaven was very reverently worshipped by the Pāṇḍavas. Then, Indra said to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "My dear king, you can rest assured that the day will soon come when you will once again rule over the earth. Now, in order to pass the remaining years of your exile, please return to the Kāmyaka forest."

After Indra's departure, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira went to Arjuna and with great affection he requested him to describe in detail how he had passed his time in heaven. Everyone then eagerly gathered around to hear, and so Arjuna happily told about his wonderful experiences as follows: "My dear brothers, after leaving the Kāmyaka forest, I first went to the āśrama of Bhṛgu Muni. There, a certain brāhmaṇa advised me that I should perform austerities if I hoped to meet Indra, and so I immediately departed for the Himavān with that purpose fixed in my mind. After having performed very severe penances for six months, I happened to get into an argument with a fierce Kirāta over a wild boar which we had both pierced with our arrows.

"A fight ensued and as the battle raged, the Kirāta expanded his body
into hundreds of forms. Without becoming bewildered, I pierced all these Kirātas with my arrows, and so once again he became one. Indeed, sometimes the Kirāta assumed a small body having a large bead. Finally, after displaying various mystical feats in this way, the Kirāta assumed his original form as a black-complexioned hunter.

"I found that I could not defeat my enemy in spite of exerting my best efforts and so, at last, I released the brahmāstra. When the Kirāta managed to neutralize that supreme of all weapons, I became terrified and thereafter, we began to fight hand to hand. The Kirāta was too powerful for me, however, and as he squeezed me in his powerful arms, I practically lost consciousness. It was at this point that the hunter revealed himself to be Lord Śiva and the goddess Umā came and stood by his side.

"The lord was pleased by my fighting, however, and so he awarded me his personal weapon, the pāśupata, which can be used only as a last resort when all other weapons have failed. Then, after speaking with me for some time and instructing me in the use of the pāśupata weapon, Lord Śiva suddenly disappeared.

"I spent the night at that spot, and the next morning, I happened to meet the same brāhmaṇa who had advised me to perform austerities. When I described to him my encounter with Lord Śiva, he became very pleased and embraced me repeatedly while assuring me that I would soon have the opportunity of meeting Indra and all of the demigods. The brāhmaṇa then departed and that evening, heavenly breezes began to gently blow while fragrant flowers fluttered down from the sky. I could hear Vedic hymns being chanted in glorification of Indra and then the Maruts, Gandharvas, Apsarās and other celestial beings appeared overhead in their chariots. After them came Indra himself along with Śacī, and he was followed by all of the demigods, riding upon their celestial vehicles.

"The Lokapālas then came before me and after introducing themselves, they gave me their favorite weapons, saying that I would have to perform a heroic task on their behalf. After the other Lokapālas had departed, Indra assured me that by ascending to heaven I would be able to obtain all other celestial weapons which I desired. Then, after saying this, Indra and the other demigods who were accompanying him
miraculously vanished from sight.
"I was certainly struck with wonder and soon thereafter, Indra's chariot appeared above me in the sky. Mātali then invited me to accompany him to Amarasvati, and as soon as I mounted upon the chariot, he set off with great speed, coursing through space. At that time, Mātali remarked with a voice that was filled with astonishment, 'O son of Kuntī, I am very surprised that your body did not jerk even a little bit when I started! Even Indra himself is slightly shaken when this chariot begins to move, and thus I can guess that your prowess exceeds that of the king of heaven!'
"Thereafter, as the chariot soared upward, Mātali began to point out to me the various heavenly abodes of the demigods which came into view, one after another. Soon, we reached the outskirts of Amarasvati, the capital of Indra, where the inhabitants are always contented and never feel the miseries of excessive heat or cold. First of all, I was introduced to all classes of demigods and then, when I entered the royal court, my father offered me half of his throne as my seat.
"Thereafter, I continued to reside at Indraloka, and while doing so I acquired all of the celestial weapons, and I even learned the arts of music and dance from the Gandharva Citrasena. Finally, when my education was complete, Indra patted me on the head with great affection and then said, 'My dear son, now you must grant me my preceptorial fee!'
"Of course, I gave my consent and then, Indra explained, 'O son of Kuntī, I want you to kill my enemies, the thirty million Dānavas named Nivāta-kavacas, who are dwelling within the ocean.'
"Indra then called for his chariot, and as I was setting out, all of the demigods came there, and after eulogizing me, they gave me the Devadatta conchshell. With Mātali at the reins, when I soon approached the city of the Dānavas, I jubilantly blew upon that conchshell. Upon hearing the tumultuous sound, all of the Dānavas came running out with their weapons in their hands. During the fierce battle that ensued, I was continually harassed with showers of weapons, and so, at last, I released Indra's thunderbolt. Innumerable arrows, immediately issued forth from that wonderful weapon, so that the Nivāta-kavacas became greatly afflicted. The Dānavas then resorted to their mystic powers of illusion, and thus it soon appeared as if the whole world was enveloped in dense
darkness.
"At this time, Mātali became overwhelmed with fear, and he began to panic. I pacified him, however, and then employed my own mystic powers in order to dispel the darkness created by the Dānavas. The Nivāta-kavacas created more illusions, however, so that at one moment everything appeared to be normal and then the next moment, all seemed to be submerged in water or darkness. Still, I remained undaunted and continued to slay the Dānavas. Indeed, even when everything was shrouded in darkness so that the Nivāta-kavacas remained invisible, I still severed their heads with one of my celestial weapons.
"Finally, the Nivāta-kavacas had to flee from the battlefield and re-enter their city. Then, when the veil of illusion lifted, I could see that thousands of the Dānava soldiers had been slain. Once again, however, all of the Nivāta-kavacas appeared on the scene, flying invisibly in the sky while showering torrents of rocks upon me. At this time, both I and my horses became very hard-pressed. Seeing that I had become momentarily disheartened, Mātali once again urged me to release Indra's thunderbolt.
"This time, all of the Nivāta-kavacas fell down dead upon the battlefield, and so I entered their city, which was filled with women bewailing the loss of their husbands. When they heard the rattling of Indra's chariot, the wives of the Dānavas fearfully withdrew into their palaces. Upon seeing the opulence of the wonderful city, I became highly astonished. I then inquired, 'O Mātali, how was it possible for the Nivāta-kavacas to live amidst greater opulence than that which is enjoyed by the king of heaven?'
"Mātali replied, 'Long ago, this city was Indra's capital. Then, the Nivāta-kavacas fought with the demigods and were able to drive them off. These Dānavas had performed very severe austerities, and thus they had received a benediction from Lord Brahmā which enabled them to reside here while remaining unconquerable by the demigods. Indra became very disheartened after losing his abode, however, and so Lord Brahmā assured him that in another body he would be able to kill the Nivāta-kavacas. My dear Arjuna, it was for this purpose that Indra gave you all of his celestial weapons, and thus you have been able to accomplish a task which even the king of heaven could not do.'"
Arjuna continued, "Then, after defeating the Nivāta-kavacas, as I was returning to Indraloka, I happened to see the effulgent city of the Pulomās and the Kālakeyas, which was made of jewels and could move at will. In answer to my inquiries, Mātali explained, 'Two women, Pulomā and Kālakā, had formerly practiced great austerities and thus received a benediction from Lord Brahmā that their children would be unslayable by the demigods. Lord Brahmā also awarded them this wonderful city, Hiranya-pura, but at the same time, Brahmā indicated that it would be destroyed by a human being. My dear Arjuna, you should now employ Indra's thunderbolt and accomplish that which has already been predicted.'

"Thereafter, when I approached the flying city, the Dānavas and Daityas immediately rushed out to fight with me. Without delay, I employed the thunderbolt, however, and thus showers of arrows issued forth and slaughtered the demons in great numbers. The Dānavas and Daityas then resorted to their illusory powers so that their city sometimes appeared to be submerged within the water and sometimes it appeared to enter into the earth. Still, I somehow managed to shatter the city with my celestial weapons, and thus it came crashing down to the ground.

"The demons then rushed towards me, riding upon 60,000 blazing chariots. I quickly employed my best celestial weapons and yet, much to my dismay, my enemies remained unharmed. Becoming exceedingly fearful, I considered these demons to be unconquerable, and at last, I thought of the weapon given to me by Lord Śiva. Then, as soon as I fixed an arrow upon my bowstring, a male person appeared there, having three heads, six arms and nine eyes. He was blazing like the sun and as his dress he wore mighty serpents. The sight of the Raudra weapon personified dispelled all of my fears, and when it was released, it sent forth innumerable beasts such as lions, tigers, apes, buffaloes and vultures, as well as great mountains and seas, hosts of Gandharvas, Yakṣas and Rākṣasas. Indeed, the entire universe appeared to be filled with these wondrous creations and within a moment, all of my enemies were slain.

"Out of gratitude, I bowed down to Lord Śiva while Mātali praised me highly for my wonderful accomplishment. I then returned to Amarāvatī, and the king of heaven became highly gratified upon hearing of my
victories. King Indra then told me, 'My dear son, rest assured that the
time will come when you shall enable Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira to rule over
the entire earth.'
"After saying this, Indra gave me various gifts and then, with his
permission, I departed from heaven in order to return here."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then exclaimed, "O Arjuna, I consider myself to
be so fortunate just to have you back! Indeed, I feel as if I have already
conquered over the entire earth! Now, please show us all the celestial
weapons which you used to kill the Nivāta-kavacas."
It was already late in the day and so Arjuna told his elder brother that
he would display his weapons the next morning. Thus, after passing the
night and performing their morning religious duties, the Pāṇḍavas once
again approached Arjuna with great eagerness. Arjuna sat down on the
ground and after taking up his Gāṇḍīva bow, he began to show off all of
his celestial weapons by invoking them one after another. However,
because so many celestial weapons came to be assembled in one place,
the earth became oppressed with the great weight and began to tremble.
The waters of the seas and rivers became exceedingly turbulent, and the
shining of the sun became dim. Those creatures living below the earth
came up to the surface, for they had become afflicted by the heat which
those celestial weapons created. Indeed, while surrounding Arjuna, these
creatures prayed for their very lives with folded hands. The Brahmāris,
Siddhas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Gandharvas and Devarśis then appeared
overhead, as did Lord Brahmā and all of his followers. The Lokapālas
and even Lord Śiva also came there while Vāyu engaged in strewing
heavenly flowers all around Arjuna. Then, the Gandharvas sang and the
Apsarās danced. Nārada Muni came before Arjuna at the behest of all
the demigods and after being worshipped by the Pāṇḍavas with great
respect, he said, "My dear Arjuna, do not discharge these celestial
weapons without adequate reason. Indeed, even with reason these
weapons should not be employed unless absolutely necessary, for such a
rash act can cause the destruction of the entire three worlds."
Nārada Muni then turned to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and said, "My dear
king, rest assured that you will get the opportunity to see all of these
weapons when Arjuna uses them against his enemies in battle."
After thus prohibiting Arjuna to further display his celestial weapons,
the demigods returned to their heavenly abodes. Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas remained at the base of the Gandhamādana mountain for four years, enjoying life together in the pleasant forests. Thus, the time went by quickly so that ten years of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's period of exile altogether elapsed. Then, one day, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva approached the king and said, "My dear elder brother, with your consent, we would like to leave the abode of Kuvera and once again descend onto Bhāratavarṣa (the earth). We are afraid that this heavenly atmosphere will cause us to forget our real purpose of vanquishing Duryodhana and regaining our parental kingdom."

Yudhiṣṭhira was always very eager to please his brothers, and so he took one last look around the area that had become very dear to him, and then prepared to depart. While the Pāṇḍavas were getting onto the backs of Ghaṭotkaca and his followers, Lomasa Ṛṣi took their leave and departed through the airways. Ariṣṭāśena then came and gave the Pāṇḍavas some advice regarding the journey which lay before them. The Pāṇḍavas certainly felt some remorse after leaving Gandhamādana, but later on, when Kailāsa once again came into view, their happiness increased. The Pāṇḍavas then passed through many very beautiful forests and crossed over some practically inaccessible mountainous regions until they at last reached the āśrama of Vṛṣaparvā. The Pāṇḍavas narrated to the rājarṣi all that had they had experienced and then, after spending the night, they departed for the abodes of Nara and Nārāyaṇa. Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas resided at Sadarikāśrama for one month and then journeyed to the kingdom of Suvahu, from where they had originally begun their mountain journey.

The king of the Pulindas came out of his city with great joy in order to greet his exalted guests, and at that time the Pāṇḍavas' charioteers and servants rejoined them. After spending the night, the Pāṇḍavas dismissed Ghaṭotkaca and his followers and set out for the river Sarasvatī in the foothills of the Himālayas. There, in a forest named Viśākhayūpa, they resided quite peacefully for one year, and hunting became their chief occupation.

One day, Bhīma wandered off alone into an adjoining forest which was frequently visited by Siddhas, Devarṣis, Gandharvas and Apsarās. While
engaged in killing may wild boar, deer and buffalo, Bhîma also took
pleasure in pulling out trees by their roots and then breaking them into
pieces. In a sporting mood, Bhîma crushed the tops of mountains as well,
and while doing so, he shouted loudly, making even the ferocious
animals run away in fear. In this way, Bhîma roamed about and while
doing so, he happened to come upon a large snake which was living in a
mountain cave.
This serpent was so huge that it looked just like another mountain and
with its yellow spots, glaring reddish eyes and gaping coppery mouth like
a great cave, its very sight made one's hair stand on end. As Bhîma
unwittingly came close by, this gigantic hissing serpent seized him in his
clutches and because of a benediction which it had received, Bhîma
found that he could not exert his strength. Indeed, no matter how hard
Bhîma struggled, he found that his energy was diminished and so that
instead of freeing himself, he began to lose consciousness. At this, Bhîma
became exceedingly alarmed and in exasperation he inquired, "Who are
you? How is it that you have been able to overpower me? O Serpent,
now that I am within your grips, what do you intend to do with me?"
The huge snake replied, "Being extremely famished, I am so grateful that
some food has come my way after such a long time! O Hero, I am not an
ordinary serpent. I am actually Nâhuṣa, the son of Āyu. Once, I offended
the brahmârsis and so, Agastya cursed me to take on this abominable
form. Then, as I was falling down from the throne of Indra, I begged the
great rṣi to retract his curse, and as a concession, he compassionately
said, 'O King, you shall become freed from this curse after some time.
When you meet someone who will properly describe the nature of the
Absolute Truth and then answer all of your questions, you will be
delivered. And, for as long as you remain in the form of a serpent, even
superior beings will lose their strength when held captive within your
coils. In addition, you shall retain a complete memory of your past life."
Bhima then said, "O Nâhuṣa, I know that Destiny is supreme and thus I
do not grieve so much for myself. However, I feel sorry for my poor
brothers. When they find out that I have perished, they will certainly
lose all enthusiasm for gaining back their kingdom. And my helpless
mother, who is now living amongst the evil sons of Dhṛtarâṣṭra, will also
give up all hope after hearing about my death."
Meanwhile, as Bhīma lamented over his cruel fate, Yudhiṣṭhira began to observe various inauspicious omens and so he became exceedingly anxious. On his right side, jackals began to howl ominously. Hideous birds having just one wing, one eye and one leg, were seen crying out hideously while vomiting blood. As a dry wind began to rage, King Yudhiṣṭhira's left arm, thigh, eye, and chest all began to twitch. When he fearfully inquired from Draupādi about Bhīma, the king learned that he had gone off to the forest alone that day. Then, after leaving Draupādi in the care of Arjuna and the brāhmaṇas under the protection of Nakula and Sahadeva, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira set out with Dhaumya by following Bhīma's footprints.

While going alone through the forest, the king saw thousands of deer and hundreds of lions which had been slain by Bhīma and thus he easily ascertained his brother's path. The trees which had been smashed by Bhīma's impetuous strides also made it easy for Yudhiṣṭhira and thus, he soon emerged from the forest to where there was a desert-like region. There, within a mountain cave, he saw Bhīma caught in the coils of a gigantic serpent. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira anxiously called out, "O Bhīma, what has happened?" his brother replied, "This snake has captured me in order to make me his food!"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then implored, "O Serpent, please free my brother and in return I shall supply you with whatever food you desire."

However, the gigantic snake replied, "I do not want any other food because Bhīma has come to me of his own accord. Indeed, my dear king, you had better leave this place at once or else you may become my food for tomorrow!"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "Who are you? Is there anything I can do so that you will release my younger brother?"

The serpent then replied, "O King, previously I was Nähuña, the son of Āyu in the Soma dynasty. By dint of my great sacrificial performances and austerities, I had been selected to occupy the post of Indra. Yet, after having achieved such great success, I became extremely proud and arrogant. Once, while thousands of brahmārṣis were carrying my palanquin, I offended them and so Agastya cursed me to fall down into this abominable condition of life. Now, my dear king, if you are able to answer my questions, I shall set your brother free."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira said, "O Nāhuṣa, I will answer to the best of my ability. Now, please begin."
Nāhuṣa then asked, "Who is a brāhmaṇa? What is ultimately to be known?" Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then replied, "One who possesses the qualities of truthfulness, charity, forgiveness, good conduct, mercy, and who observes the religious duties of a brāhmaṇa is to be known as a genuine brāhmaṇa. That which is ultimately to be known is the Supreme Brahman, in Whom there exists no material dualities, such as happiness and distress."
Nāhuṣa then said, "My dear king, the qualities which you have listed are sometimes seen even in śūdras. And, regarding the Supreme Brahman, I have never seen a living being who is devoid of happiness and distress."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then explained, "One is not to be considered a brāhmaṇa or a śūdra simply because of birth. It is the actual possession of brahminical qualities which makes one a genuine brāhmaṇa, and the lack of them qualifies one as a śūdra. You say that you have no experience of someone who exists beyond the platform of material dualities. However, just because we have not experienced something does not mean that it does not exist! Therefore, your objection is not valid."
The serpent then challenged, "O King, if one's caste is to be determined by qualities alone and not birth, then no distinction could be made between persons until their qualities became manifest by their activities."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "Yes, this is a fact. Thus, until one is initiated by a bona fide ācārya, he must be considered a śūdra, no matter how exalted his birth may have been. Actually, in human society, sexual intercourse is very commonly indulged in promiscuously between members of the different social orders. Therefore, it is very difficult to ascertain the real nature of one's birth. For this reason also, one's personal qualities must be the determining factor for ascertaining his social status. Anyone who displays the proper qualifications should be accepted as a genuine brāhmaṇa. Svāyambhuva Manu has said, 'Anyone from a lower or mixed caste who has become purified by reformatory processes is superior to one born in a brāhmaṇa family but who has fallen
down from the conduct which is suitable for his order."

Upon hearing this, the serpent declared, "O King, you have answered my questions very nicely and thus I shall not eat your brother Bhīma."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then said, "O Nāhuṣa, since you are well-acquainted with Vedic knowledge, please tell me what one should do if he desires to gain salvation from the miseries of material existence."

Nāhuṣa replied, "O King, one who gives in charity, who always speaks truthfully and respectfully, and who practices nonviolence toward all living beings, certainly attains to heaven after giving up his present body."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then asked, "How would you rank the three practices which you have mentioned in terms of importance?"

Nāhuṣa replied, "All three items are extremely important. Actually, the relative importance of each depends upon the particular situation in which they are to be applied. My dear Yudhiṣṭhīra, it is very enlivening for me to answer your questions for I have passed a long time in this miserable condition without any stimulating association. Therefore, please continue to ask me more questions if you so desire."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra next asked, "How does the soul transmigrate to another body after death? How can the soul, which is transcendental, perceive through material senses? How is it that a living entity obtains the results of his own acts (karma)?"

Nāhuṣa replied, "The soul transmigrates from one body to another, being carried by the subtle body. It is through the medium of the mind that one experiences pleasure and pain, and the realms of sense objects. According to the karma that is stored up in the subtle body, one is awarded a new body after quitting his old and useless one."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then asked, "O Nāhuṣa, how could such an exalted personality as yourself become overwhelmed by illusion and thus fall down from heaven?"

Nāhuṣa replied, "O King, you should know for certain that prosperity acts as a powerful intoxicant upon the conditioned soul, even if he happens to be a very wise or heroic personality. Thus, by association with great opulence, even a man of discrimination gradually loses his good intelligence and falls down. After being awarded the post of Indra, I soon became very proud. Just imagine! I was always being served hand
and foot by the brahmarṣis, demigods, Yakṣas, Gandharvas and Apsarās!
I was so powerful that any person upon whom my gaze fell would become
diminished in prowess. At my command, thousands of brahmarṣis once
pulled my chariot, and while going along I happened to touch the great
sage Agastya with my foot. Becoming enraged on account of this offense,
the rṣi cursed me to fall toward the earth. I begged Agastya Muni for
forgiveness and so he kindly informed me that I would be delivered by
meeting you. O Yudhiṣṭhira, your answers to my questions were quite
correct and so I must thank you very much for your mercy upon me. It is
the possession of brahminical qualities and not birth in a brāhmaṇa's
family that is the cause of salvation!"
Then, after wishing Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and his brother well, Nāhuṣa
suddenly gave up his serpent body and within an instant, returned to the
heavenly planets. Thereafter, when Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Dhaumya
returned to their camp, the king narrated the wonderful incident for the
pleasure of the brāhmaṇas, who then strongly admonished Bhīma for
once again acting so rashly. The Pāṇḍavas continued to dwell happily at
the Viśākhayūpa forest and then, after the end of the monsoon season,
they returned to Kāmyakavana. The Pāṇḍavas were very happily
received by all of the sages living there, and one of the brāhmaṇas
informed them, "Lord Kṛṣṇa and Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi will soon come here to
visit you."
Remarkably, just as the brāhmaṇa was saying this, Lord Kṛṣṇa suddenly
arrived there on His chariot, accompanied by His wife Satyabhāmā.
After dismounting, Kṛṣṇa first of all offered His obeisances unto
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Dhaumya. Next, He embraced Arjuna
with great affection while Nakula and Sahadeva came and offered their
obeisances at His lotus feet. Lord Kṛṣṇa was meeting the curly-haired
Arjuna after a long period of separation and thus He embraced him
again and again. Indeed, the Lord's transcendental beauty was seen by all
to increase in the association of His dear friend. Then, as Satyabhāmā
embraced Draupadī, Arjuna inquired about the welfare of Subhadrā and
Abhimanyu, who were residing in the Lord's care at Dvārakā.
Finally, Kṛṣṇa sat down, surrounded by the Pāṇḍavas, and He praised
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira by saying, "My dear king, you have always acted
righteously. In spite of the most trying circumstances, you undeviatingly adhere to religious principles. Your actions are always performed out of a sense of duty and not from personal motives for enjoyment. Indeed, no other person but yourself could have tolerated the insults which Draupadi received in the assembly of the Kurus!" Then, turning to Draupadi, Kṛṣṇa said, "O princess of Pañcāla, you can rest assured that your sons are well and fine. Subhadrā is looking after them very nicely and My son Pradyumna is training them in the military science."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then suggested to Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, if you so desire, the Yādavas can go right now and vanquish the wicked Duryodhana. Thus, when your period of exile is over, you can enter Hastināpura peacefully, without a struggle."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear Lord, I am extremely grateful that You are ready to help us in all circumstances. Indeed, You are our only refuge. The twelfth year of our exile is now coming to an end and so we will soon have to begin our year of living incognito. After that, I am sure that by Your mercy I shall be able to regain my kingdom without having deviated from my vows."

While Lord Kṛṣṇa and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira were thus conversing, the great sage Mārkaṇḍeya suddenly arrived there. Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Pāṇḍavas, and all of the brāhmaṇas quickly got up from their seats in order to receive the illustrious rṣi, who, even though thousands of years old, appeared just like a young man, devoid of any signs of age. Thereafter, when Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi was comfortably seated after having been worshipped by the Pāṇḍavas, Lord Kṛṣṇa requested him to narrate some ancient histories which instill in the listener a sense of the moral values of life. Then, as everyone surrounded Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi anxiously awaiting his discourses, Nārada Muni came there. Everyone got up to worship him but then, when Nārada understood that Mārkaṇḍeya had been about to speak, he encouraged the rṣi to go ahead without delay. Thus everyone sat down once again, being very eager to hear. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then started things off by asking, "My dear sage, I am always perplexed when I think about how the wicked sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra are prospering whereas we are suffering, even though we act righteously. Please explain how God figures in man’s happiness and
distress, for it seems to me that such results are simply the fruits of one's endeavors. O venerable ṛṣi, I would also like to understand the concept of karma. Are the reactions to our work enjoyed by us in this life or in the life hereafter? If the reactions are meted out in a future life, then how could there ever be a cessation to the cycle of action and reaction and resultant birth and death?"

Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi replied, "My dear king, your questions are most praiseworthy and I shall try to answer them to the best of my ability. In the beginning of creation, Lord Brahmā made the bodies of human beings pure and sinless and thus they were on a par with those of the demigods. These human beings had all of their desires automatically fulfilled, they were able to fly in the sky, and they were completely freed from the demoniac qualities of lust and envy. They lived for many thousands of years, and they all had the power to die at their own will. Because there was so little suffering, fear was practically unknown and thus everyone lived very peacefully and happily. Gradually, however, in the course of time, human beings became overcome by lust and greed and so they all began to depend upon cheating methods for earning their livelihood. Men lost the ability to traverse the airways and thus they had to walk upon the surface of the earth. Because of their sinful acts, men were forced to go to hell and suffer and in this way they came to reap the results of their actions.

"My dear king, at the time of death, only the gross body of the living entity is destroyed. The actions which one performs are all recorded in the subtle mind. Then, after death, when the subtle body carries one to the next gross body, his fruitive acts follow him just like a shadow and then fructify in the next life. However, by the practice of yoga or devotion unto the Supreme Lord, the results of one's fruitive actions can be destroyed. In this way, one can become peaceful in mind and freed from all diseases, fear and other material miseries. Indeed, those who have become spiritually advanced by dint of mature practice of bhaktiyoga, can always envision the relationship between the individual soul and the Supreme Soul, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in any condition of life, even while encased in the mother's womb!"

"O King, human beings can be divided into four classes. Those who work hard to acquire wealth by any means simply for the purpose of enjoying
sense gratification can feel happiness in this life but not the next. Those who engage in austerity and meditation, who subdue their passions, and even sacrifice their bodily strength and health by executing rigid vows, attain happiness in the next life, but not in this one. Those who live piously, accumulating wealth by virtuous means, who live a life of regulated sense enjoyment in marriage while performing sacrifices and giving in charity experience happiness in this life and in the next as well. Then, there are those who are distinct from the above-mentioned three classes of persons because they are simply lazy and foolish. Such men cannot enjoy any happiness in this life nor in the next. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, because you are very pious and are engaged in performing austerities, you will come to enjoy the supreme happiness in due course of time. Of this there is no doubt."

In response to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's inquiries, Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi spoke at great length, citing numerous historical accounts, such as the time when the Supreme Lord in His matsya-avatāra (Fish incarnation) appeared before Vaivasvata Manu. Manu had been standing on one leg with arms upraised for 10,000 years on the banks of the river Cīrini. Thereafter, when the earth became flooded so that the water reached up to the heavens, Manu anchored his boat to the highest peak of the Himavat, which later on became known as Naubandhana (the harboring). At this time the gigantic fish who had been towing Manu's boat revealed Himself to be Lord Viṣṇu and then empowered the son of Sūrya to re-create the different species of life, including the demigods, humans and asuras.

This account aroused in Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira a desire to hear more about the creation and so he addressed Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi as follows: "O venerable sage, next to Lord Brahmā, you are the oldest person within this universe! During the period when the entire three worlds are dissolved, only you remain awake in order to worship the Supreme Lord. Thus, you alone are able to see Lord Brahmā sleeping upon his lotus-seat and only you are able to witness how he recreates the universe the next morning. Therefore, please describe to me in detail the topics regarding the creation and dissolution during each day of Lord Brahmā."

Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi replied, "Let me first of all offer my most respectful
obeisances unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is known as Janārdana because He is the soul of all souls. He is the primeval Lord, the cause of creation, maintenance and annihilation and thus it is He who is the ultimate shelter of all beings."

"My dear king, as you very well know, there are four yugas (ages). The duration of the Kṛta-yuga is 4,000 celestial years (celestial year equals 360 solar years), and at the beginning and the end, the transitional periods each extend for 400 celestial years. Tretā-yuga has a duration of 3,000 celestial years and the transitional periods each last 300 celestial years. The duration of the Dvāpara-yuga is 2,000 celestial years and its transitional periods are 200 years each. Kali-yuga lasts for 1,000 celestial years and it has transitional periods of 100 years. Thus, the cycle of four yugas has a duration of 12,000 celestial years, and 1,000 such yuga-cycles constitutes the daytime of Lord Brahmā."

"O King, please listen as I describe the symptoms of the upcoming Kali-yuga. As time goes on, the brāhmaṇas will take up the work of śūdras and śūdras will endeavor to acquire wealth like vaiśyas. The brāhmaṇas will give up meditation and the recitation of Vedic hymns while the śūdras take up these practices. In the age of Kali, men become very shortlived and weak in terms of physical strength and energy. They have diminutive bodies and they give up even the last vestige of religious principles by making their speech devoid of all truth. The world becomes ruled over by mleccha kings who act no better than plunderers. Then, toward the end of the age, the human population begins to dwindle while animals become oversized and increase in number until they crowd the earth. In this degraded age, children are born stunted and they are devoid of all good behavior. As a result of sinful life, there is great scarcity and famine, and prostitutes are seen lining the roads. Indeed, women in general become very hostile toward their husbands and devoid of all sense of modesty. Cows yield very little milk, and trees, instead of producing profuse fruits and flowers; become the sitting places for swarms of crows."

"O King, in the age of Kali, many persons become imitation sādhus simply to facilitate economic improvement and the āśramas become filled with wretched persons who advocate a life of dependence upon others, like parasites. Rain no longer falls in season and indeed, the
entire earth begins to take on a sinful aspect. In this degraded age, only sinful persons flourish, and those few men who are virtuous remain impoverished. Sinful behavior will become so rampant that it will be a common sight even in public places. Even those with meager wealth will become very proud in this fallen age due to being intoxicated by their accumulated money."

"As the Kali-yuga advances, girls will give birth to children at the age of seven or eight and boys will become fathers by the age of ten or eleven. By the age of sixteen, people will begin to experience the symptoms of old age, and soon thereafter, they will meet their deaths."

"At the very end of this horrible age there will be a great drought so that men and animals will die by the thousands. At this time, the sun becomes seven times hotter than usual and thus it gradually dries up all of the oceans. In this way, when the earth becomes completely dry, the sāmvartaka fire appears, driven by fierce winds. This fire not only consumes the earth but, after penetrating the surface, it annihilates the lower regions as well. Indeed, as the sāmvartaka fire reaches up to the heavenly planets, the entire three worlds becomes burnt. Then, dark masses of clouds appear in the sky, accompanied by tremendous streaks of lightning. Thereafter, rain pours down incessantly for twelve years, extinguishing the great fire and flooding the entire earth. Strong winds then disperse those clouds and at last, Lord Brahmā drinks up the wind and goes to sleep."

"During the night-time of Lord Brahmā, the whole universe remains one great expanse of water. There are no stars in the sky and all of the living entities, including the demigods, are no longer manifest. Indeed, my dear king, I am the only person remaining at that time and upon seeing the universe entirely devoid of living beings, I become exceedingly depressed. All I can do is wander over the great expanse of water, and since I am unable to find any resting place, I become very tired."

"Finally, I see a great banyan tree within the water, and upon one of the branches is situated a most wonderfully beautiful boy. Having a moon-like face, eyes like lotus petals, the mark of Śrīvatsa on His chest, and radiating a dazzling effulgence, the boy is seated upon a heavenly couch. I am highly astonished to think of how this boy could survive the devastation and in spite of my infallible knowledge which encompasses
past, present and future, I cannot understand His identity. The boy then smilingly says, 'O Rṣi, I can understand that you are exceedingly fatigued. Therefore, you may rest here for as long as you like by entering into My body. O great sage, I am very pleased with you and thus I have designated this as your resting place.'

"As the boy continues speaking, I can feel myself swimming in an ocean of bliss and thus losing my normal sense of identity. The boy then suddenly opens His mouth wide and I begin to helplessly enter into His body by His Supreme Will. Finally, upon coming to the boy's stomach, I see the entire earth situated there with all of its kingdoms, mountains and rivers, and all of the inhabitants are engaged in performing their duties according to the four social orders. Thereafter, as I wander in the boy's stomach, I see the great oceans and the sky bedecked with sun and moon. I see all of the great mountains such as the Himavat, Gandhamādana, Śveta, Meru, Mahendra, and the Vindhyas. I see all kinds of animals, Nāgas, Yakṣas, Daityas, and demigods, and indeed, every kind of moving and nonmoving being."

"Living only on fruit, I wander about the universe for many hundreds of years and yet I never find the limits of the boy's body. Finally, when I become very anxious, I begin to surrender unto that Supreme Person, admitting that He is the predominator and that I am His eternal subordinate. Just at this time, a powerful wind projects me out of the boy's body and thus once again I see Him seated as before upon a branch of a banyan tree, dressed in yellow cloth. The boy then smilingly says, "O Rṣi, you have dwelt within My body for a long time and thus you have certainly become very fatigued. Now, in order to mitigate your material pangs, I shall enlighten you with transcendental knowledge."

"As the boy continues to speak, I can feel myself becoming liberated from the illusion of material existence while at the same time my spiritual vision awakens. In that self-realized condition I can understand that this boy is the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the source of all emanations, and the master of all worlds, material and spiritual. I thus worship His reddish lotus feet by placing them upon my head with great reverence. Then, with folded hands, I say, 'My dear Lord, O origin of all, including myself, please explain about Yourself and Your illusory energy. Why do you remain here as a small
boy? How is it that the entire universe was seen by me to be situated within Your transcendental body?"

"The boy replies, 'O Ṛṣi, I am the eternal Lord, Nārāyaṇa, who lies down upon the water of the Garbhodaka ocean. It is I Who am the creator, maintainer and destroyer of everything and thus, the entire cosmic manifestation constitutes My universal form. I become the ingredients of sacrifice, it is I who award the results of sacrifice and I am the Vedas personified. I am the cause of all causes and the One Who maintains the innumerable living beings while sustaining the cosmic creation. At various times I incarnate within the universe in order to establish religious principles, as well as to protect the demigods and annihilate the great demons who cannot be killed by anyone else. During the night-time of Brahmā, I submerge the universe in the waters of dissolution for 1,000 yuga-cycles. While Brahmā thus sleeps, I keep Myself in this form as a small boy. Because you had become depressed after seeing the universe completely inundated with water, I took you within My body in order to show you how the three worlds remain conserved there. Now, until the time when Brahmā once again awakens, you can stay here and reside peacefully.'

"After saying this, the boy suddenly vanishes from that place and thereafter, in due course of time, I witness the creations of Brahmā. My dear Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, this same Supreme Personality of Godhead has now appeared as your cousin Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, your best course is to always take shelter of Him and depend on Him alone."

After hearing this, the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī bowed down before Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who was so kind as to be personally present before them. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O greatest of ṛṣis, I am very curious to hear more about the forthcoming age of Kali. It is very hard for us to imagine that the human society will become so degraded!"

Mārkaṇḍeya then said, "O King, in the Kali-yuga, people will deceive others under the guise of virtue. Due to a short duration of life, men will not acquire much knowledge and those who gain a false reputation as learned men will conceal the real truth from the innocent public. Becoming dedicated to lust, anger and greed, men will create so much enmity toward each other that ultimately they will threaten to destroy the whole world. Cows will gradually become extinct and the brāhmaṇas

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will begin to speak disrespectfully of the Vedas. Fathers and sons will take away each other's property, and the rulers of nations will plunder the citizens' wealth by every means within their power. Society will gradually come to consist of only one class which is much lower than śūdrās.

"Toward the end of the age, girls will give birth to children at the age of five or six, and by the age of seven or eight, boys will become fathers. Women will become averse to their husbands and the masses of people will give up the worship of God. Instead of worshipping the Supreme Personality of Godhead, people will worship bones and other relics that they find deposited in ancient ruins. Finally, men will become so cruel and wicked that they will slay one another over a slight provocation. At this time, the incarnation of Godhead, Kalki, will appear in a brāhmaṇa family in the village of Śambhala, and He will destroy all of these despicable persons. The age of Kali will thus come to an end and then, surrounded by other brāhmaṇas, Kalki will inaugurate the next Kṛtya-yuga. My dear king, do not maintain any doubts in this regard, for I have witnessed all of these things again and again."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Rṣi, please give me some advice about the proper behavior of a king so that I may always perform the royal duties properly."

Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi then replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should always be merciful toward all living creatures, making sure that you neglect no one. Always be truthful in your speech and conduct yourself in a very humble and exemplary manner. If you can thus renounce all sense of false pride and keep your passions under control, then you shall be able to execute your royal duties very nicely. In addition, I wish to give you one most important piece of advice which can never be over-emphasized. My dear king, never insult a brāhmaṇa by thought, word or deed, because by his anger he can destroy the whole universe."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Rṣi, I am never deterred by lust, greed, pride or fear, and thus I will certainly act as you have directed. Now, please speak about the brāhmaṇas, for even to hear of their prowess is very wonderful."

In response, Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi next narrated the following story: There
was once a king named Parîkṣit in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku (not Parîkṣit, the son of Uttarā and Abhimanyu), who ruled over his kingdom of Ayodhyā. One day, while hunting in the forest, Parîkṣit was led far away by a deer that he was chasing and at last he became very fatigued and overwhelmed by hunger and thirst. Finally, after entering into a dense forest, Parîkṣit came to a lake and so he took the opportunity to bathe along with his horse. Then, after giving his horse some lotus stalks to eat, Parîkṣit sat down on the shore to rest.

Soon thereafter, the king heard some sweet music coming from nearby and since he had not seen anyone nor even any footprints, he became very curious to find out where the sounds were coming from. Then, as Parîkṣit was musing over this, a young girl suddenly came into view nearby. She was engaged in picking flowers and while doing so, she sang with a lovely voice. When the girl came close by, Parîkṣit asked, "My dear, who are you that has come to this secluded spot?"

The girl simply replied, "O Hero, I am just a princess who has not yet accepted a husband."

Parîkṣit was already enamored by the girl's youth and loveliness and so upon hearing this, he requested her to become his wife. The girl then said, "O King, I shall accept you as my husband only on the condition that you never make me look at water."

The king readily gave his consent, and he then married the girl simply by agreement. The newlywed couple continued to enjoy each other in that place and after some time, the king's soldiers arrived there, having followed his trail. Parîkṣit then mounted upon a fine chariot and returned to Ayodhyā along with his wife. However, from that time the king began to live with his queen in privacy so that even those who had formerly been very close to him hardly saw him anymore. The chief minister then inquired from the palace ladies, "Why is it that our king has suddenly become a recluse?"

The ladies replied, "Parîkṣit is enjoying life along with his wife in private because he had promised at the time of their marriage that he would never show her water."

The chief minister knew that a kingdom without a vigilant ruler is in a precarious position. Therefore, after hearing this, he devised a plan. First of all, the chief minister had an artificial forest constructed nearby and
adorned with many fruit trees. Then, within a secluded part of the forest he built a large lake filled with sweet water. Finally, when his work was completed, the chief minister approached the king and said, "O Lord, I have arranged a very nice forest that is without even a drop of water. I suggest that you go and enjoy yourself there along with your wife."

Parikṣit was very pleased to hear this and so he went with his queen and enjoyed himself there for many hours. At last, however, the king became hungry and thirsty and when he saw a grove of Mādhavī creepers, he entered within and came to a large lake filled with clear, cool water. Having completely forgotten about his promise, Parikṣit sat down on the shore and then invited his wife to come and refresh herself by bathing. At this, the girl quickly dove into the lake, and after doing so, she never again came back to the surface.

Parikṣit became almost mad with grief and fear after losing his wife. Although he searched everywhere, he could not find any trace of his beloved darling. Finally, he ordered that the water be drained from the lake. This soon was accomplished, but the only thing which the king found at the bottom was a large frog that immediately disappeared into a hole there. Since Parikṣit was almost mad with grief, he considered the frog to be somehow connected with his wife's death. Becoming highly enraged, he then issued the following proclamation throughout his entire kingdom:

"Let it be known that all frogs should be slaughtered without discrimination! From now on, no one can gain an interview with me unless he brings a tribute of frogs!"

Because of this, a great slaughter ensued, and so all of the frogs fearfully approached their king in order to inform him of the situation. The king of the frogs then disguised himself as a ṛṣī and, coming before Parikṣit, he pleaded, "O King, please give up your anger and stop killing all of these innocent frogs."

However, Parikṣit replied, "My dear sage, you should not try to intervene on the frogs' behalf. The frogs deserve to be killed because, for no reason, they have swallowed up my beloved wife."

Upon hearing this, the king of the frogs became highly aggrieved. He then assumed his real form and explained, "O King, I am Āyu, the ruler of the frogs. It was my daughter, Suṣobhana whom you had married. She
did not die as you think. Because she has a very cruel nature, she has cheated you, just as she has deceived many kings in the past."

And yet, in spite of hearing the truth about Suśobhana, Parīkṣit was so attached that he begged Āyu to give her back to him. Āyu then brought his daughter to the king and commanded her to faithfully serve him as his queen. However, before taking his leave, the king of the frogs angrily cursed her saying, "O wicked woman, because you have cheated so many righteous kings, your sons will become disrespectful towards the brāhmaṇas!"

Even still, Parīkṣit was very grateful to Āyu. Being so enamored by his daughter, the king was exceedingly happy just to have her back. Indeed, after regaining his beloved Suśobhana, Parīkṣit bowed down before the king of the frogs while tears of joy rolled down his cheeks. Thereafter, in due course of time, Parīkṣit begot three sons in the womb of Suśobhana, and their names were Śala, Dala and Vala. When the eldest son, Śala, grew up, Parīkṣit installed him upon the royal throne and then retired to the forest in order to execute a life of austerities.

Once, while hunting in the forest, Śala gave chase to a deer and while doing so, he urged his charioteer to go faster. The charioteer replied, "O King, it -is futile for you to chase this deer, for you shall never be able to catch up with it. However, if you had Vami horses, it would be easy for you to overtake it."

The frustrated Śala then demanded, "O Sūta, tell me more about Vami horses or I shall kill you!"

The charioteer was certainly very afraid of the king, but since he was more afraid of Vāmadeva’s curse, he remained silent. However, when Śala angrily lifted up his sword saying, "Speak quickly or die!" the driver explained, "The Vami horses belong to the sage Vāmadeva, and they can go as quickly as the mind."

Upon hearing this, Śala ordered his charioteer to take him to Vāmadeva’s āśrama. Soon thereafter, Śala came before the great ṛṣi and said, "O best of the brāhmaṇas, while hunting in the forest I found that my horses were not fleet enough, and thus a deer was able to elude me. O ṛṣi, I have become very aggrieved on this account. Now, please lend me your Vami horses so that I can dispel this horrible anguish."

Vāmadeva replied, "O King, you may borrow my Vami horses, but after
killing the deer, you must return them to me without fail."
Śala consented and then quickly yoked the Vami horses to his chariot. Soon thereafter he caught sight of the fleeing deer and after killing it he thought, "Such fine horses should not belong to a brāhmaṇa!"
Having come to this conclusion, Śala ordered his driver to return to Ayodhyā, and thereafter the king kept the Vami horses in the inner apartments of his palace. Meanwhile, Vāmadeva allowed one month to pass, and then he sent a disciple named Ātreya to Ayodhyā in order to retrieve the horses. However, when Ātreya relayed Vāmadeva’s message to Śala, the king haughtily replied, "A brāhmaṇa has no business in keeping such fine horses, for they rightfully belong to the king. Now, return to your master and tell him what I have said."
When Ātreya reported back to Vāmadeva, the āśi became so angry at the young king’s foolishness that he decided to go and personally take back the horses. However, it came to be that even when Vāmadeva stood before Śala and requested him to return his Vami horses, the king refused. At this, Vāmadeva angrily warned, "O King, do not transgress the proper etiquette of behavior toward a brāhmaṇa and thus bring destruction down upon your head!"
However, Śala impudently replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, you can take a couple of bulls, swift asses, or other horses that are as fast as the wind, but these Vami horses now belong to me!"
When he heard this, Vāmadeva flared up with rage and cursed Śala by saying, "You rascal! Four fierce Rākṣasas will soon pursue you, and after killing you they will cut your body into four pieces and carry them upon their upraised spears!"
In response, Śala began to order his guards to kill the āśi and his followers. However, before the king could utter a word, four fierce Rākṣasas suddenly appeared on the scene with spears in their hands. Then, while the foolish Śala was still shouting, "I shall never return your Vami horses!", the Rākṣasas killed him then and there.
Thereafter, when Dala was installed upon the throne, Vāmadeva approached him and said, "O King, do not sinfully refuse a brāhmaṇa’s request. Now, give me back my Vami horses." Unfortunately, Dala considered the āśi to be very impudent, and thus he became angry upon hearing these words. Dala then ordered his charioteer, "Bring me a
poisoned arrow so that I can pierce this foolish ṛṣi! I want to have the pleasure of seeing him writhe in pain as his flesh is eaten by dogs!"

Vāmadeva then urged, "O King, shoot your arrow quickly, for at my command it will kill your ten year old son instead of me!" In spite of this warning, Dala released the poisoned arrow, and even though it was aimed at the ṛṣi, it flew into the inner apartments of the palace and killed the young prince. Dala then called for another arrow to kill Vāmadeva but the ṛṣi informed him, "You shall not even be able to aim this arrow, and so what to speak of release it!"

Thus it happened that Dala could not even properly place the arrow upon his bowstring. Realizing that this was due to the great ṛṣi's prowess, Dala came to his senses and gave up the idea of punishing him.

Vāmadeva then mercifully said, "O King, you will be freed from the sin of attempting to kill a brāhmaṇa if you simply touch your queen with this arrow." Dala did as he was told. Then, afterwards, the queen approached Vāmadeva and requested, "O foremost of ṛṣis, I wish that every day I could give moral instructions to my wretched husband. I also wish that I may always have the chance to serve the brāhmaṇas so that I can attain a heavenly destination after death."

In order to grant these benedictions, Vāmadeva then ordered, "Let the Queen become the ruler of the Ikṣvākus!" Indeed, Vāmadeva was so pleased with the queen that he requested her to ask for another boon.

The queen then said, "O Ṛṣi, may my husband become freed from all sinful reactions and may you think about the welfare of my dead son." Vāmadeva consented and then Dala came and delivered the Vami horses to the ṛṣi while bowing before him with great respect.

Next, at Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's request, Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi related the following incident:

Once, long ago, there was a fight between the demigods and demons, and because the demigods came out victorious, Indra began to rule over the three worlds. At this time, all of the inhabitants of earth were highly virtuous, and so Indra reciprocated by showering down abundant rain. All kinds of crops thus grew in profusion, and so the people felt very happy. Indra was also pleased to see how there was peace and prosperity in human society and that the brāhmaṇas were very devoted to their
practices. One day, Indra came to earth in order to visit the ṛṣi Baka, whose āśrama was situated on the shore of the Eastern ocean. When Indra arrived at the beautiful hermitage, which abounded with exotic birds, wild animals and lush vegetation, Baka immediately stood up and welcomed him with great respect. Baka then offered the king of heaven arghya, water for washing his feet, a nice carpet to sit on, and fruits and roots to eat. Thereafter, as Indra sat at his ease, he took the opportunity to pose the following question:

"O ṛṣi, what miseries are experienced by the demigods and great sages who are deathless in the sense that they live for very extended periods of time and then die at their own will?"

Baka replied, "O king of the celestials, even the so-called immortals suffer by having to associate with sinful or obnoxious people. They also suffer upon the death of a loved one, when they lose their wealth, or become insulted, or meet with disgrace. Besides this, deathless persons have to suffer innumerable miseries which are inflicted upon them by wicked and envious persons."

Indra then asked, "What are the joys which are experienced by persons who are immortal?"

Baka replied, "O Indra, anyone who does not have to associate with wicked persons, and who can maintain himself simply, without much endeavor, can experience true happiness. One who does not have to depend upon others for his livelihood is happy. If one is self-sufficient, cooks for himself, and then eats after feeding a guest or a brāhmaṇa, he experiences great happiness and becomes freed from all sinful reactions."

After conversing with the ṛṣi Baka on various topics, Indra departed for his heavenly abode, feeling very satisfied on account of the knowledge he had acquired.

There was a king of the Kuru dynasty named Suhotra who once went to visit some great ṛsis. Then, while returning home, he happened to meet King Śibi, the son of Uśinara, coming down the road from the opposite direction. The road was too narrow for both chariots to pass, and since they were equals in terms of age and other qualifications, neither Śibi nor Suhotra would move aside in order to yield the right of way. Nārada Muni then appeared on the scene and inquired, "O Kings, why are you both blocking the way, refusing to move aside for the other?"
Suhotra and Śibi replied, "O Devarṣi, it is proper etiquette that one should give the right of way to superiors. However, because we appear to be equal to one another in all respects, neither of us are willing to move aside."
Nārada Muni then said, "O Kings, I shall recite some verses from sāstra to you and also give my opinion on the matter. 'Wicked persons behave harshly even toward superiors, whereas those who are elevated conduct themselves very mildly, even when dealing with those who are sinful. Since a noble person behaves virtuously even toward those who are degraded, why should he not do so in relation to those who are good? An exalted person regards the qualities of another person and the services rendered by him to be 100 times greater than they actually are. In this way, he only sees the good in others.'
"The way to conquer over a mean-minded person is to give him charity. A liar is won over by truth, a sinful person is conquered by forgiveness, and a dishonest person's heart is softened by honesty.'
"My dear Suhotra, aside from all this, you should know that Mahārāja Śibi's greatness exceeds yours. Now, my dear kings, since both of you are very large-hearted, one of you should voluntarily move aside, giving up all sense of false pride."
Nārada then became silent, and Suhotra moved his chariot to the side, giving Śibi the right of way, and while doing so, he praised him highly. After this, both kings continued on their journey and Nārada Muni also departed to wander at will.
Once, Yayāti, the son of Nāhuṣa, was seated upon his royal throne when a brāhmaṇa came before him. After being welcomed and worshipped by the king, the brāhmaṇa said, "O pious ruler, I want to ask from you some wealth on behalf of my guru. However, I am only willing to accept your gift on the condition that you describe to me the feelings which you experience at that time of giving it away. It is commonly found that when one is requested to give something in charity, he feels contempt for the person who asks for it.'
Mahārāja Yayāti replied, "I feel great happiness when I give charity to the brāhmaṇas. I never lament at having lost the thing which I have given away, nor do I feel any hatred for the person to whom I gave it. Indeed, I feel highly aggrieved when I find myself unable to fulfill a
"brāhmaṇa's request. Thus, I refuse to even listen to an appeal for charity that I know I cannot give."

After saying this, Mahārāja Yayāti happily gave the brāhmaṇa 100 cows is charity. Being very satisfied by the king's nectarean words, the brāhmaṇa respectfully accepted the gift and then departed for the āśrama of his spiritual master.

There was once a king named Aśṭaka, who was a descendent in the dynasty of Viśvāmitra. When Aśṭaka commenced the performance of a great aśvamedha-yajña, numerous kings came to his sacrificial arena, including his three brothers: Pratardana, Vasumanaś and Śibi, the son of Uśīnara. Then, some time after the completion of the sacrifice, the four brothers happened to be riding upon a single chariot when they were met by the great sage, Nārada Muni. After offering the ṛṣi all due respects, the four brothers invited him to get up onto their chariot so that they could take advantage of the good opportunity by inquiring from him. Nārada Muni consented, and after he was comfortably seated, one of the brothers asked, "O Devarṣi, all four of us are certainly very pious rulers. Now, please tell us, who among us will be the first to fall down after attaining the heavenly destinations which await us after death?"

Nārada replied, "Aśṭaka will be the first to fall down from heaven." Of course, the brothers were very curious to learn the reason for this, and so Nārada Muni explained, "O Kings, some time back I spent a few days as a guest in Aśṭaka's palace. One day, as I drove out of the city, accompanying the king on his chariot, I noticed many cows grazing by the side of the road. When I inquired about them, Aśṭaka proudly explained to me how he had given those cows in charity. It is because he had praised himself for his pious act in this way that Aśṭaka will be the first one to fall down from heaven."

Then, one of the other brothers inquired, "O Nārada, among the three of us remaining, who will be the next to fall from heaven?"

Nārada Muni replied, "Pratardana will be the second to fall down."

When questioned about this, Nārada explained, "O Kings, once, I spent some time as a guest in Pratardana's palace. One day, as I was accompanying the king on his chariot, a brāhmaṇa approached him and asked for a horse in charity. In reply, "Pratardana informed the
brāhmaṇa that he would give him the horse as soon as he returned to his palace. The brāhmaṇa urgently requested Pratardana not to wait, however, and so the king unharnessed one of the four horses which were pulling his chariot and then gave it to him. "Thereafter, we proceeded on, and after a short while, another brāhmaṇa approached Pratardana with the same request. Again the king begged the brāhmaṇa to wait, but as before, he ended up unyoking one of the remaining horses since the brāhmaṇa urgently demanded it. Then, after proceeding a little further, a third brāhmaṇa approached Pratardana and asked him to give a horse in charity. As before, the king requested the brāhmaṇa to wait, but then ended up giving one of the two remaining horses. We started off once more, but then a fourth brāhmaṇa came before us, desiring to obtain a horse. The king assured the brāhmaṇa that he would give him his one remaining horse as soon as he returned home. However, the brāhmaṇa insisted that he needed the horse without delay and so Pratardana unhesitatingly unyoked his last steed. Mahārāja Pratardana then yoked himself to the chariot but as he began to pull it he sarcastically remarked, 'Well, I guess I have nothing left to give to the brāhmaṇaś!' It is because of this comment that Pratardana will be the second to fall from heaven."

After hearing this, one of the two remaining brothers inquired, "O Nārada, between us, who will be the next to fall from heaven?" Nārada replied, "Vasumanaś will be the third one to fall down." When he was requested to explain the reason for this, Nārada said, "O Kings, once I came to the palace of Vasumanaś. At this time he was performing a particular religious rite called svasti-vācana because of his desire to receive a celestial chariot made of flowers. And, it so happened that after the priests had finished the ritual, such a chariot appeared before the delighted king. I then began to praise this celestial flower airship and when Vasumanaś heard this he said, 'O Devarśi, this chariot actually belongs to you, and I am simply its caretaker.' "Then, some time later, when I was in need of such a chariot, I remembered these words and so approached Vasumanaś. After praising his chariot, I asked the king to let me use it, and so he happily complied. Then, some time later on, I once again approached Vasumanaś as he was engaged in showing the chariot to some brāhmaṇaś. I praised the chariot
as before, but this time, when Vasumanaś saw me, he was obviously annoyed. The king simply said, 'O Närada, you have praised my chariot sufficiently,' and did not even offer it for my use. It is for this reason that Vasumanaś will be the next one to fall down from heaven."

Then, one of the four brothers inquired, "O Närada, between yourself and Śibi, who will be the first to fall from heaven?" Närada Muni replied, "I will fall down before Śibi."

When requested to explain this, Närada said, "O Kings, I am not as exalted as Mahärāja Śibi! One day, a brāhmaṇa came to him in order to beg for some food. When Śibi inquired as to what sort of food he desired, the brāhmaṇa replied, 'O King, please kill your son, Bṛhadgarbha, and then cook him for me to eat.'

"Śibi unhesitatingly decided to fulfill the brāhmaṇa's request and so, after killing his son and cooking the flesh, he brought the pot of food on his head. Upon his return, however, Śibi found that the brāhmaṇa was gone, and so he began to search for him everywhere. At last, Śibi came out of the city and at that time he was approached by someone who informed him, 'O King, the brāhmaṇa whom you are looking for is now angrily setting fire to your palace, arsenal and stables!'

"Upon hearing this, Śibi did not feel even the slightest agitation, but simply went to the brāhmaṇa and said, 'My dear sir, your food is now ready.' "The brāhmaṇa did not reply, however, but simply hung his head down. Then, when Śibi once again invited him to eat, the brāhmaṇa replied, 'My dear king, I want you to eat the food instead of me.'

"Śibi cheerfully agreed to do so and then took the pot down from his head. Then, when Śibi prepared to begin eating his own son's cooked flesh, the brāhmaṇa suddenly caught him by the hand and declared, 'O King, you have truly conquered over anger! I can also understand that there is nothing that you are unwilling to give to the brāhmaṇas!'

"As the brāhmaṇa was thus glorifying him, Mahārāja Śibi suddenly saw his son standing before him. Indeed, Bṛhadgarbha’s body was now transformed so that it was just like that of a demigod, decorated with fine ornaments and emitting a pleasant fragrance. The brāhmaṇa then revealed his identity by saying, 'O King, I am Vidhātṛī. I came here just to test your exalted character.'

"After saying this, Vidhātṛī disappeared from the king's vision. Śibi's
ministers then came there and inquired, 'O King, why were you willing to endure so much suffering just to please the brāhmaṇas?' Śibi replied, 'I never do anything for achieving fame, or for gaining wealth, or for any such motive. Whatever I did was simply because my heart is naturally inclined toward the virtuous path.'

The Pāṇḍavas then inquired, "O venerable ṛṣi, is there anyone who has a longer duration of life than you?"
Mārkaṇḍeya ṛṣi replied, "There once lived a great saintly king named Indradyumna. He had attained to a life in heaven but then, as his pious credits continued to wane, he was forced to fall back down to earth. Once, when Indradyumna happened to meet me, he inquired, 'O Sage, do you know who I am?'
"I replied, 'O King, ṛṣis like myself are always engaged in performing austerities. Thus, we are not very much aware of such worldly matters.'
"Indradyumna then asked, 'Is there anyone who has been living longer than you, and thus might have previously heard of me?'
"I replied, 'In the Himavat there is an owl named Pravarakarṇa who is older than me. Thus, it may be that he has heard of you.'
"Upon hearing this, Indradyumna transformed himself into a horse and quickly took me to where the owl was staying. The king then asked, 'My dear owl, did you ever hear of King Indradyumna?'
"The owl thought deeply for a moment and then replied, 'I am sorry, but I have never heard of the king.'
"Indradyumna then inquired, 'Do you know of anyone who is older than yourself?'
"The owl replied, 'At the Indradyumna lake there lives a crane named Nadijaṅgha who is older than me.'
"Indradyumna then took the owl and myself to that lake. Upon meeting the crane, he asked, 'Did you ever hear of a king named Indradyumna who lived long ago?'
"The crane also replied, 'no', and so Indradyumna next inquired, 'Is there anyone who is older than yourself?'
"The crane replied, 'There is a tortoise named Akūpārā who lives in this lake, and he is much older than me.'
"After saying this, the crane began to call for the tortoise. Then, when
the tortoise appeared there on the shore of the lake, the crane inquired, "Did you ever hear of a king named Indradyumna?"

"The tortoise reflected for a moment and while doing so his eyes filled up with tears while his body began to tremble due to intense emotion. Then, with folded hands, the tortoise said, 'Long ago, King Indradyumna had performed great sacrifices here. Indeed, this lake was created by the hoof prints of the cows which he had given away in charity to the brāhmaṇas, and I have been living here ever since that time.'

"As the tortoise was speaking, a celestial chariot suddenly descended from the sky, and a voice from within declared, 'My dear Indradyumna, you can now come and take your rightful place in heaven. A person can remain in heaven for as long as his virtues are glorified, just as one must suffer in hell for as long as he is spoken of in infamy.'

"Indradyumna then requested, 'Kindly allow the chariot to wait awhile until I have escorted back home these elderly persons whom I have brought here.'

"Thus; after returning Pravarakarṇa and myself to our respective residences, Indradyumna ascended that celestial chariot and once again rose up to heaven."

After hearing this story, the Pāṇḍavas praised Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi for his having helped Indradyumna regain his heavenly abode. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "O great sage, please describe to me how charity should be given so that the result will be meritorious."

Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi replied, "O King, there are four classes of persons whose lives are lived in vain: he who has no son, he who lives by eating food which is provided by another, he who does not practice virtue, and he who cooks for himself but does not offer the food to God and the prasādam to guests. There are also sixteen ways of giving in charity that are futile. Some of these are: to give wealth that is unlawfully earned; to give to a person who has fallen down from his vows; to give to a fallen brāhmaṇa, or to a thief, a bogus guru, a liar, a sinful person, or one who is ungrateful; to give to one who recites the Vedas for money; to give to a person who is employed in menial service, to women, and to one who has married a girl after she had attained puberty.

"On the other hand, if one gives in charity to the brāhmaṇas with a
mentality devoid of fear or anger, then such gifts lead one to heaven. When brähmanas are invited for prasāda after the performance of the śraddhā ceremony, those should be excluded who are too dark or too fair in complexion, who have diseased nails, who are cursed or fallen, who are lepers, who have an illegitimate birth, who are deceitful, and who support themselves by having become professional beggars. The qualified recipient of charity is able to deliver himself as well as the giver of gifts. It is more meritorious to receive guests with proper respect, especially brähmanas, than it is to offer oblations into the sacred fire. One who worships the brähmanas and gives them wealth in charity, never has to suffer in the abode of Yamarāja."

At this point, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became curious to hear about the planet of Yamarāja, and so Mārkandeya Ṛṣi spoke as follows: "O King, the abode of Yamarāja is 86,000 yojanas from earth, and the path leading there is just like a desert, for it is devoid of water or the shade of trees. All human beings who have acted sinfully are forced by the Yamadūtas to traverse this path. However, those who have performed some pious acts are given good facilities. Those who have presented horses or other conveyances to the brähmanas are allowed to proceed along the path in those conveyances. Those who had given umbrellas to the brähmanas are provided with umbrellas so that they can shield themselves from the hot sun. Those who had given food proceed without hunger, and those who gave away drinks proceed without thirst. Those who gave nice clothes can wear them while going to the abode of Yamarāja, and those who never gave clothing must proceed naked. Those who had given gold proceed very happily, bedecked with ornaments, and those who had given land go with all of their desires fulfilled. Those who had given grains also proceed without anything lacking, and those who had given houses proceed to the abode of Yamarāja by riding upon a fine chariot. Those who had given cows also proceed very happily, freed from all sinful reactions. Those who had fasted for six days are allowed to proceed upon a chariot which is drawn by peacocks, and those who had fasted for a month proceed upon chariots pulled by swans. "In the abode of Yamarāja, there is a river named Puṣpodaka, and its water is just like nectar. Those who always gave people water upon
request are able to drink from that nectareous river. Sinful and miserly persons, however, have to drink from a river of puss. Therefore, my dear king, you should always adore the brāhmaṇas and give them nice gifts in charity."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then inquired, "O great sage, by what practice can a brāhmaṇa always keep himself in a pure condition?"

Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi replied, "By chanting the Gāyatrī mantra three times daily: morning, noon and evening, one becomes freed from all sinful reactions. For such a person, even inauspicious stars and planets become auspicious, and Rākṣasas cannot do him any harm. However, without purity of heart, the chanting of the Gāyatrī mantra, the carrying of the tridanda, the shaving of the head, and the practice of other vows and austerities are all useless. One who is sinless at heart, as well as in words and actions, is the real ascetic and not simply he who performs austerities. Austerity does not simply mean absence from worldly pleasures. One who is pure-hearted and kind to all living entities is actually a great sage, even though he may be situated in household life. One who performs austerities with an impure heart only receives bodily pains as a result, for his endeavors can never free him from sinful reactions. It is purity of heart and godliness that cause austerities to become effective. The acts, in and of themselves, such as taking sannyāsa, fasting, etc., cannot give any good result.

"The real fruit of Vedic study and the execution of all kinds of austerities is to gain the spiritual vision whereby one can see that all living entities are spiritual beings who are distinct from their material bodies. After all, anyone can understand that the material body, which is devoid of life, is no better than a block of wood. When one understands his eternal relationship with the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, then that is a sure sign of liberation. The Vedas are the embodiment of the Supreme Lord. Thus, there is no other purpose in the Vedas than the understanding of one's eternally subordinate relationship with the Supreme Lord. O King, it is the attainment of this transcendental knowledge which is the real fruit of all kinds of religious performances and austerities."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra was becoming highly enlivened while listening to
the discourse of Märkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi. Next, the king inquired, "O great sage, why is it that Kuvalayāśva of the Ikṣvāku dynasty changed his name to Dhundhumāra?"
Märkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi then narrated this history as follows: There was once a great ṛṣi name Utaṅka who engaged in the worship of Lord Viṣṇu while executing severe austerities. After a long time, the Lord appeared before Utaṅka and so, with great delight, the ṛṣi offered Him suitable prayers that nicely described His transcendental glories. Lord Viṣṇu became very pleased with His devotee and so, after acknowledging the ṛṣi’s words, He offered to give him a benediction. Utaṅka was a truly pure devotee and not a materialistic neophyte. Thus, he requested, "My dear Lord, kindly let my heart always be inclined toward virtue. May I forever have the opportunity to engage in Your devotional service, for this is the only all-auspicious path."
Lord Viṣṇu granted these wishes and then said, "My dear Utaṅka, in the future, you shall help in the accomplishment of a difficult task which will be of benefit for the entire universe. There is a great demon named Dhundhu who is performing severe austerities in the hopes of destroying the three worlds. At your command, this demon will be killed by a king named Kuvalayāśva, the son of Brhadāśva in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku. Kuvalayāśva will be empowered by Me, and thus he shall easily be able to accomplish your purpose."
After saying this, Lord Viṣṇu vanished from Utaṅka's sight. Later on, Kuvalayāśva was installed upon the royal throne by his father Brhadāśva, when the latter desired to retire to the forest in order to live a life of executing austerities. At this time, Utaṅka approached Brhadāśva and tried to dissuade him from renouncing his royal duties by speaking as follows:
"O King, the merit which a kṣatriya receives by protecting the citizens far exceeds the merit which can be earned in the forest. Besides, to simply reside in the forest will not free one from all disturbances. Indeed, even I am unable to perform my meditation and vows peacefully, for near to my āśrama lives the Dānava king named Dhundhu. This son of Madhu and Kaitabha is staying beneath the sand in a great desert, and he is performing severe austerities for the purpose of gaining control over the three worlds. This great demon has already received
benedictions from Lord Brahmā, and thus he is unslayable by the
demigods, Gandharvas or Rākṣasas.
"My dear king, I beg you to please retire to the forest only after having
killed Dhundhu. He lays down underneath the sand and then, after one
year has passed, he wakes up and begins to breathe. At this time, the
whole earth trembles and his breath raises clouds of sand which block
the sun's rays. Indeed, he causes fire, sparks and smoke to cover all
directions so that for seven days I can find no peace in my āśrama. My
dear Bṛhadaśva, you can be assured of your victory. Long ago, Lord
Viṣṇu personally told me that He would empower the one who would be
ordered to kill this great demon."
Bṛhadaśva replied, "O Utaṅka, your visit here must not go in vain.
Therefore, I shall Order my powerful son Kuvalayāśva to kill the demon.
I have already renounced the use of weapons and so, with your
permission, I will leave for the forest without further delay."
Utaṅka agreed to this proposal, and so Bṛhadaśva commanded his son to
go and kill Dhundhu, and after doing so, he departed for the forest. At
the end of Brahmā's life, when there was a total dissolution, all became
immersed in water. Thereafter, Lord Viṣṇu expanded Himself and then
lay down on Śeṣa-nāga in order to rest in yoga-nidrā. Finally, after a
long, long time had passed, a lotus flower of great beauty and effulgence
sprang from His lotus navel, and upon that lotus flower the four-faced
Brahmā was born. Soon thereafter, two Dānavas named Madhu and
Kaiṭabha happened to come to where Lord Viṣṇu was lying upon His
great serpent-bed within the Garbhodaka ocean. When the two demons
began harassing Lord Brahmā, his body shook with fear and as a result,
the lotus-stem also trembled, causing Lord Viṣṇu's sleep to become
disturbed.
Upon awakening, the Lord welcomed Madhu and Kaiṭabha and then
offered to give them benedictions. These demons were so puffed-up
however, that they simply laughed and declared, "O Viṣṇu, it is You who
should ask benedictions from us!"
Lord Viṣṇu then calmly said, "O best of the Dānavas, there is one
benediction which I would like to receive from you. Since there is no
one else as powerful as you in the entire universe, I wish to kill you for
the benefit of the three worlds."
Madhu and Kaitabha replied, "We shall grant Your desire, for we have never lied or broken a promise, not even in jest. Indeed, we are unequaled in terms of virtue, strength, beauty, self-control and good behavior. Our only request is that You kill us in an uncovered place, and that in the future You allow us to become your sons."

Lord Vishnu agreed and thereafter, He began to think about which uncovered place He should utilize. After some time, the Lord considered, "My thighs are an uncovered place," and so He took Madhu and Kaitabha upon His lap and then cut off their heads with His Sudarshana-cakra.

Dhundhu was the son of Madhu and Kaitabha. After their deaths, he began to perform austerities while standing upon one leg until his body became reduced to just a mass of veins and arteries. Lord Brahma became very pleased with Dhundhu and so went and requested the demon to accept a benediction. Thus, it came to be that Dhundhu received the boon that he could never be killed by any demigod, demon, Naga, Gandharva or Rakshasa. Finally, after placing the feet of Lord Brahma upon his head, Dhundhu departed and all the while he remembered the death of his father at the hands of Lord Vishnu.

Thereafter, the enraged demon began to take revenge by harassing the demigods and then at last, with a desire to destroy the entire universe, he commenced the execution of severe austerities at the desert called Ujjalaka.

King Kuvalayaśva set out with a large army, and he was also accompanied by his 21,000 powerful sons. While proceeding along the way, Utabha thought of Lord Vishnu, and in response, the Lord empowered Kuvalayaśva with a portion of His unlimited potency in order to enable him to kill the demon. Then, a voice from the sky suddenly announced, "Kuvalayaśva will kill the Dānava Dhundhu on this very day!" At that moment, flowers rained down from the sky and drums could be heard beating in the heavens. A gentle breeze blew, carrying a cool and refreshing mist, and thus the dust on the road became moistened.

When Kuvalayaśva approached the Ujjalaka desert, the demigods and rṣis appeared overhead in the sky for they were very curious to witness the impending battle. First of all, Kuvalayaśva ordered his army to
surround the desert, and after doing so he began to excavate the sands. Finally, after seven days of digging, Dhundhu was discovered, buried beneath the sand, and Kuvalayāśva's sons at once began to assault the huge demon with their weapons. As a result, Dhundhu awoke with a start, and then he angrily swallowed up all of the weapons that were being showered upon him. Fierce flames then emanated from Dhundhu's mouth so that in a moment all of Kuvalayāśva's sons were burnt to ashes, just as the sons of Sagara had formerly been burnt in front of Lord Kapila.

At this, the enraged Kuvalayāśva rushed at Dhundhu, who appeared just like a second Kumbhakarna. By dint of the power of Lord Viṣṇu, a stream of water then came out from the king's body and soon extinguished the flames that were issuing forth from the demon's mouth. Kuvalayāśva then employed the brahmāstra weapon, and as a result, Dhundhu was slain. For this reason, Kuvalayāśva became known as Dhundhumāra.

The demigods and rṣis who had come to witness the fight were exceedingly pleased with the king, and so they all came and offered him their benedictions. After bowing down before the demigods with great pleasure, Kuvalayāśva requested, "O Lords, kindly grant that I will always remain invincible while engaged in battle, and that I will always be in a position to give charity to the superior brāhmaṇas. May I never have any ill-feelings toward any living creature, and may my mind forever be inclined toward virtue. May I always have the friendship of Lord Viṣṇu, and, after giving up this present body, may I go to reside with Him in His eternal realm, Vaikuṇṭha."

The demigods and rṣis were very pleased to grant all of these boons to the best of their ability, and after praising Kuvalayāśva very highly, they departed. Three sons of Kuvalayāśva had survived the wrath of Dhundhu in order to perpetuate the Ikṣvāku line: Drđhāśva, Kapilāśva and Bhadrāśva.

Next, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira requested, "O Rṣi, I would like to hear about the glories of chaste women who are always faithful to their husbands. Such exalted women are supposed to be treated as veritable deities, and they are to be given the same respect which is offered to the sun, moon,
wind, earth, fire, the father and mother, and the preceptor. I greatly admire such a chaste woman because she not only must undergo great austerities while controlling her senses in order to serve her husband like a god, but she must also accept so much trouble for the purpose of bearing and raising children."

Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi then said, "O King, it is a fact that the life of a chaste woman is more difficult than that of a man. For a woman, the performance of sacrifices and austerities is not as effective as the sincere service which she renders to her husband. Indeed, it is that faithfulness alone that can award her a heavenly destination. Now, to illustrate all of these points, I shall narrate a very interesting story." There was once a brāhmaṇa named Kauśika who was very devoted to the study of the Vedas. One day, as he was reciting the Vedas while seated beneath a tree, a female crane passed stool upon his head. At this, the Ṛṣi became very angry, and with a desire to retaliate, he looked up at the crane with eyes that were red with rage. Immediately, the crane fell down dead upon the ground, and upon seeing the result of his anger, Kauśika became very sorry. With great remorse, he lamented again and again for having acted so maliciously. Some time thereafter, Kauśika went to a nearby village in order to beg for some alms. While going door to door he came to a certain house and as usual, he asked the housewife to give him something in charity. The lady of the house replied, "O brāhmaṇa, just wait a bit," and after saying this she went inside. Then, while the woman was cleaning the bowl which was used for giving alms, her husband suddenly arrived home, very tired and hungry. At this, the chaste wife forgot all about the brāhmaṇa and quickly went to tend to all of her husband's needs. She gave her lord a comfortable seat and water for washing his feet. She then placed before him cool drinks and a sumptuous feast, and after thus fulfilling all of her husband's needs, she stood respectfully by his side, just to await his orders. This chaste woman always ate her husband's remnants. She performed all of her household duties very expertly, and she treated her husband and his relatives with very great respect. Then, the woman suddenly remembered that she had asked the brāhmaṇa Kauśika to wait. Feeling ashamed at her negligence, she quickly took some alms and then came before him. Kauśika was very angry by this time, and upon seeing the woman finally arrive, he fumed,
"I am very surprised that you would dare to make me wait like this!"
The woman tried to pacify Kauśika by explaining, "O brāhmaṇa, my husband is my supreme god, and therefore I always serve him first."
Kauśika then challenged, "O foolish woman, do you really think that your husband is more worthy of respect than brāhmaṇas, before whom even Indra bows down his head? Don't you know that a brāhmaṇa's wrath can destroy the entire earth?"
At this, the woman exclaimed, "O Åñi, I am no she-crane! Therefore, you had better give up your anger, for it will never be able to harm me! I certainly have great respect for brāhmaṇas, and I know that it is because of their wrath that the ocean has become salty and thus undrinkable. I also know how you killed one she-crane with your angry glance. However, you should know that one is really a brāhmaṇa when he has conquered over his lust and anger, and is therefore forgiving. Only then, do the demigods regard him as a true brāhmaṇa. Therefore, you should forgive my small fault.
"I know that you have studied the Vedas very minutely and yet, in spite of this, I can see that you do not actually understand the true meaning of virtue. You should go to the city of Mithilā and learn the essence of morality from a certain butcher who lives there. This seller of meat is perfectly truthful, a master of the senses, he is very devoted to his parents, and he is capable of teaching the real meaning of righteousness. Now, please forgive me if my words have offended you. After all, virtuous persons never think of punishing women."
After hearing the woman's remarkable speech, the brāhmaṇa humbly said, "Your words of wisdom have given me great pleasure, and my anger has now subsided. I honestly feel that your chastisement is meant for my benefit. Now, I will go to Mithilā as you have suggested so that I can learn the true meaning of virtue."
Kauśika then left that woman's house and while going along the road he bitterly reproached himself for his uncontrolled anger, born of false pride. Even after returning home, Kauśika could not forget the woman's wonderful speech and because he felt very ashamed of his crude behavior, he decided to set out at once for Mithilā in order to learn the truth about morality. Because the woman had mysteriously known that he had killed a crane, Kauśika had faith in her words, and thus he set off
on the long and arduous journey. Finally, after traversing many forests while passing through numerous kingdoms, Kauśika arrived at a splendid capital which was ruled over by King Janaka. After entering the opulently decorated city, Kauśika saw that all of the citizens were very healthy and happy, and that they were always engaged in either arranging for or celebrating some festival or other. Kauśika made inquiries from the local brāhmaṇas, and thus he was directed to a butcher's house. There, he saw the man whom the woman had instructed him to meet, sitting in the front yard, engaged in selling the meat of deer and buffalo. Because of the crowd of people, Kauśika stood at some distance. However, understanding Kauśika's arrival, the butcher suddenly got up from his seat and went to the secluded spot where he was standing. The butcher then welcomed Kauśika and said, "O brāhmaṇa, I know about the words of the chaste woman and why you have therefore come here."
Upon hearing this, Kauśika was struck with wonder, for this was the second miracle which he had experienced in this connection. Then, as he continued to marvel at this, Kauśika was invited to sit down in front of the butcher's home, and he was offered water for washing his feet. Thereafter, when he was seated at ease, Kauśika remarked to his host, "O Meat-seller, the cruel profession which you are engaged in does not seem to correspond to your gentle and cultured nature!"
The butcher replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, this has been my family occupation for many generations, and thus I am simply performing the duty which has been ordained for me by the Supreme Lord. Because this is my destiny, I know that there is nothing for me to lament about. In spite of my lowly profession, I always serve my superiors, I ever speak the truth, I only eat what is left over after offering all of my food to God, my dependents, and guests, and I am never envious of others. I sell the meat of pigs and buffalo but I never kill the animals myself, nor do I eat meat. Indeed, I fast during the entire day and then take my meal at night. As far as sexual enjoyment is concerned, I only approach my wife at the proper time for her conception. O brāhmaṇa, even if one is engaged in an abominable profession, he can still develop all good qualities."

The butcher knew that Kauśika had come to his house in order to take
instruction on the subject of morality, and so he discoursed at length on such topics. In the course of his speeches, the butcher spoke as follows: "O brähmana, due to the pious rule of King Janaka, all of the subjects are properly engaged in their occupational duties, and no sinful act goes unpunished. When the king falls down from the execution of his royal duties according to religious principles, then virtue declines within the kingdom and sin flourishes. Indeed, it is due to such sinfulness on the part of the king that dwarves, hunchbacks, as well as those who are deaf, dumb and impotent, take birth within his realm. "My dear brähmana, a person who acts sinfully is actually killing his own self. On the other hand, even if one is devoid of bodily beauty, he can display a sublime inner beauty by never speaking ill of others and avoiding praise of himself. Sinful men sometimes clothe themselves with an external show of virtue, but by doing so they become just like a dark well covered by grass. Outwardly, such persons seem to possess self-control and godliness, and indeed, they often preach the path of virtue. However, if one gets a chance to witness such persons' conduct, it is seen to be just the opposite. One whose heart is naturally inclined towards truthfulness, charity and non-violence is actually a virtuous person. "O brähmana, my present low position is certainly the result of my past bad karma. And yet, because I know that the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate controller of everyone's destinies, I consider Him to be the real doer and myself to be simply His servant The animals which I sell are always offered first to various demigods and goddesses, and then they are fed to guests. In this way, they also receive some pious credit. King Rantideva used to sacrifice 2,000 animals daily and by distributing this food to all who were hungry, he attained great fame. "O brähmana, it is always better to stick to one's own occupation, even though faulty, than to accept the duties which have been ordained for another. One must accept the results of his previous acts while at the same time endeavoring to atone for his sins and not commit any more which will result in future suffering. Factually, however, every occupation involves some kind of violence and sinful activity. Even in agriculture so many tiny living beings are killed when one plows the fields. Indeed, the entire material universe is maintained on the principle that one living being subsists on another. There are living
entities everywhere, and so even by walking one is unconsciously committing so much violence. Because of this, there is no such thing as genuine non-violence and thus the ways of understanding morality are very subtle. For example, truthfulness is certainly one of the highest virtues and yet, it may be forsaken for the purpose of saving life or at the time of marriage. Therefore, one must judge a thing by its results. That which leads to the greatest good is actually moral.

"Aside from this, it is also a fact that one is forced to accept so many conditions as a result of his past karma. Thus, a person must learn to tolerate all these conditions while trying to lead a virtuous life. Someone may argue that we are free to do as you like. However, it can be counter-argued that if we are actually independent, then no one would ever grow old or die. In the great race of life where everyone tries to out distance all others, no one would fail to obtain the objects of his desires. However, it is practically seen that people are almost always baffled in the endeavor to fulfill their aspirations. Therefore, what is the question of independence? Some people think that astrological conditions are the predominating determining factor in one's life. However, it is practically seen that even though many persons may be born under the influence of the same stars and planets, there is a great diversity of results that they achieve throughout their lives. Therefore, we must conclude that it is one's acts which fructify in order to become the conditions of our present life."

Kauśika wanted to hear more about how karma takes one through the cycle of repeated birth and death and so the butcher spoke as follows: "My dear brāhmaṇa, pious acts carry us to the heavenly planets where we can enjoy the life of a demigod. Sinful and sensual life leads downward to animal existence or hellish torments. A mixture of pious and sinful life awards one a human birth. However, one can free himself from the effects of past karma by performing austerities and living a life of piety. Indeed, when one renounces temporary material enjoyment altogether, he can attain salvation from the vicious cycle of repeated birth and death. Thus, the ultimate goal of virtue and study of the Vedas is to factually detach oneself from this materialistic life of personal and extended sense gratification. This is not the only goal of life for those who have been born in brāhmaṇa families. Even if one is born in a śūdra
family but somehow cultivates the mode of goodness and thus develops
virtuous qualities, he must be accepted as a genuine brāhmaṇa."
After hearing all this, Kauśika said, "My dear sir, I have become very
satisfied by meeting you and your words have given me great happiness."
The butcher then requested, "My dear brāhmaṇa, please enter my house
now so that you can see for yourself my sole claim to virtue; my old
mother and father."
Kauśika thus entered the butcher's house and there he beheld a beautiful
mansion that was gorgeously decorated and furnished. He saw the
butcher's mother and father, dressed in white robes and sitting at ease
after having finished their meal. The butcher fell to the ground in order
to offer obeisances unto his parents and then he touched his head to
their feet. Both mother and father then picked up their beloved son and
praised him for regarding them as his chief deity. The butcher then
introduced Kauśika to his parents and in turn the brāhmaṇa inquired
about their welfare. The butcher then said, "O Kauśika, I worship my
mother and father just as one is supposed to worship the principal
demigods. My whole life is dedicated to their service and thus I always do
exactly that which is the most agreeable to them and I wash their feet
with my own hands."
Kauśika was very astonished to see the butcher's piety and so he praised
him highly as being the perfectly virtuous person. The butcher then said,
"My dear brāhmaṇa, you have wronged your mother and father by
leaving home without their permission for the purpose of studying the
Vedas. By now they have become old and invalid and they are blind as
well, and in your absence they have become very aggrieved. Therefore,
you should return home and console them. Indeed, because of this single
fault, all of your religious practices have been rendered useless."
Kauśika could understand that there must be some mystery as to how
such a great soul could have been born into a low family, and with this
in mind he spoke as follows:
"My dear butcher, it has been my great fortune to have met you and thus
learned so much about the science of morality. Indeed, you have saved
me from traversing the path to hell and therefore I am eternally
indebted to you. Now, kindly disclose the actual secret of your present
low birth if you think that I am worthy to hear it."
The butcher then said, "O Kauśika, in my last life I was born as the son of a very respectable brāhmaṇa. Naturally, I became very learned in the Vedas, and because I was the close friend of a king, I also became highly skilled with the bow. One day, I accompanied the king to the forest. when he went on a hunting excursion along with his ministers and military commanders. The king proceeded to kill a large number of deer, and at that time I also released an arrow, desiring to test my skill. I was sure that I had aimed at a deer, but it so happened that my arrow pierced a ṛṣi who resides there in the forest. As the brāhmaṇa lay there, crying out in great pain, I approached him and pleaded, 'O Sage, be merciful and pardon me, for it was by accident that I pierced you with my arrow.' "The ṛṣi was overwhelmed by anger and grief, however, and so he could not be pacified. Before breathing his last, he cursed me by saying, 'In order to pay for this sin, you will take your next birth in a family of butchers!'

"Again and again I piteously begged for the ṛṣi's forgiveness and so at last he compassionately said, 'My curse cannot be nullified. However, as a concession I shall grant that in spite of your low birth you will be able to remember the events of your past life and thus always remain fixed in righteousness. By rigidly serving your parents, you will become purified and thus, when the duration of my curse expires, you will once again take birth as a brāhmaṇa and thereafter attain to heaven.'"

Kauśika then circumambulated the butcher while praising him highly, and then, after receiving his permission, he departed for home. Kauśika then returned to his aged mother and father, and as advised by the butcher from Mithilā, he became very attentive in the matter of rendering them service.

Next, Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi narrated the glories of Kārttikeya as follows: Long, long ago, the 256 demigods and demons frequently engaged in warfare, and the demons invariably came out victorious. Indra thus became very despondent to see how his army was being repeatedly slaughtered. The king of heaven thus began to think about what powerful personality could become his commander in chief in order to revitalize his beleaguered forces. At last, Indra retired to the Mānasa mountains (Arctic region), where he sat down in order to contemplate
the matter very seriously. Then, as Indra was sitting in a meditative mood, he suddenly heard the sound of a woman crying out, "Oh, please may someone come here quickly and save me by either giving me a husband or becoming my husband!"

Indra responded by saying, "Do not be afraid!" and when he looked up he saw an asura named Keśin holding the distressed woman by the hand. Although Indra demanded, "Let this woman go!" the demon replied, "You had better stay out of this, for I want to enjoy this girl. Indeed, if you try to interfere, then I shall smash you to pieces with my mace!"

After saying this, Keśin hurled his gigantic club, but Indra cut it to pieces with his thunderbolt as it flew through the air. The enraged demon next hurled a huge mass of rocks, but Indra smashed it into fragments by again releasing his thunderbolt. This time, Keśin himself was injured as some of the rocks fell upon him and so he fled from the scene after letting his captive go. Indra then approached the woman and inquired "Who are you? Why have you come to this place?"

The woman replied, "My name is Devasena and I am the daughter of Lord Brahmā. My sister Daityasena was previously raped by this demon Keśin. We often used to take our father's permission and come to this heavenly forest along with our maidservants in order to play. Keśin regularly came here to woo us and my sister foolishly listened to his alluring words so that at last the demon carried her away. Now, please be merciful and find me an invincible husband so that I need no longer have any fear of Keśin."

Indra then said, "You and I are cousins because my mother and your mother are sisters. Therefore, I should think that you are quite powerful enough to protect yourself."

Devasena replied, "Oh no! I am very weak. However, by the benediction of my father my future husband will surely become very influential and powerful."

Indra then asked, "O Devasena, what sort of husband would you-like?"

Devasena replied, "He must be very devoted to Lord Brahmā and he must be so powerful that he can conquer over all of the demigods, demons and Rākṣasas."

Upon hearing this, Indra felt pained at heart, for he could not think of anyone fitting this description. Just then, the king of heaven gazed upon
the sun as it rose above the Udaya Hill in the East. He could see how the new-moon was gliding into the sun, causing an eclipse at the particular time known as Raudra. The clouds on the horizon became tinged with a blood red hue, as did the sea below, and Indra could see the demigods and demons battling furiously upon the Sunrise Hill. The great ṛṣis were also seen by Indra to be offering oblations which Agni carried into the sun. After witnessing all of this, the king of heaven considered the situation as follows:

"This union of the Sun, Moon and Agni at the time of a powerful eclipse foretells that a great war will occur on the next day. The influence of Soma and Agni is exceedingly powerful just now and so if either of them were to beget a son at this moment that child would be a suitable match for Devasena."

Having come to this conclusion, Indra escorted Devasena into the presence of Lord Brahmā. After offering his obeisances, the king of heaven petitioned, "O Lord, please award this girl a suitable husband."

Lord Brahmā replied, "My dear Indra, what you have already concluded is quite correct. The person who is conceived at the time of this eclipse shall not only become the husband of Devasena, but the commander-in-chief of the demigods as well."

After hearing this, Indra and Devasena bowed their heads before Lord Brahmā. Then, accompanied by all of the demigods, they went to the place where the seven great brahmāṛṣis were engaged in performing sacrifices. After presenting themselves before the ṛṣis, the demigods explained how they desired to personally accept their offerings of soma. Thereafter, when the offerings were made, the ṛṣis chanted specific mantras for inviting Agni. Coming out from the sun, Agni, the carrier of all oblations, entered the sarificial fire and after taking the offerings, he presented them to the demigods. Having thus performed his duty, Agni departed, but then, while going away, he happened to see the wives of the sapta-ṛṣis resting upon their beds. As he beheld their exquisite beauty, Agni became highly enamored and thus agitated by lust. Agni restrained himself, however, remembering how it is sinful to think of enjoying the wives of others who are not filled with a reciprocal desire. Still, the god of fire could not forget the wives of the sapta-ṛṣis and so he finally decided to fulfill his desire in a more proper way. After
transforming himself into the household fire known as Gārhapatyā, Agni began to reside at the āśrama of the sapta-ṛṣis and thus he was able to behold their beautiful wives every day and sometimes touch them with his flames. In this way, Agni lived with the sapta-ṛṣis for a long time and while doing so, he became more and more filled with love for their lovely wives. Finally, Agni's heart became exceedingly tortured by that love because he could not actually engage in loving affairs with his beloveds. Indeed, Agni finally became so frustrated that he departed for the Caitraratha forest, having firmly decided to end his life.

The daughter of Dakṣa named Svāhā was madly in love with Agni but she could never find the chance to approach him for winning his love. Now, taking advantage of this opportunity, Svāhā transformed herself so as to appear exactly like Śiva, the wife of the ṛṣi Aṅgirāś. She then approached Agni in the Caitraratha forest in the hopes of fulfilling her desire as well as his. Svāhā, in the form of Śiva, then came before Agni and said, "O god of fire, I am tortured by love for you, and thus, if you refuse to accept me then I shall give up my life at once. I have come to you after consulting with the other wives of the brahmarsis because we are all infatuated with love for you just as you are for us."

Agni inquired, "O Śiva, how did you and the other ṛṣis' wives know that I am hopelessly in love with you?"

Svāhā replied, "O Agni, we could read your mind by various signs. However, since we are all married women, we are too afraid to approach you at your āśrama. Now, please, quickly fulfill my desire, for the others are anxiously awaiting my return."

Thereafter, Agni eagerly fulfilled his long-cherished desire of embracing one of the wives of the sapta-ṛṣis. After the completion of their union, Svāhā thought as follows while holding Agni's semen in her hands:

"It would be a great disgrace for both Agni and myself if I were to be discovered here in the guise of Śiva."

Svāhā then assumed the form of a bird and quickly departed from that forest, thinking that she was unobserved by others. After flying to the White mountain, which is guarded by fierce seven-headed serpents, and which serves as the abode of numerous ghosts and Rākṣasas, Svāhā dropped Agni's semen into a golden lake there. Thereafter, Svāhā
successively took the forms of the other wives of the sapta-ṛṣis in order to enjoy herself to her heart's content with Agni. However, on account of Arundhati's great loyalty and devotion to her husband Vasiṣṭha, Śvāhā was unable to take that chaste woman's form. In this way, Śvāhā threw Agni's semen into that golden lake six times altogether. Śvāhā had approached Agni in the guise of the wives of the sapta-ṛṣis six times on the first day of the new moon. Then on the second day, a male child was produced from the fire-god's accumulated semen. This child was extraordinarily powerful and he was born with six heads, twelve hands, twelve legs, one neck and one stomach.

On the third day of the new moon, the child grew up to become the size of a small boy, and on the fourth day he attained the age of youth. This child had been called Guha and because he had been cast off, he also received the name Skanda. On the fifth day, Skanda picked up the bow which Lord Śiva had formerly used to destroy Tripura, and he began to roar so loudly that all of the moving and non-moving entities within the creation became struck with wonder. Along with Lord Śiva's bow, Skanda held a dart in one hand and a red-crested rooster in another. Then, in his other hands he grabbed hold of two great Nāgas: Citra and Airāvata, causing them to shake with fear.

Thereafter, while sporting upon the mountaintop, Skanda blew upon his conchshell and the tumultuous sound caused terror to enter the hearts of all creatures. Skanda then began to survey all directions with his numerous eyes while roaring again and again. At this time many creatures came there and surrendered unto Skanda out of fear, and thus they became his ardent followers. After assuring these diverse beings that there was no cause for fear, Skanda once again took up his mighty bow and released some arrows at the Krauñca mountain, the son of Himavat. When the other mountains saw Krauñca fall down to the ground while uttering painful groans, they started to scream out in fear. Skanda was unmoved, and after letting out a fierce war-cry, he picked up his mace and smashed one of the peaks of the White mountains. While crying out in pain, the White mountain then fearfully disjoined itself from the earth and began to flee along with the other mountains. The earth then became very aggrieved on account of the loss of her mountains, because they are considered to be her ornaments. She then
approached Skanda in order to surrender unto him. At this time, all of
the mountains accompanied her and after bowing down before Skanda,
they repositioned themselves upon the earth's surface as before. Ever
since that time the fifth day of the new moon has been set aside for
worship of Skanda.

At the time of Skanda's birth, many fearful omens became visible. The
characteristics of male and female, heat and cold, and other such
dualities became reversed. The entire earth trembled and the sky was
uncommonly lit up in all directions. As the sapta-ṛṣis engaged in
restoring proper order to the universe, other sages who lived in the
Caitraratha forest began to spread the rumor that this calamity was
caused by Agni's cohabitation with their wives. Others, who had seen
the wives of the sapta-ṛṣis take the form of birds, placed the blame upon
the birds, but no one knew that it was actually Svāhā who had come to
Agni. When Svāhā heard about the new-born child, she approached
Skanda and gradually told him that she was his real mother. When the
sapta-ṛṣis, with the exception of Vasiṣṭha, heard about Skanda's birth,
they angrily rejected their wives and at the same time claimed that the
wonderful child was their own. Svāhā then informed them that the
child was actually hers and had not been produced in connection with
any of their wives. Then, while Svāhā was trying to convince the ṛṣis of
this fact, Viśvāmitra arrived there. When Agni had previously retired to
the forest, being tortured by his insatiable lust, Viśvāmitra had followed
him and witnessed all that had happened. Viśvāmitra knew the actual
truth and so he also tried to convince the ṛṣis about the innocence of
their wives. However, in spite of hearing so much testimony, the ṛṣis
remained adamant and were not willing to take back their abandoned
wives.

Thereafter, Viśvāmitra performed Skanda's birth ceremony as well as
other reformatory rituals, and he highly pleased the wonderful child by
glorifying him and his followers. In this way, Viśvāmitra became a
favorite of Skanda's. The demigods began to tremble with fear when
they heard about Skanda's terrible prowess and thus they all went and
approached Indra. Then, while standing before the king of heaven with
folded hands, the demigods pleaded, "O Lord, you must kill this horrible
child before he conquers over the entire three worlds and installs
himself upon your throne."
However, Indra was also overwhelmed by fear and so he refused to fight with Skanda. At this, the demigods criticized him by saying, "O King, you are a eunuch and a coward. Therefore, you should send the unlimitedly powerful mothers of the universe to kill him."
Thereafter, at Indra's request, the mothers of the universe agreed to kill Skanda. However, when they actually approached the child and saw his unparalleled prowess, they became fearful. Considering Skanda to be unconquerable, the mothers of the universe surrendered themselves, seeking his protection. They then pleaded, "O Skanda, kindly become our adopted son. We are filled with so much affection for you that milk is flowing from our breasts."
Upon hearing this plea, Skanda became desirous of sucking these mothers' breast-milk and thus he respectfully welcomed them and accepted them as mothers. Agni then appeared there and Skanda received him with great reverence, knowing him to be his father. The mothers then began to look after Skanda in various ways. The daughter of Anger personified guarded him with a spear in her hand. The daughter of the Sea, who lives by sucking blood, let Skanda suck her breast. Agni then transformed himself into a merchant accompanied by many children, and in this way he gave Skanda great pleasure by presenting him toys to play with.

While Skanda was thus being attended to, Indra gained some courage and so approached him, mounted upon Airāvata and followed by all of the demigods. Desiring victory while at the same time filled with doubt and fear, Indra roared loudly in order to encourage his warriors. Skanda then came forward to fight and he responded with such a fearful war-cry that Indra's entire army became stunned. The enraged Skanda then caused flames to issue forth from his mouth and as a result, the demigods and their carriers became scorched by the heat. Being greatly afflicted, the demigod soldiers began to surrender themselves unto Skanda, "and thus Indra soon found himself to be deserted. Finally, as a last hope, Indra released his mighty thunderbolt. This chief of weapons passed right through the right side of Skanda's body and from that wound, a ferocious being came out, bearing a club in his hand. Due to the
circumstances of his birth, this terrible creature was given the name Viśakha and when Indra saw him, he became exceedingly terrified. Indeed, with folded hands, the king of heaven also approached Skanda in order to surrender himself. Skanda then assured Indra of safety and thereafter, many other male and female children took birth from the wound in his right side and they all became known as the offspring of Viśakha.

The great ṛṣis then approached Skanda and requested him to assume the post of Indra. Skanda replied by asking, "O Sages, as the king of heaven, what will be my duty?"

The ṛṣis replied, "Indra awards benedictions when he is pleased, he destroys the wicked and he fulfills the desires of the righteous. He assigns duties to all living creatures and sometimes he has to officiate for the sun and moon or else act as the god presiding over the earth, water, fire or air."

Indra also urged Skanda to occupy his heavenly throne. However, Skanda replied, "I do not covet such a position. Instead, I simply wish to remain as the servant of Indra."

Indra then argued, "Since you have defeated me, I will not command the same respect as before. Thus, people will gradually divide themselves into two parties, yours and mine, and this will eventually lead to a war. O Skanda, you have already demonstrated your superiority, and thus I will once again be defeated. Therefore it would be better for you to assume the post right away."

However, Skanda still refused to occupy Indra's throne. Instead, he inquired, "O king of heaven, just tell me what service I can render unto you."

At last, Indra requested, "My dear Skanda, if you actually desire to do that which is pleasing to me, then please become the commander-in-chief of my army."

Skanda accepted this post by saying, "O King, I shall be happy to act in this capacity so that I can destroy all of the demons for the well-being of the demigods, the brāhmaṇas and the cows."

Skanda's installation ceremony was then performed, and at that time, Lord Śiva offered him a golden necklace which had been made by Viśvakarmā. Because of this great honor, as well as for other reasons,
Skanda thereafter became known as the son of Lord Śiva. The red rooster given by Agni became Skanda's official emblem and it was placed upon his flagstaff.

After being installed as commander-in-chief, Skanda appeared very glorious and satisfied, and everyone joyfully celebrated the occasion so that the singing of the Gandharvas and the chanting of the Vedic hymns resounded in all directions.

Indra then remembered Devasena. Considering Skanda to be the husband which had been ordained for her by Lord Brahmā, the king of heaven called for Devasena and had her dressed and decorated in the most attractive manner. Then, as he presented Devasena before Skanda, Indra said, "My dear boy, even before your birth, this girl had been selected for you by Lord Brahmā. Therefore, you should accept her as your wife without hesitation."

Skanda then consented and so the marriage took place with Bṛhaspati presiding. The rejected wives of the six brahmarṣis then came before Skanda and said, "O Lord, we have been disowned by our husbands due to false rumors which were spread, claiming that we were your real mothers. Now, please let us adopt you as our son, for in this way we think that we shall attain good destinations."

Skanda agreed to accept these six women as mothers and he also assured them of their good fortune. Indra then came before Skanda and said, "Abhijit, the younger sister of Rohiṇī has left home and gone to the forest in order to perform severe austerities. She has done this out of jealousy of her sister and thus there is now a vacancy among the stars. I wish for you to select someone who can fulfill this empty post."

Skanda assigned Kṛittikā as that star and then, at the request of the mothers of creation, he produced a powerful, fiery being from his body named Skandapasmara. This evil spirit, along with numerous other male and female beings created by Skanda, afflicts children from the time when they are within the mother's womb up to the age of sixteen. One of these is the rākṣasi Pūtanā, who causes miscarriages in women and another evil spirit is the mother of dogs, Saramā. They can be propitiated by the worship of Skanda however, for he is their lord and master. There are many other evil spirits who influence persons from the age of sixteen onward. One such spirit creates the illusion that one is
directly seeing his dead ancestors.
There are many evil spirits who can possess one by entering his body, and such persons who come under their influence soon become bereft of all reason. Some evil spirits cause one to see hideous sights, and people stay under their influence up to the age of seventy. There are three classes of such spirits: frolicsome, gluttonous, and sensuous. All of these spirits avoid one who subdues his senses, who has clean habits, who is free from laziness and who is Godfearing. The powers which these spirits possess were all bestowed upon them by Skanda at the request of the mothers of the universe.
Svāhā, the daughter of Dakṣa, then approached Skanda and requested, "O Lord, please grant me happiness."
When Skanda asked her to explain her desire, Svāhā replied, "I have always been in love with Agni but he does not reciprocate my feelings. Please somehow enable me to live happily with him as his ever-devoted and beloved wife."
Skanda gave Svāhā this benediction by saying, "When offerings are made in sacrifice, your name will always be chanted along with Agni's and thus you shall forever remain associated with him."
Svāhā was very pleased to receive Agni as her husband in this way and then Lord Brahmā requested Skanda, "You should go now and approach your father, Lord Śiva. It is because Lord Śiva and Umā had empowered Agni and Svāhā that you were born invincible. Once, long ago, Umā had ejected the semen of Lord Śiva upon this mountain and thus the twins Mujika and Minjika were born. Other drops of Lord Śiva's semen fell into the Red Sea, upon the earth, and on the sun rays, and as a result, your fierce meat-eating followers were produced."

Skanda went and offered his respects to Lord Śiva and thereafter, all of the demigods prepared for an all-out assault on the demons. Lord Śiva then set out on his chariot, which was drawn by 1,000 roaring lions and he was accompanied by Skanda and Pārvatī. Kuvera stayed in front of Lord Śiva, riding upon the back of a human being, and on his side was Indra, riding on the back of Airāvata. Yamarāja was accompanied by Death personified and followed by hundreds of diseases. Varuṇa and the other demigods also set out along with all of the Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Vasus
and Rudras, and thus a huge army was amassed. Lord Śiva appeared to be as brilliant as the sun and he was personally fanned with cāmaras by Vāyu and Agni. Behind the demigod warriors came innumerable Apsarās, Gandharvas, Rivers, Rṣis, Nāgas and Stars, who all sang, danced and scattered flowers here and there.

Lord Śiva then turned to Skanda and warned, "My dear son, you must very carefully command the divisions of your army, and while doing so, if you always remember me with devotion, your welfare is assured."

After saying this, Lord Śiva embraced Skanda and dismissed him.

Various evil omens then became manifest before the demigods. The stars seemed to be ablaze, the earth trembled, and the entire universe appeared to be in a confused state as darkness began to set in all around. Thus, the demigods and Rṣis became very anxious at heart and while they were in this apprehensive mood, a massive army of Daityas and Dānavas suddenly attacked them. Indeed, as the demons continued showering their weapons, the demigods were soon thrown into such a state of confusion that it appeared as if they would turn their backs and flee from the battlefield at any moment.

Then, as many of his warriors fell to the ground slain, Indra personally came and took command, and after rallying his forces, he charged at the demons, followed by all thirty-three crores of demigods. Thereafter, as the Daityas and Dānavas fell down dead on all sides in large numbers, their army panicked and began to waver. Upon seeing this, the demigods shouted with joy, but then, the next moment, the demons rallied and began to drive back the celestial army. Then, while the Daityas and Dānavas similarly indulged themselves by roaring impetuously, a huge demon named Mahiṣa suddenly emerged from their midst, carrying a huge mass of rocks. Indeed, as this terrible demon advanced forward, Indra's soldiers began to run away in fear, leaving aside their weapons. Mahiṣāsura chased after the demigods and when he hurled that mass of rocks, it crushed to death 10,000 enemy soldiers. This struck terror into the hearts of all the demigods, and as they scattered in all directions, Mahiṣa and his followers attacked them just like lions falling upon a herd of deer. Then, suddenly, Mahiṣa rushed at Lord Śiva's chariot, and while coming close by, he grabbed onto the flagpole. Upon seeing this, the earth let out a terrible groan and even the great Rṣis nearly fainted.
On the other side, the demons shouted with joy, for they were convinced that their victory was now assured. And yet, even though he was put into this precarious condition, Lord Śiva did not want to kill Mahiṣa, for he knew that Skanda was the destined slayer of the great demon.

Indeed, Skanda suddenly came upon the scene, riding upon his golden chariot. Skanda looked magnificent, dressed in red cloth and wearing a garland of red flowers, and when the army of demons saw him, they became disheartened. Then, when Skanda released his terrible Śakti weapon, it instantly cut off Mahiṣāsura’s head, making him fall down dead upon the battlefield. That monstrous head was a full sixteen yojanas (128 miles) wide, and when it fell to the ground, it blocked the entrance to the kingdom of the Northern Kurus. Thereafter, Skanda again and again hurled that invincible Śakti weapon and each time that it was released from his hand, thousands of Daityas and Dānavas were slain. The followers of Skanda slaughtered the rest of the demons and drank their blood so that very soon the entire enemy army was exterminated.

All of the demigods came and congratulated Skanda for his wonderful victory and Skanda in turn went and paid respects to his father, Lord Śiva. Indra then came, and while embracing Skanda, he exclaimed, "You have accomplished a greatly heroic feat by killing the demon Mahiṣa! He had become invincible due to a benediction which he had received from Lord Brahmā and thus, for a long time he was a thorn in the sides of the demigods."

Finally, before the demigods returned to their heavenly abodes, Lord Śiva gave this instruction to the demigods, "O Celestials, just as you always render allegiance unto me, you must do the same with my son, Skanda, from now on."

While the Pāṇḍavas and the brāhmaṇas were listening to Märkaṇḍeya Rṣi, Draupadī and Satyabhāmā entered the cottage and began to converse with great pleasure. Then, in the course of their conversation, Satyabhāmā inquired, "O princess of Pańcāla, how is it that you are able to keep your husbands so submissive and obedient to you? I see that the Pāṇḍavas are always ready to please you in all respects and they never become even slightly angry with you. Do you control them by some
mystic incantation, or is it just by your youthful beauty and the artistic use of dress and cosmetics that you manage to keep your husbands under your sway? I am asking you this because I desire to keep my dear Lord Kṛṣṇa under control in just the same way. Therefore, please tell me your secret."

Draupadī felt a little offended by Satyabhāmā's words, and so with a bit of indignation, she replied, "O Queen, these are the methods of wicked women! You should know that men can never be made truly obedient by such means! My secret is simply this:

I have given up all sense of false pride as well as personal desires for sense gratification. I carefully control my anger and I always serve my husbands with great care and devotion. Indeed, I restrain my senses so carefully that I do not allow even a glance to betray the slightest bit of emotion. I never even think of bathing, eating or sleeping until my husbands and servants have done so, and I am ready to rise up quickly at any hour in order to personally greet my husbands when they return home. I always endeavor to do just that which is agreeable to them and I discharge my various duties cheerfully and without lethargy. I always serve my superiors and I never speak of them disrespectfully. Most of all, I am very careful to always wait upon my mother-in-law, Kunti, with the utmost respect and attention.

"While residing at Indraprastha, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira used to feed thousands of brāhmaṇas daily, and it was my duty to see that their needs were properly taken care of. I had 100,000 maidservants to assist me, and I knew the names, faces and capabilities of each and every one of them. I used to direct all of these maidservants, and any complaints about them would be personally submitted to me. Besides these maidservants, I also knew all of the male servants and even the cowherds. In fact, it was I alone who kept track of my husbands' daily income and expenditure and thus only I knew the totality of their wealth. My dear Satyabhāmā, it is because I took on this great burden of responsibility and was thus the first to rise in the morning and the last one in bed at night, that I have won the great respect of my husbands."

Satyabhāmā then said, "O Draupadī, please forgive me for even suggesting that you might have controlled your husbands by some duplicitous method."
Draupadi then continued, "My dear Queen, a woman can captivate the mind of her husband, thus drawing it away from anyone else, in a way that is devoid of deceit. In order to do so, a wife must first of all consider her husband to be her god. In this way, she should understand that it is he alone who can fulfill all of her desires for children, ornaments and other articles of enjoyment. By always adoring her husband and promptly serving him with seats, garlands, food and whatever else he requires, a wife makes him feel that she really loves him. When her husband orders a maidservant to do something, a wife should do it herself. Whatever a man says to his wife in confidence, should never be repeated to others. If a man hears someone else repeat what he had confidentially told his wife, then he certainly becomes irritated. A woman should consider all persons who are hostile toward her husband to be persona non grata. She should never allow herself to be seen enjoying the company of other men, even to the extent of speaking privately with her sons. Also, a good wife should shun the company of other women who are not of very good character."

In this way, Draupadi gave very good instructions and Satyabhāmā appreciated them greatly. At last, Lord Kṛṣṇa took His leave from the Pāṇḍavas and the brāhmaṇas, headed by Mārkaṇḍeya, and after getting up onto His chariot, He called for His wife. Satyabhāmā then embraced Draupadi and assured her, "Dear princess, your sons are being very lovingly cared for by Subhadrā, Rukmīṇi and many other exalted women, and thus you need not worry."

Satyabhāmā then mounted upon Kṛṣṇa’s chariot and so the Lord set out at once for His capital city, Dvārakā. Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas returned to Dvaitavana, accompanied by the brāhmaṇa's and Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi. They chose a secluded place to live, far away from human habitation, and much of their time was spent roaming about in the forest. Many ṛṣis used to come and visit the Pāṇḍavas and all of them were respectfully received and worshipped.

One day, a certain brāhmaṇa came to Dvaitavana, and after talking with the Pāṇḍavas for some time, he departed for Hastināpura. This brāhmaṇa was very expert in speaking, and when he entered the royal court of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the old king received him with great respect. Then,
after the brāhmaṇa had been seated, Dhṛtarāṣṭra inquired from him about how the Pāṇḍavas were passing their days in the forest. In reply, the brāhmaṇa explained to the king in very pitiful words how the Pāṇḍavas had become exceedingly emaciated due to being exposed to the elements and how, along with Draupadi, they slept by lying down upon the bare ground. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard the brāhmaṇa's vivid portrayal of the Pāṇḍavas' plight, he became very sorry at heart. Indeed, while considering how his poor nephews' sufferings were the result of his own fault, Dhṛtarāṣṭra became merged into an ocean of lamentation. The old blind king began to imagine the Pāṇḍavas' hardships and then he concluded that Bhīma's wrath must be swelling more and more as the time passes. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then marveled, “Alas! How is it possible that my own son and Śakuni are oblivious of the impending doom which awaits them as the result of their sinful deeds?” At one moment, Dhṛtarāṣṭra would harshly reproach himself for the affection which he cherished for his wicked son, knowing it to be the cause for his having sanctioned Duryodhana's evil plans. The next moment, however, Dhṛtarāṣṭra would become callous and think, "Never mind! All of this is taking place by the will of Destiny. The wind will always blow and the sun will forever shine, irrespective of our desires or endeavors. Similarly, the events which are now taking place are out of my hands."

Whichever way Dhṛtarāṣṭra considered things, however, he knew that the result would be the same, the Pāṇḍavas would certainly take revenge after the completion of their period of exile. Dhṛtarāṣṭra reasoned, "If the Pāṇḍavas were not going to fight for their kingdom, then why did Arjuna come back after having ascended to heaven in his mortal body?" While Dhṛtarāṣṭra was thus lamenting to himself, Śakuni overheard him and then went to Duryodhana. Duryodhana was sitting along with Karṇa, and upon entering, the cunning Śakuni spoke as follows: "O King, the sovereignty over the earth with all of its rulers, and the unlimited opulence which Yudhiṣṭhira had formerly enjoyed are now yours without rival. After having their kingdom snatched away by us, the Pāṇḍavas are now living in an impoverished condition on the banks of the Dvaita lake, along with numerous brāhmaṇas. Let us go there in
full royal opulence, just to display ourselves before the Pāṇḍavas and make them burn with envy! The highest joy for a ksatriya is to see himself prosper while his enemies sink lower and lower into adversity. It is just like looking down from the top of a hill and seeing one's rivals crawl upon the ground! Factually, it gives a king greater pleasure to see his enemies suffer than to simply enjoy his own wealth and prestige. O Duryodhana, you should therefore take your wife with you and go to the forest in royal style, just to see the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī dressed in tree-bark and deerskin."

At first, Duryodhana was very pleased upon hearing this, but then, the next moment, he became melancholic. Turning to Karna, Duryodhana said, "My father will never allow me to do this, for he is sympathetic toward the Pāṇḍavas. I've always wanted to go to the forest in order to exhibit my opulence before my cousin-brothers. What joy could be greater than to behold the Pāṇḍavas living miserably in the forest and to see Draupadī dressed in rags? My dear friends, please think of some excuse for us to go to Dvaitavana so that my father will give us permission."

Without saying anything further, Karna and Šakuni departed. Then, the next morning when the three met again, Karna said, "My dear friends, let me explain the nice plan which I have devised. Since our cows are being kept at Dvaitavana, we could go there on the plea of making a routine inspection. This is quite customary for kings, and so I am sure that if we present it in this way, Dhṛtarāṣṭra will not refuse us."

Šakuni exclaimed, "Why, this was my plan as well!" and at this, the three wholeheartedly laughed and shook each other's hands. Soon thereafter, Duryodhana, Karna and Šakuni presented themselves before Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Then, while they were inquiring about the old king's welfare, a cowherd named Šamanga came there as arranged beforehand. Šamanga began to speak to Dhṛtarāṣṭra about the cows at Dvaitavana. Then, taking this cue, Karna and Šakuni suggested, "O King, now is an ideal time to go to the forest in order to take a count of our cattle. The forest is very pleasant at this time of year and so we can also take the opportunity to do some hunting."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "To go hunting and to take account of the cows are certainly good ideas. However, since the Pāṇḍavas are staying nearby, it
would be better for you to send someone else. Otherwise, if you three go there, Duryodhana will surely manage to offend the Pāṇḍavas somehow or other. Just try to understand how powerful the Pāṇḍavas are, and thus realize that any attempt to harm them will result in your own destruction."

Śakuni then argued, "O King, we have no intention of even seeing the Pāṇḍavas. In fact, we will carefully avoid the vicinity where they are residing and thus there will be no chance for any misconduct on our part."

At last, with great reluctance, Dhṛtarāṣṭra granted his son permission to go to Dvaitavana along with his companions. Thus, without delay, Duryodhana happily set out and he was accompanied not only by Karna and Śakuni, but by Duḥṣāsana and many other brothers, thousands of ladies, and a large army as well. Altogether, the party consisted of 8,000 chariots, 30,000 elephants, 9,000 horses, as well as innumerable foot-soldiers, merchants carrying their goods, hunters and various classes of servants. When they arrived at the vicinity of Dvaitavana, Duryodhana set up his camp four miles from the lake where the Pāṇḍavas were residing. From there, the counting of the cattle was conducted, and when this was accomplished, the Dhṛtarāṣṭras and their soldiers began to revel in the forest. Numerous cowherd men and virgin girls personally served Duryodhana, and in return, the king distributed wealth and food to them.

Thereafter, Duryodhana and his associates engaged themselves in hunting deer, buffaloes, boars, and other wild beasts, and while wandering about in the forest they thus killed thousands of such animals. Finally, when they came near to the Dvaita lake, Duryodhana ordered his men to construct some pleasure-houses on the shore. However, when those men approached the lake in order to begin construction, a host of Gandharvas forbade them by announcing, "The king of the Gandharvas has come here to sport in the water, accompanied by many Apsarās. Therefore, you cannot advance any further. Turn back!"

These men then went back and reported the matter to Duryodhana. The Kaurava king became enraged when he heard how his men had been hindered in the execution of his order, and so he sent some soldiers to
drive away the Gandharvas. When these warriors came before the Gandharvas, they confidently announced, "You must all stand aside, for the mighty King Duryodhana is coming here to enjoy himself along with his associates!"

In response, the Gandharvas simply laughed and then harshly replied, "Duryodhana must be mad if he thinks that he can order around the celestials as if they were his menial servants. You soldiers must also be crazy for relaying such a foolish message. You had better leave here at once if you at all hope to keep your lives!"

These soldiers then returned to Duryodhana and when the Kaurava king heard what had happened, he became further inflamed with anger. In a fit of rage, he ordered his army, "Go and attack the Gandharvas without delay, even if they have come here along with Indra himself!"

After receiving this command, the Kaurava army set out to encounter the Gandharvas. Then the Gandharvas saw how the Kauravas were approaching the Dvaita lake, in spite of their warning, they hastily reported the matter to their king, Citrasena. When the Gandharva king heard of Duryodhana's impudent words, he also became highly enraged and ordered his soldiers to go and punish the Kauravas. Thereafter, when the warriors of the Kaurava army saw the Gandharvas approaching, they immediately panicked and began to run away in fear, in spite of Duryodhana's presence. Only Karna did not waver, and by releasing a perfect shower of arrows, he checked the onslaught of Gandharvas. Then, within a short time, the mighty Karna killed many of the enemy soldiers. Still, the Gandharvas held fast, and after rallying, they made a sudden rush at the Kauravas.

Being supported by the Dhrtarashtra and Sakuni, Karna fought fiercely, and it soon appeared that he had gained the upper hand. The enraged Citrasena then entered the battlefield, and by utilizing his mystic powers, he created the illusion that ten Gandharvas were fighting with each enemy soldier. Because of this, the warriors of the Kaurava army once again panicked and began to run away in all directions. In spite of being wounded, however, Karna remained immovable, with Duryodhana and Sakuni by his side.

Thousands of Gandharvas then rushed at Karna and surrounded him on
all sides so that within a matter of moments, his flagpole, yoke and umbrella were cut down, and his horses and driver were also slain. Then, as the Gandharvas proceeded to smash his chariot to pieces, Karṇa jumped to the ground, got up onto Vikarna's chariot and fled from the battlefield. At this time, all of the Kauravas except Duryodhana also turned their backs and ran, and so the king was soon surrounded on all sides. First of all, the Gandharvas killed Duryodhana's horses and driver, and then they smashed his chariot to pieces, so that the king was forcibly thrown down to the ground. Citrasena then rushed forward and arrested Duryodhana, and at the same time some Gandharva warriors surrounded Duṣāsana and took him prisoner as well. Indeed, the Gandharvas proceeded to capture many of the Kauravas along with their wives and meanwhile, some of the fleeing soldiers approached the Pāṇḍavas for protection. While banding over the Kauravas' chariots and weapons to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, the soldiers pleaded, "O King, Duryodhana and his brothers have been captured by the Gandharvas. Please come quickly and rescue them!"
At this, Bhīma exclaimed, "What we could have done only with great endeavor, has been easily accomplished by the Gandharvas!"
Indeed, Bhīma greatly rejoiced at the defeat of the Kauravas and then he declared, "The wicked sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra have gotten what they deserve for all of their evil deeds!"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira restrained Bhīma, however, and said, "My dear brother, the Kauravas have sought our protection, and so it is our duty to save them. Even though there may be some dispute within our family, still, now that the honor of the Kuru dynasty is at stake, we cannot tolerate this aggression. Because the Kauravas have been insulted by the king of the Gandharvas and have been captured along with their ladies, we must rescue them for the sake of our family prestige."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then ordered his brothers to utilize the Kauravas' chariots in order to fight with the Gandharvas for the sake of freeing Duryodhana. At this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira said, "My dear brothers, even an enemy who seeks it should be given all protection. Besides, just think of how it will be a great source of pride and satisfaction for us if we are able to release Duryodhana! Although he has always been inimical toward us, now that he has fallen into despair, he
will be forced to express his gratitude. I would have immediately gone to Duryodhana's rescue but because of my vow to live an ascetic life in the forest, I cannot do so. First of all try to gain Duryodhana's release by means of conciliation. Then, if this proves to be unsuccessful, use light force. Finally, if even that is not enough to bring the Gandharvas to their senses, then they must be crushed by all means!"

After receiving his elder brother's command, Arjuna vowed to free Duryodhana, and so Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva also prepared for battle. Thereafter, when the Pāṇḍavas rushed onto the battlefield, the Gandharvas enthusiastically turned to fight them, being intoxicated by their victory over the Kauravas. Then, after a light skirmish, Arjuna ordered the Gandharvas to release Duryodhana. However, they simply laughed upon hearing this and declared, "Except for Indra, the king of heaven, there is no one who can command us!"

Arjuna then challenged, "Taking the wives of others captive is improper, and thus you should immediately release the Kaurava ladies!"

The Gandharvas ignored these words, however, and so Arjuna began to shower his arrows upon them, causing a fierce battle to commence. Thousands of Gandharvas then surrounded the Pāṇḍavas and tried to smash their chariots as they had done with Karṇa and Duryodhana. However, the Pāṇḍavas were able to check the Gandharvas by means of torrents of arrows. Then, by discharging a weapon of Agni, Arjuna killed thousands of enemy soldiers, while Bhima wielded his club to slay hundreds. At this point, the Gandharvas ascended into the sky, taking their prisoners along with them. However, Arjuna dexterously blocked the Gandharvas' path with a network of arrows, and thus he was able to keep them like birds in a cage. Having accomplished this, Arjuna easily proceeded to pierce his enemies, and thus their severed limbs began to fall down like rain.

When Citrasena saw how his army was being exterminated, he rushed at Arjuna, wielding a club in his hand. Arjuna then cut that mace into seven pieces with his arrows, and so Citrasena made himself invisible while continuing to fight. Arjuna then employed a weapon named Śabda-veda which forced his Gandharva friend to reappear. Then, at last, when Arjuna could see that Citrasena was exhausted from fighting, he desisted along with his brothers. Arjuna then inquired, "O king of the
Gandharvas, why did you arrest the Kauravas along with their wives?"
Cirasena replied, "O son of Kunti, even before they had come here, I knew of Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni's plan to visit Dwaitavana so that they could flaunt their opulence and mock you for your miserable condition. Indra himself had ordered me saying, 'Go and capture Duryodhana, and then bring him back to me. I shall always do that which is for the welfare of Arjuna.' Now, please let me take Duryodhana and present him to Indra so that I can fulfill my duty."
Arjuna then said, "O king of the Gandharvas, if you would like to do that which is actually agreeable to me, then immediately set Duryodhana free, for that is the wish of Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira."
Cirasena replied, "O Arjuna, you should consider that your elder brother had commanded you to free Duryodhana without knowing of his evil intention in coming here. Therefore, first let me bring Duryodhana before Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira and then, after I explain the situation, I shall leave the matter up to him."
Thus, Citrasena and the Pāṇḍavas took Duryodhana to Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira. Then, after hearing everything from the Gandharva king, Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira said, "My dear Citrasena, it is very praiseworthy that you only captured Duryodhana and did not kill him. Now, please release our cousin along with all of his brothers and their wives, if you wish to do that which is actually agreeable to me."
Thus, the Kauravas and their wives were set free, and with the permission of Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira, the Gandharvas departed for heaven. Soon thereafter, Indra came to Dwaitavana and revived all of the slain Gandharva soldiers by sprinkling nectar over their bodies. The Kauravas then worshipped the Pāṇḍavas, being very grateful for having been rescued. At this time, Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira affectionately said to Duryodhana and his brothers, "My dear cousins, please do not ever again attempt to act so rashly. Now, you are free to return to Hastinäpura if your business here is finished."

The Kauravas then departed, but they were very despondent on account of their bitter defeat. After being released, Duryodhana had offered his respects unto Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira, but while doing so he was overwhelmed with shame. Indeed, with his heart broken, Duryodhana
appeared to be almost lifeless as he listlessly set out for Hastināpura. The Kaurava king was by nature very proud, wicked, arrogant, vicious, and conceited, and so, after this humiliating incident, he proceeded slowly with his head hung down in shame. While going along the road, all that Duryodhana could think of was his painful defeat and how Arjuna had heroically forced the Gandharvas to release him. When night fell, Duryodhana set up camp along the side of the road and soon thereafter, Karṇa met up with him. Karṇa and Vikarna had fled from the battlefield, and so they were elated to see that Duryodhana was alive and well. Indeed, Karṇa assumed that Duryodhana must have vanquished the Gandharvas and thus he began to glorify him by saying, "O King, what you have accomplished is a most wonderful feat, for even I had to flee from the Gandharvas out of fear for my life!"

Duryodhana then replied in a voice that was choked up with tears, "O Karṇa, after a long fight, the Gandharvas completely surrounded us, and after smashing our chariots to pieces they took us captive. Yudhiṣṭhira then ordered Bhīma and Arjuna to come to our rescue, and thus the Pāṇḍavas appeared on the scene and routed the Gandharvas with showers of arrows. Then, as the Gandharvas began to flee through the sky, Arjuna encompassed them in a wonderful network of arrows so that they could no longer proceed. Being thus defeated, the Gandharva king, Citrasena, surrendered and thereafter, the two friends embraced one another and talked very affectionately. Then, when Arjuna smilingly asked Citrasena to release us, the Gandharva king disclosed that he knew all about our real purpose in coming to Dvaitavana. I was then taken in chains to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and in the very presence of my wife and the other Kaurava women, I was set free on his order. Having thus been put into the hands of my enemies and then released by them, I witnessed the most miserable experience in my life! Now, I am eternally indebted to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and so I think that it would have been far better if I had been killed by the Gandharvas in battle."

"My dear Karṇa, I have decided to remain here and fast until death, and so the rest of you can return to Hastināpura. How could I dare face Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, Vidura, Saṃjaya and my other superiors? After having experienced such humiliation and defeat, how could I dare to show my face before my relatives? I must now admit once
and for all that proud and vain persons like myself cannot prosper for long. Because I have performed so many wicked acts, I am now being forced to suffer this intolerable disgrace. My only way out is death, for I am too proud to go on maintaining my wretched existence after being rescued by my enemies."

Duryodhana then turned to Duḥśasana, and while clasping him by the neck, he said, "My dear brother, you must go back to Hastināpura now and rule over the kingdom in my place."

Upon hearing these pathetic words, Duḥśasana became overwhelmed with grief. With a voice that was choked up with tears, he begged his elder brother, "My dear Duryodhana, please give up your morbid intention."

Duḥśasana then fell down at Duryodhana's feet, and while wetting them with his tears, he vowed, "The earth may one day split in two, or the sun may lose its splendor. The moon may lose its coolness, the ocean may dry up, or fire may cease to radiate heat, but I shall never rule the kingdom without you!"

Duḥśasana then grabbed hold of Duryodhana's feet and began to cry convulsively. While beholding the two grief-stricken brothers, Karṇa then tried to cheer up Duryodhana by saying, "O King, tears are useless because they will not help anyone. The Pāṇḍavas were only doing their duty for they are subordinate rulers who are living within your jurisdiction. Thus, your grief is childish. Because the Pāṇḍavas are your slaves, they should have immediately joined with you in fighting against the Gandharvas. That they failed to do so is a grievous fault on their part! "My dear Duryodhana, it is not uncommon that a great hero first of all crushes his enemy and then later on is put into difficulty. If, at that time, he is rescued by his own warriors, then what is so surprising? You are lamenting unnecessarily. The Pāṇḍavas had been vanquished by us previously, but they did not give up their lives. Why then should you think of doing so? Indeed, if you were to fast until death, others will simply ridicule you and your name will become infamous. Therefore, please give up your grief. After all, very soon the memory of your defeat will be all but forgotten."

However, Duryodhana was unmoved by Karṇa's words, and he did not even attempt to reply. Duryodhana could not tolerate an insult, and thus
he remained firmly seated, determined to fast until death. Then, hoping to encourage him, Śakuni said, "O King, why should you foolishly let all of the wealth, opulence and power which you possess go to waste? Why lament uselessly? If you feel so obliged to Yudhiṣṭhīra, then establish friendship with him. Give him back the one-half of the kingdom in exchange for the favor which he has shown you."

However, Duryodhana simply became more discouraged after hearing the words of Karṇa and Śakuni. Filled with unbearable shame and utter despair, he looked down and saw Duḥśāsana weeping at his feet. Duryodhana then picked up his brother and smelled his head with affection, but after doing so, he once again begged his associates to return to Hastināpura without him. In response, Karṇa and Śakuni declared, "O King, without you, we shall never be able to return home!"

Still, Duryodhana was undaunted and he next spread kuśa-grass upon the ground. Then, after purifying himself by touching water, he sat down firmly. Dressed in rags, Duryodhana entirely gave up speech and he renounced all other connection with the external world as well. Devoting himself completely to prayer, he was determined to give up his body and thus attain a heavenly destination.

The Daityas and Dānavas had been residing in the regions below the earth ever since they had been defeated by the demigods. Now, having understood the determination of Duryodhana, the demons felt that their mission was being weakened and so they began to perform a particular ritual which would summon the Kaurava king. Then, when the brāhmaṇas poured the libations into the sacred fire, a ghastly-looking goddess emerged from the flames and stood before the demons, awaiting their command with folded hands. The demons ordered her, "Go up to the earth and bring Duryodhana back here into our presence."

In an instant, the goddess went to where Duryodhana was sitting and brought him in his subtle body to the assembly of demons. The Daityas and Dānavas gave Duryodhana a very respectable welcome and after praising him highly they said, "O King, if you commit suicide then it will only go against your self-interest and lead you to a life in hell."

Then, in order to encourage Duryodhana, the demons divulged the mystery of his origin as follows:
"Long ago, we had engaged in the worship of Lord Śiva, and as a result we received you as a benediction. O King, the upper part of your body has been made out of thunderbolts and therefore it is invulnerable to weapons. The lower part of your body was assembled out of flowers by the wife of Lord Śiva and it is therefore capable of captivating any female heart. This is the secret of your celestial origin, and you should also know that many Dānavas have already appeared upon the earth in order to help you to defeat your enemies. In addition, there are other demons who are assigned to possess Bhīṣma, Kṛpa, Droṇa, Karṇa and others so that they will give up all affection for the Pāṇḍavas and thus become very hard-hearted while engaged in battle with them. Therefore, you can rest assured that when Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa come under our influence, they will be able to slay the Pāṇḍavas by dint of their increased prowess.

"O Duryodhana, you should give up your fear of Arjuna, for the soul of Narakāsura will soon take possession of Karṇa so that his prowess will be irresistible. Indra knows about this, and so he will disguise himself as a brāhmaṇa in order to beg for Karṇa’s natural armor and earrings. However, to compensate for this, we have already sent thousands of Daityas and Rākṣasas who will possess the warriors known as Samsaptakas (those who have sworn to either conquer or die; these are the one ākṣauhiṇī of soldiers which were later on given by Kṛṣṇa to Duryodhana). Because of this, they will also be capable of killing Arjuna. My dear Duryodhana, you are our sole refuge and so please give up your despondency and return to Hastināpura in order to rule over the earth." After saying this, the demons embraced Duryodhana just like he was their son and indeed, the Kaurava king became pacified by their assurances. Duryodhana was then carried back to the earth by the goddess who had brought him, and thus he was placed within the body that remained seated, as if fasting until death. When the goddess departed, Duryodhana opened his eyes and it seemed to him that all which he had experienced was just like a dream. Still, within his mind, the Kaurava king was now convinced that he could defeat the Pāṇḍavas with the help of Karṇa and the Samsaptakas, whom he felt to be competent to kill Arjuna. Thereafter, Karṇa became possessed by Narakāsura, and thus he became
much more determined to kill Arjuna, as did the Samsaptakas, whom had come under the control of fierce Rākṣasas. Bhīṣma, Drona and Kṛpa also came under the influence of the Dānavas, and as a result, they also did not feel as affectionate towards the Pāṇḍavas as before. Duryodhana alone could understand what was happening, but he was very careful not to disclose this secret to anyone.

Duryodhana had been summoned by the demons during the night, while all were sleeping. The next morning, Karṇa again went to try and persuade the Kaurava king to rise up and return to Hastināpura. Karṇa first of all embraced Duryodhana and then said, "O King, do not be aggrieved, for I promise you that I will kill Arjuna without fail. In his absence, the Pāṇḍavas will no longer be a stumbling-block on your path to unrivaled enjoyment."

Remembering the words of the demons, Duryodhana immediately threw off all lethargy and got up to begin arraying his army. Then, with a determined heart, he set out, followed by his brothers, Karṇa, and Śakuni. Thereafter, when Duryodhana arrived at Hastināpura he was met by Bhīṣma. When the grandfather heard from the Kaurava king what had taken place, he tried to give him some good advice as follows: "My dear Duryodhana, you should make peace with your cousins, the Pāṇḍavas. Although you are depending upon the strength of Karṇa, you should know that he is not even equal to one-fourth of their prowess. You have already witnessed how Karṇa had to flee for his life from the Gandharvas, whereas Arjuna easily defeated them. How then can you hope to become happy by creating enmity with the sons of Pāṇḍu?"

Duryodhana simply laughed at Bhīṣma's words, however, and then, without even replying, he arrogantly walked away from his grandfather, followed by Karṇa, Śakuni and Duḥśāsana. Bhīṣma certainly felt pained to witness this callous behavior, and while hanging his head down in shame, he also departed. Karṇa then turned to Duryodhana and said, "O King, Bhīṣma always speaks in favor of the Pāṇḍavas and while doing so he takes every opportunity to criticize me in my very presence. My dear Duryodhana, I long to show the old grandfather my real prowess. Therefore, please grant me permission to go out and conquer over all the kings of the earth, just as the Pāṇḍavas had formerly done for the sake of their elder brother."
Duryodhana was very pleased with Karna's proposal and so he unhesitatingly gave him his heart-felt blessings. Preparations were then made, and on an auspicious day, the abhiṣeka of Karna was performed by brāhmaṇas who sang of his glories. Then, at an auspicious moment, Karna cheerfully set out, surrounded by a large army. He first of all attacked the city of Drupada, and after a lengthy battle, he managed to defeat the aged monarch making him pay a large tribute. Then, after defeating innumerable kings in the North and the East, Karna fought with Rukmi in the South. A dreadful battle took place but after some time, Rukmi ceased fighting and exclaimed, "O Karna, I am very pleased to have witnessed your great prowess. I had only opposed you because it was my duty as a kṣatriya to do so. Now, I shall reward you with a large tribute and admit my subordination before King Duryodhana."

Finally, after conquering over all the rulers of the earth, Karna made a triumphant return to Hastinapura, where he was royally received by the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Indeed, after hearing of Karna's exploits, Duryodhana ecstatically exclaimed, "Now I am confident of my ability to defeat the Pāṇḍavas! O Karna, you are my sole refuge! You have given me great honor such as I have never received from Bhīṣma, Droṇa or Kṛpa!"

Duryodhana then took Karna to where Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhāra were seated. Just like a son, Karna bent down and touched Dhṛtarāṣṭra's feet and in turn, the old blind king embraced him with affection. Karna was then dismissed and later on, in private, Duryodhana confided, "O Śūta, ever since Yudhīṣṭhira's performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice, I have had a burning desire to do the same. Now, please help me so that I can fulfill this long-cherished aspiration."

Karna replied, "O King, all the rulers of the earth have already been subdued by me. Therefore, why not summon the brāhmaṇas at once so that preparations for the Rājasūya sacrifice can begin without delay?"

With great eagerness, Duryodhana then called for his head priest. However, when he explained his intention, the brāhmaṇa replied, "My dear king, as long as Yudhīṣṭhira and your father are alive, it will not be possible for you or anyone else in your family to perform the Rājasūya sacrifice. However, there is another similar sacrifice which you can execute. It is called the Vaiṣṇava-yajña because up until now it has only
been performed by Lord Viṣṇu. First of all, have a golden plow made from the tribute which was presented to you by Karṇa. Then, use this plow to construct the sacrificial arena."

Duryodhana agreed to perform the Vaiṣṇava-yajña and thereafter when all preparations were completed, Vidura came and informed the Kaurava king that it was time for him to be installed for its performance. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī, Bhīma, Droṇa, and the other elderly Kurus were all very pleased to see Duryodhana engaged in this way, and swift messengers were sent to invite the great rulers of the earth and distinguished brāhmaṇas. The malicious-minded Duḥṣāsana took the opportunity to send one of the messengers to Dvaitavana in order to invite the Pāṇḍavas. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira received the invitation, he replied to the messenger, "I wish Duryodhana all success. However, I regret that I shall not be able to attend his sacrifice because the period of my vow to live in the forest has not yet come to an end." Bhīma then gave the messenger his reply: "O Duryodhana, you can rest assured that after the end of the thirteenth year we will pour the libations of our wrath into the sacrificial fire of war."

None of the other Pāṇḍavas spoke unpleasantly, however, and when the messenger returned to Hastināpura he related to Duryodhana all that had been said. Thereafter, kings from all over the world began pouring into Hastināpura and Duryodhana instructed Vidura to look after their comfort. At last, when the sacrifice reached its successful completion, Duryodhana gave away immense charity unto the brāhmaṇas and he also presented very costly gifts to all of the kings who had attended. Then, when Duryodhana entered Hastināpura in procession along with his brothers, Karṇa, and Śakuni, many of the citizens praised him highly while showering him with a mixture of fried rice and sandalwood paste. Others, however, who were not in favor of Duryodhana, audibly remarked, "This sacrifice did not equal even a sixteenth part of the Rājasūya-yajña which had been performed by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira! " Duryodhana and his companions could clearly hear such comments and so Karṇa said to assure the king, "Do not worry. After we have slain the Pāṇḍavas in battle, you shall also be able to perform the Rājasūya sacrifice. I have already vowed to kill Arjuna and now I promise that until that time arrives, I will not allow anyone to wash my feet, I will
never enjoy meat, and whoever asks charity from me will receive whatever he requests!"

In response to Karṇa's vow, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra cheered loudly, and because of their implicit faith in him, they felt as if the Pāṇḍavas were already defeated. Meanwhile, after receiving Duryodhana's invitation, the Pāṇḍavas became somewhat anxious. Then, when they heard about Karṇa's vow from spies, and thought about how he had been born with impenetrable armor, the Pāṇḍavas lost all remaining peace of mind. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira especially became filled with a horrible fear, and because of this he began to think about moving away from Dvaitavana. Then, one night, as Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira lay down to rest, some deer appeared before him in a dream. With pitiful voices that were choked with tears, they said, "My dear king, please change your residence, for the deer in this forest have become almost entirely exterminated by you and your brothers. We are among the very few that have survived and if you stay here much longer, we shall also perish."

When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira saw how the deer were standing before him, trembling with fear and addressing him with folded hands, he became very aggrieved on account of compassion. In reply, the king assured the deer that he would move to another forest without delay. Then, when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira awoke the next morning, he informed his brothers about the dream and then said, "Since we have been subsisting upon the deer in the forest for one year and eight months, I think it would be best if we return to Kāmyakavana in order to spend the remaining months of our exile."

Soon thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas departed along with the brāhmaṇas and their numerous servants. However, even after taking up residence at the Kāmyaka forest, the Pāṇḍavas became more restless because the remaining period of their exile was now very short. More and more the Pāṇḍavas dwelt upon their miserable condition of life, and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira especially lamented, for he considered himself to be the sole cause of their sufferings. Due to extreme anxiety, the king could not sleep peacefully at night, and he was continually haunted by remembrances of the fateful gambling match which had forced them into exile.
Then, one day, Śrila Vyāsadeva came to visit the Pāṇḍavas at Kāmyakavana. After being greatly honored by them and seated very comfortably, Vyāsadeva began speaking to his grandsons with tears in his eyes, for he felt great compassion for them:

"My dear sons of Pāṇḍu, you should know that happiness and distress are concomitant factors in this material world. Because of this, a wise person must always expect to experience both conditions of life. You have all performed great austerities here in the forest. You should therefore be confident that these acts have purified your existence and thus will lead you to future happiness. One who lives virtuously throughout his entire life will certainly take birth in the next with a righteous inclination and amongst great prosperity."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O Grandfather, which is more effective and more difficult to execute as well: charity or austerity?"

Vyāsadeva replied, "There is nothing more difficult in this world than to become genuinely charitable. Men have such a strong desire to attain wealth that they are willing to work hard, day and night, in order to obtain it. Indeed, it is practically seen that in the course of striving for economic development, people sometimes risk their very lives. Because of this strong attachment of wealth, it is very difficult for a man to cheerfully part with his hard-earned money by giving it away in charity. Still, it is a fact that if one gives away his rightfully earned wealth to a proper recipient, no matter how small the amount may be, that gift will award him great gain in the next life. In order to illustrate this principle, I shall now relate to you the following history:

There was once a virtuous sage named Mudgala who used to reside at Kurukṣetra. While living the life of a pigeon, he would subsist by picking up the grains which the farmers purposely left in the fields after harvesting them. And yet, in spite of this austere lifestyle, Mudgala managed to entertain guests and perform sacrifices. Actually, the ṛṣi used to live like a pigeon only during two weeks of a month and in this way he collected one droma (small clay pot) of corn. Then, for the remaining two weeks, he would perform sacrifices and distribute the prasādam to guests. Mudgala and his family would eat only after all of his guests were fed. And yet, because of his purity, every time Mudgala distributed food, the quantity would automatically increase enabling him
to feed many hundreds of brāhmaṇas. Even Indra and the other demigods would sometimes come in order to personally accept the prasādam which Mudgala distributed at the conclusion of his sacrifices. Durvāśā Muni was a bald-headed ascetic who used to wander about naked so that he appeared to be just like a madman. Having heard of Mudgala's practices, he came one day to the sage's residence, and while speaking in a very insulting manner, he asked for some food. Mudgala welcomed the hungry Durvāśā and immediately brought him water to wash his mouth and feet. After this, Mudgala supplied very excellent food, and since he was famished, Durvāśā quickly ate up everything. When he saw how the mendicant was frantically devouring all that was put before him, Mudgala hurriedly went and brought more food. At last, after eating everything, Durvāśā Muni went away without even saying a word.

Then, after some time, Durvāśā Muni once again came to Mudgala and requested to be fed. As before, he hungrily gobbled up all that the sage could provide and then silently departed. Indeed, again and again Durvāśā Muni came there, and each time he ate up Mudgala's entire stock of food. Therefore, after the Muni's departure, Mudgala would immediately go out and collect some more food, because nothing remained for his family to eat. In this way, Durvāśā Muni came to Mudgala six times and yet he could not discern even the slightest bit of agitation in the heart of his host. Thus, Durvāśā Muni finally became very pleased and so he praised Mudgala by saying, "O brāhmaṇa, I can see that you are never agitated by hunger, thirst or anger. Therefore, I do not think that there is another person on this earth that is as pure-hearted and charitable as you. Food is the very sustaining force of life and when one is too oppressed by hunger he generally gives up all considerations of virtue and loses all patience as well. Besides this, it is extremely hard for anyone to renounce that which he has gained by honest endeavor. Thus, by your selfless acts of charity, you will surely be able to ascend to heaven in your present body."

Indeed, as Durvāśā Muni was thus speaking, a celestial chariot drawn by swans and cranes suddenly appeared overhead in the sky. A messenger then announced, "O Mudgala, your austerities have at last fructified and so you can ascend to heaven at once."
However, Mudgala replied, "O celestial messenger, kindly tell me what
the residents of heaven are like. What is their goal of life? What kind of
happiness does one enjoy in heaven and what are the disadvantages of
living there? I am only going to decide what to do after hearing the
answers of these questions."
The messenger then said, "My dear brāhmaṇa, you are certainly very
naive, for after obtaining the chance to enjoy celestial bliss, you are still
deliberating whether you want to accept it or not. Only virtuous persons
dwell in heaven, for no atheists or sinners are even allowed to enter
there. In heaven, there is full facility for satisfying every conceivable
desire without the encumbrances of hunger, thirst, fear, old age, diseases,
grief, the necessity for doing work, or any other such repugnant thing.
The residents of heaven have no perspiration or bodily odor, dirt does
not soil their garments and their garlands never fade. There are
innumerable gardens and mountains of indescribable beauty which serve
as the playgrounds for the denizens of heaven. Then, there are even
higher regions which go on increasing in terms of the residents' duration
of life and quality of bliss, up to the topmost planet of Lord Brahmā,
where death takes place only after an almost incalculably long time.
"Of course, there are a few disadvantages also. When one reaches
heaven by dint of his previous pious work, he cannot perform any more
such acts there but can only use up his earned merit by experiencing
heavenly enjoyment. Thus, as soon as his pious credits are nearly
exhausted, such persons fall back down to earth. At the time when one
is just about to fall down from heaven, he becomes overwhelmed with
fear and grief, and his garlands begin to fade. He practically loses
consciousness and then, after taking his birth upon the earth, he finds
life to be very bitter after having enjoyed such a high standard in
heaven. Such a fallen resident of heaven is given a human birth,
however, and so he at least gets the chance to act piously so that he may
one day return to the celestial kingdom."
After hearing all this, Mudgala thought very deeply for awhile. Then,
after bowing down to the celestial messenger, he said, "You may depart
now, for I do not wish to have anything to do with heaven on account of
its defects. Instead, I will search for that region where having once gone,
one never again has to come back to this miserable earth. Indeed, if you
can describe such a place, then I shall be very grateful if you do so."
The messenger then explained, "O brāhmaṇa, above even the abode of
Lord Brahmā is the eternal realm of Lord Viṣṇu, which is called the
parama dhāma of the Parambrahma, the Supreme Personality of
Godhead. Only persons who are completely freed from all material
attachments can go there however, and this state of pure consciousness
is achieved by the perfection of yoga practice."
After hearing this, Mudgala bade the celestial messenger farewell and
thereafter, he began to engage in meditation upon the Supreme Lord,
Viṣṇu. By dint of his spiritual advancement, achieved by practice of
yoga, Mudgala came to accept all material dualities with an equipoised
mind. By seeing pebbles and gold as all the same, Mudgala was liberated
from the life of conditional existence and thus he became indifferent to
the pleasures and pains of this material world. Thus, in a state of purified
consciousness, he eventually gave up his mortal body while meditating
upon the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu, and thus he at once attained to the
Lord's eternal abode, Vaikuṇṭha.
Vyāsadeva then advised Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, do not take
seriously the temporary conditions of happiness and distress, for one
always follows the other. Besides, you can rest assured that because of
your austerities, you will regain your kingdom after the thirteenth year
of exile. Have faith in my words and the power of righteousness, and
thus give up all anxieties once and for all."

After instructing Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira in this way, Śrīla Vyāsadeva
took his leave and departed. Meanwhile, Duryodhana received news of
how the Pāṇḍavas had moved to Kāmyakavana. The Kaurava king
always dreamt of getting an opportunity to harm the Pāṇḍavas, and
indeed, along with Duḥśāsana, Karna and Śakuni he used to spend many
hours devising plans for that purpose. Then, one day, Durvāsā Muni
came to Hastināpura, accompanied by his 10,000 disciples. Duryodhana
and his brothers welcomed the rṣi with great respect and humility and
they attended to his every need just as if they were menial servants.
Durvāsā Muni then continued to reside in Duryodhana's palace for
several days, and the Kaurava king carefully waited upon him around
the clock. Sometimes, Durvāsā would immediately demand his meal,
claiming to be exceedingly hungry. At other times, he would go out to bathe in the river, insisting that food be kept ready for him. Then, he would return late at night and still not eat anything. Then again, sometimes Durvāsā would come home unexpectedly and immediately demand that food be supplied. And, sometimes he would awaken in the middle of the night, insisting that he be fed without delay. Then, when the food was brought before him, he would complain about it and thus end up eating nothing. In this way, Durvāsā Muni tested Duryodhana again and again. At last, when the ṛṣi found that in spite of his eccentric behavior, Duryodhana did not become angry or even annoyed, Durvāsā Muni became very pleased and announced, "My dear king, I will award you a benediction, provided that it is not opposed to the principles of religion."

Duryodhana had been waiting for this opportunity, and indeed the boon that he would ask for had already been decided by him in consultation with Karna, Śakuni and Duḥśāsana. Duryodhana thus happily replied, "O best of ṛṣis, as you may know, King Yudhiṣṭhira is now living in the forest along with his brothers. I wish that you and your disciples would pay him a visit just at the time when Draupadī has finished eating and everyone has laid down to take rest."

Durvāsā gave his consent and then, after his departure, Duryodhana and Karna began to rejoice, thinking that they had successfully plunged the Pāṇḍavas into an ocean of danger on account of the ṛṣi's impending wrath. Then, one day soon thereafter, when Durvāsā Muni ascertained that Draupadī had already taken her meal and was resting, he came to Kāmyakavana, surrounded by his 10,000 disciples. Upon seeing the arrival of this most illustrious guest, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers quickly got up in order to greet him. Then, after welcoming Durvāsā Muni and worshipping him with the utmost respect, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira requested, "O great sage, please go now along with your disciples and take bath and perform your noontime religious duties. Upon your return here you can sit down and enjoy your meal."

Durvāsā Muni then left for the riverside, confident that the king would not be able to provide him and his entourage with the promised feast. When Draupadī came to understand the awkward situation, she became exceedingly anxious. Then, in utter hopelessness, she began to take
shelter of Lord Kṛṣṇa while fervently praying, "My dear Lord, kindly protect me from this danger, just as You formerly saved me from the hands of the wicked Duḥśāsana!"

Lord Kṛṣṇa is the omniscient Supreme Personality of Godhead, and He had appeared upon the earth in order to deliver the pious and annihilate the miscreants. As soon as Lord Kṛṣṇa understood Draupadi's plight, He jumped up from Rukmīni's bed, and after leaving His sleeping wife, He instantly appeared before the aggrieved Draupadi. Upon seeing Lord Kṛṣṇa before her, Draupadi joyfully bowed down and then began to explain about the arrival of Durvāśa Muni and the precarious situation which it created for her and her husbands. After hearing Draupadi's anxious plea, Lord Kṛṣṇa simply smiled and said, "I am also feeling very hungry. Therefore, please give Me something to eat without delay."

Draupadi was already agitated with anxiety and upon hearing these unexpected words, she became even more perplexed. With tears in her eyes, she replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, there is no food remaining in the copper vessel which was given to me by the Sun-god, for I have already taken my meal."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then smilingly said, "My dear Draupadi, I am famished. Therefore, this is no time for you to joke with Me. Just bring the pot here, and let Me see for Myself."

Draupadi hastily went and brought the copper pot for Kṛṣṇa to see. The Lord took it in His hands, and upon close inspection, He found that there was a grain of rice and a tiny piece of vegetable stuck to the rim. Lord Kṛṣṇa then picked up these two morsels, and after eating them, He said, "I hope that the Lord of all sacrifices becomes satisfied by this offering!"

Then, turning to Bhīma, Lord Kṛṣṇa ordered, "My dear cousin, go now and invite your guests to come here and take their lunch."

Meanwhile, it so happened that as Durvāśa Muni and his disciples were bathing in the river they suddenly found that their bellies had become completely full. Thus, as they proceeded to come out of the water, the rāṣis simply stared at one another in disbelief. The disciples then asked their guru, "O Master, what should we do now? Yudhiṣṭhira has certainly prepared a big feast for us, and yet, we suddenly find ourselves filled up to the neck so that we cannot even think of taking another bite!"
Durvāśa Muni replied, "We have certainly committed a great offense by making the king prepare a big feast when we will not at all be able to eat it. If we go back and refuse the meal, then the angry glances of the Pāṇḍavas may very well burn us all to ashes. I know that Yudhiṣṭhira has become very powerful as a result of his severe austerities. In addition, he is a pure devotee of the Lord, and I have become very fearful in dealing with such exalted souls because of my past experiences. Therefore, let us run away from this place as quickly as possible and never again dare to set our eyes upon the Pāṇḍavas."

After hearing these words of their guru, Durvāśa's 10,000 disciples began to run away in all directions out of fear of the Pāṇḍavas. Thus, when Bhīma arrived at the river side in order to summon his guests, they were already long gone. Bhīma searched for Durvāśa Muni and his disciples everywhere, and then some local rṣis informed him of how they had fled the scene. Bhīma then returned home and when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira heard about what had happened, he began to wait for Durvāśa's arrival in great anxiety, for he knew very well of the rṣi's cunning behavior.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Bhīma, this is the way that Durvāśa Muni tests his hosts. Indeed, he may turn up in the middle of the night and demand his meal just to trick us."

When Lord Kṛṣṇa saw how the Pāṇḍavas were in so much anxiety, He told Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, when I heard Draupadi's anxious pleas, I immediately came here and arranged things so that Durvāśa Muni will not dare to return. Therefore, you can all rest at ease and now, with your permission, I shall return to Dvārakā."

The Pāṇḍavas felt great relief upon hearing Lord Kṛṣṇa's words, for they had absolute faith in Him. As unalloyed devotees, the Pāṇḍavas glorified their Lord and well-wishing friend by saying, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, You are just like a boat that carries drowning persons to shore. Without Your assurance of protection, we would feel as if we were drowning in the vast ocean of material existence!"

Lord Kṛṣṇa departed and then, one day thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas went to search for food in the forest, leaving Draupadī alone at home. At that time, the king of Sindhu, the son of Vṛddhakṣatra named Jayadratha, happened to pass through the Kāmyaka forest. The king was on his way
to visit Mahārāja Śālva in the hopes of marrying his daughter, and thus he was dressed in the best royal fashion. When he saw the Pāṇḍavas' cottage, Jayadratha decided to halt there, and as he came closer, he saw Draupadī standing in the doorway. Indeed, whoever happened to see Draupadī considered her to be just like a goddess and thus Jayadratha's entourage came and stood before her with folded hands. Jayadratha, however, became overwhelmed by lust after seeing Draupadī's splendid beauty and thus he began to conceive of evil intentions. Addressing his companion, Prince Koṭiśaśya, Jayadratha said, "My dear friend, if I could only have this beautiful woman, then there would be no need for any other marriage. Indeed, I want to take her back to my kingdom right away. Therefore, go to her now and find out who she is as well as the identity of her husband."

Koṭiśaśya got down from his chariot and after approaching Draupadī he first of all introduced himself and then pointed out Jayadratha and the other kings that were accompanying him, such as Kṣemankara, a king of the Trigartas. Then, in response to Koṭiśaśya's inquiries, Draupadī said, "My dear sir, generally, it is considered improper for a woman to speak directly with any man other than her husband. However, since I am alone here, I shall answer all of your questions. I am the daughter of Mahārāja Drupada and my name is Kṛṣṇā. My five husbands are the sons of Pāṇḍu and they are not present here now because they have gone out to hunt. You may all get down from your chariots and wait here awhile, for when the Pāṇḍavas return they will be very happy to receive you."

After saying this, Draupadī entered her cottage and Koṭiśaśya went back and related the contents of their conversation to Jayadratha. Jayadratha then said, "I have become so completely captivated by Draupadī's exquisite beauty that all other women now appear to me as no better than monkeys!"

Understanding very well his friend's condition, the wicked Koṭiśaśya suggested, "My dear Jayadratha, you should simply take Draupadī back to your capital by force. After all, there is no one here who can stop you."

Being desperate on account of the onslaught of Cupid's arrows, Jayadratha entered the Pāṇḍavas' cottage along with six other men. Coming before Draupadī, he first of all inquired about her welfare and that of her husbands. Draupadī politely responded by inquiring about
Jayadratha's welfare and then she gave him water for washing his feet. Draupadi also supplied the Sindhi king fifty animals for feeding his entourage, and assured him that her husbands would provide more upon their return. Jayadratha then thanked Draupadi for her hospitality and said, "O most beautiful one, please get up onto my chariot. Accept me as your husband and then enjoy life happily in my kingdom, surrounded by royal opulence! An intelligent woman will follow her husband in prosperity but then reject him when he falls into adversity. Just see what a miserable life you are now living here in the forest along with the Pândavas! Use your intelligence and come with me!"

Draupadi was shocked to hear this, and her face became red with rage. After stepping back from Jayadratha, she began to chastise him by warning, "You wicked wretch, if you lay your sinful hands upon me, then it will result in your own destruction!"

Jayadratha replied, "I am far superior to the Pândavas and so I am not at all afraid! Now, come with me, lovely one. Give up this false pretension of righteousness."

Draupadi then declared, "With Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as my protectors, I have no fear of even Indra and all of the demigods, and so what to speak of a lowly human being like you!"

Draupadi could understand that Jayadratha was about to grab her and so she shouted, "You wretch! Do not pollute me with your repulsive touch!"

Draupadi then called out for Dhaumya with great alarm but Jayadratha immediately grabbed hold of her upper garment. Draupadi responded by pushing Jayadratha backwards, and as a result, the Sindhi king stumbled and fell to the ground. The enraged king quickly got up, however, and this time he seized Draupadi with great force and began to drag her toward his chariot. Dhaumya then appeared there and as Draupadi offered him obeisances as best she could, he warned Jayadratha, "O King, rest assured that you will meet with your destruction at the hands of the Pândavas!"

Jayadratha then took Draupadi up onto his chariot and departed, while Dhaumya followed him from behind. Meanwhile, after having separated while hunting, the Pândavas once again met. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could see in the distance how the birds and animals were being agitated by some unknown cause. This indicated that intruders must have
entered the forest and thus Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra anxiously said, "My
dear brothers, I think that we had better return to our cottage at once
for my heart is burning with grief."
As the Pāṇḍavas rushed back home, riding upon their chariots, they
observed a jackal howling ominously on their left side and so Mahārāja
Yudhiṣṭhīra exclaimed, "This must indicate that the Kurus have once
again come here to attack us!"
When the Pāṇḍavas arrived at their cottage, they found their
maidservant Dhātreyikā weeping and so Indrasena quickly got down
from the driver's seat of Yudhiṣṭhīra's chariot and questioned her. Then,
while wiping away her tears, Dhātreyikā explained, "Alas, Draupadī has
been forcibly carried away by Jayadratha. Hurry, because the wicked
king could not have gone very far!"
The Pāṇḍavas quickly set out on the path indicated by the maidservant,
and while breathing heavily in anger, they twanged their bows
menacingly. Soon, the Pāṇḍavas spotted the cloud of dust which was
being raised by Jayadratha's army and when they came even closer, they
saw Dhaumya in the midst of the infantry soldiers. After causing their
priest to turn back, the Pāṇḍavas swooped down upon Jayadratha just
like hawks and when they saw Draupadī upon his chariot, their wrath
blazed up just like fire. The Pāṇḍavas then challenged Jayadratha,
saying, "O wretched king, stop and fight!" and upon hearing this, the
king of the Sindhus lost heart. Turning to Draupadī, Jayadratha said,
"Point out to me your five husbands by name."
In reply, Draupadī taunted, "You fool, since you are about to die, what is
the use of such information?"
Still, Draupadī proceeded to describe the Pāṇḍavas, just to intimidate
her captor and meanwhile, Jayadratha's army began to panic. As the
Pāṇḍavas attacked the leading chariot fighters, Kōṭiśāśya had numerous
warriors surround Jayadratha for his protection. The Pāṇḍavas
proceeded to slaughter the enemy soldiers by the hundreds but then, one
of the Trigartas suddenly got down from his chariot and killed
Yudhiṣṭhīra's four horses. With a crescent shaped arrow, Yudhiṣṭhīra
quickly killed that Trigarta, and then, along with Indrasena, he got up
onto Sahadeva's chariot.
At this time, another Trigarta named Suratha began dragging Nakula's
chariot with his huge elephant. Undaunted, Nakula jumped to the ground, sword and shield in hand. Then, as Suratha urged his elephant forward in order to crush him, Nakula dexterously cut off its head, causing the giant beast to fall down dead, crushing to death Suratha in the process. Bhīma then beheaded Koṭiśāya's driver, and while the chariot was thus careening about unguided, he killed the prince with a dart.

Meanwhile, after Arjuna had killed many of the leading warriors, Jayadratha became overwhelmed with fear. Then, taking advantage of the confused state of affairs caused by the raging battle, the Sindhi king put down Draupadī and began to flee in great haste. Soon thereafter, Yudhīṣṭhīra saw Draupadī along with Dhaumya, and so he put her onto Sahadeva's chariot. At this time, Bhīma was exterminating the enemy soldiers, but when Arjuna saw that Jayadratha had fled, he restrained his brother, saying, "What is the use of killing others when the object of our wrath has already escaped?"

Bhīma then turned to Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra and said, "Please take Draupadī back to our cottage while I follow Jayadratha. Even if he tries to take shelter in heaven or in hell, I shall give him his just reward!"

Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra replied, "My dear brother, Jayadratha should not be killed, for he is the husband of our cousin-sister Duṣalā. If he were to be slain, then the news of his death would bring great pain to our aunt, Gāndhārī."

Yudhīṣṭhīra's display of mildness made Draupadī highly enraged, however, and with great indignation she prodded Bhīma and Arjuna by saying, "Jayadratha must be killed! A man who kidnaps one's wife should never be forgiven, even if he begs for mercy!"

At this, Bhīma and Arjuna quickly set out, following Jayadratha's trail, while Yudhīṣṭhīra returned home with Draupadī, Dhaumya and the twins. Upon his arrival, the king saw that many rṣis had gathered at the cottage and were grievously lamenting. Thus, when they saw that Draupadī had returned safe and sound, the sages joyfully welcomed her. Meanwhile, when Jayadratha finally came into view, Arjuna killed his horses from a great distance. Getting down from his disabled chariot, the terrified king of the Sindhus began to flee on foot and so Bhīma and Arjuna also dismounted and ran after him. Although Arjuna repeatedly
challenged Jayadratha to stand and fight, the coward did not even dare to look back but kept on running at great speed. Bhīma then caught up with Jayadratha and after seizing him by the hair, he picked him up over his head and smashed him onto the ground. Bhīma then grabbed Jayadratha by the head and began to violently knock him around until he at last lost consciousness. At this point, Bhīma desisted, and then, when Jayadratha came to his senses and tried to get up, Bhīma kicked him in the head. Then, while pressing his knee against Jayadratha's chest, Bhīma pounded him again and again with his fists until he once again lost consciousness. At this point, Arjuna forbade Bhīma to beat Jayadratha any further by reminding him of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's order. At this, Bhīma reluctantly desisted but with a disgusted tone of voice he declared, "How unfortunate it is that I have to cater to Yudhiṣṭhira's overflowing mercy and your childish sense of morality!" Bhīma then took a crescent-shaped arrow and shaved off Jayadratha's hair in such a way as to leave five unsightly tufts here and there. Jayadratha remained silent all the while and then Bhīma told him, "If you want to remain alive, then you will have to go to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and declare that you are his slave."

Jayadratha agreed and so, after binding him up in chains, Bhīma and Arjuna put him onto their chariot and started for home. After arriving at their cottage, when Bhīma handed over Jayadratha, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira smiled and said, "My dear brother, you can set him free now."

Bhīma replied, "First you should go and inform Draupadī that Jayadratha has become your slave."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Bhīma, if you have any regard for me at all, then just release Jayadratha as I have ordered."

Draupadī had come there, and in deference to Yudhiṣṭhira's feelings, she also urged Bhīma to release Jayadratha. Finally, when Bhīma let him go, Jayadratha came and bowed down his head before Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira as well as the rṣis who were seated nearby. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O King, you are free to go now wherever you like, but let me warn you never to again act in such an abominable way."

Jayadratha then departed with his head hung down in shame. Going to the banks of the Gaṅgā at the place where it leaves the mountains and
begins to wind along the plains, Jayadratha began the execution of severe austerities for the purpose of gaining the favor of Lord Śiva. After some time, Lord Śiva, who is also known as Āśutoṣa, mercifully appeared before Jayadratha. The king of Sind worshipped the lord with a glad heart and then begged, "O best of all demigods, kindly benedict me in such a way that I shall one day be able to defeat all five Pāṇḍavas in battle."

However, Lord Śiva replied, "My dear king, this is not possible, for the Pāṇḍavas are invincible. However, I shall enable you to check them, with the exception of Arjuna, at a very crucial time in a future war. Arjuna is not an ordinary human being. He is Nara, the associate of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Nārāyaṇa. For this reason, even I am incapable of enabling you to impede him on the battlefield. My dear Jayadratha, you have certainly pleased me by your worship and austerities, but you should know that Lord Viṣṇu is the Supreme Lord above all others, including myself. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the original Viṣṇu, the cause of all causes, and the source of all incarnations within the universe. He has now appeared in the Yadu dynasty and because He has become the friend and protector of the Pāṇḍavas, they are unslayable. I am also an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, and you can rest assured that I will enable you to gain a temporary victory over four of the Pāṇḍavas and thereafter attain an exalted destination after death."

Having said this, Lord Śiva then departed, along with Pārvatī and his dwarfish and hunchbacked followers, and Jayadratha also returned to his capital. After the rescue of Draupadī, the Pāṇḍavas sat down amongst the exalted åñīs who accompanied them. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then addressed Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi as follows:

"O great sage, there is a doubt in my mind which I would like you to dispel. Our dear wife Draupadī had a superhuman birth because she appeared directly from the sacrificial fire, and, throughout her entire life, she has been sinless. How then has she become afflicted with so much misfortune? How could she have been carried away by the wicked and sinful Jayadratha? O best of åñīs, I consider myself to be the root cause of all these sufferings. Have you ever heard of anyone who was more unfortunate than myself?"

Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi replied, "My dear king, you should not feel sorry for
yourself. Even Lord Viṣṇu in His human-like incarnation as Lord Rāmacandra had to suffer the miseries of exile to the forest and the kidnapping of his wife by the evil Rāvaṇa."

Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi is a great authority on the Rāmāyaṇa and thereafter, he narrated unto the Pāṇḍavas all of the pastimes of Lord Rāmacandra. At the conclusion he urged Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, do not become overly aggrieved because of your present condition of life. Rest assured that with the help of your allies you will be able to vanquish your enemies at the end of the thirteenth year of exile."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Rṣi, I do not lament so much for the loss of my kingdom, but I feel very sorry to see how poor Draupadī has to suffer. Do you know of any woman in the past who had to undergo so many miseries?"

In reply, Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi narrated the following story:

There was once a king of the Madras named Aśvapati. This virtuous ruler looked after the welfare of all the living entities within his kingdom and thus he was greatly loved by all the citizens. However, in his old age, Aśvapati greatly lamented because he had never received any children. Finally, he commenced the performance of great austerities while worshipping Śāvitrī, the wife of Lord Brahmā (who is called Gāyatrī). After undergoing penances for eighteen years, Aśvapati gained the favor of this goddess and thus she appeared before him from out of his sacrificial fire. The astonished king worshipped Śāvitrī with great veneration. Then, when she requested him to accept a benediction that would not be contrary to virtue, Mahārāja Aśvapati replied, "My motive for performing austerities is that I want to attain the highest degree of righteousness. Therefore, O Goddess, I beg you to award me with many sons who are worthy of taking birth in my royal dynasty."

Śāvitrī replied, "O King, I already knew about your purpose and I have consulted with Lord Brahmā about the matter. It has been ordained by him that a daughter will soon be born to you. You should not be disappointed by this, however. Instead, know for certain that this is an expression of Lord Brahmā's great favor upon you."

After saying this, Śāvitrī vanished from sight and thereafter, the king returned to his capital and resumed ruling over his subjects. In due
course of time, Aśvapati's first queen became pregnant, and when the baby girl was born, the king named her Sāvitrī. This girl grew up to be just like a second Lakṣmī and thus everyone thought that she must be a celestial goddess who had descended upon the earth. However, because everyone considered her to be just like a deity, no one dared to ask for her hand in marriage. Then, one day, when Sāvitrī came before him, Aśvapati became very sad to see that she had already attained the age of puberty. Since no one had come forward to request her hand in marriage the king considered the situation very carefully and then said, "My dear daughter, you should select a husband whom you yourself feel to be your equal in terms of beauty and good qualifications. When you have found the man of your choice then notify me and I shall make all necessary arrangements. My dear Sāvitrī, the father who does not give away his daughter in marriage by the time she has come of age; the husband who does not have sexual intercourse with his wife at her time of conception; and the son who does not take care of his mother after his father has passed away; these persons come to grief."

Sāvitrī bashfully bowed down before her father and then Aśvapati called for his ministers and commanded them to accompany her. Thereafter, Sāvitrī got up onto a golden chariot and started out for the forest in order to visit the āśramas of the āśis who resided there. While traveling to numerous sacred places of pilgrimage, Sāvitrī distributed much charity to the brahmanas and at the same time she searched for a man who could become her suitable husband.

Then one day, as Aśvapati was seated in the royal court along with the great sage, Nārada Muni, Sāvitrī returned home from her wanderings. Nārada Muni then inquired, "O King, where has your daughter been? Now that she has come of age, why haven't you bestowed her upon a suitable husband?"

Aśvapati replied, "O Nārada, Sāvitrī went to the forest in order to search for a qualified husband and so now we shall see if she has selected someone."

Aśvapati then inquired from his daughter, and in reply she said, "My dear father, among the Śālavas there is a king named Dyumatsena who became blind. Taking advantage of this, an enemy dwelling within the kingdom usurped his royal throne. Dyumatsena then took his wife and
baby and returned to the forest in order to perform austerities. That son, named Satyavān, has now grown up and he is fit for becoming my husband."

When Nārada Muni heard this he exclaimed, "Alas! You have made a great mistake by choosing Satyavān!"

With great surprise, Açvapati inquired, "O great sage, why do you say this? Please describe Satyavān to me for I cannot imagine that my daughter would choose someone of low character!"

Nārada then explained, "O King, in his youth, this prince took great delight in horses and so he used to draw pictures and make clay models of them. Because of this he also received the name Citrasva. Satyavān is certainly a reservoir of all good qualities, and he is also very kind, powerful and handsome."

Açvapati was very curious to find out why Nārada Muni considered Satyavān to be a bad choice for his daughter, since he was describing him in such exalted terms. Nārada then explained to the king, "Unfortunately, Satyavān has one irreparable defect which overshadows all of his glorious attributes. Just one year from this very day, he will die by the will of Destiny."

Upon hearing this, Açvapati told Sāvitrī, "My dear daughter, go out once again and choose another husband."

However, Sāvitrī replied, "Oh no! I have already selected Satyavān as my husband! Thus, there is no question of altering my decision by choosing someone else."

Nārada Muni then said, "My dear king, your daughter's determination is fixed and it will not waver under any circumstance. Besides, there is also no one else who is as qualified as Satyavān. I therefore think that this marriage should take place."

Açvapati accepted Nārada Muni as his spiritual master and so he immediately gave his consent. Nārada Muni then departed through the airways and the king began to make preparations for leaving to the forest. Thereafter, on an auspicious day, Açvapati set out, accompanied by his daughter, his ministers, and some brāhmaṇas. When he arrived at the hermitage of Dyumatsena, which was situated within a sacred forest, Açvapati got down from his chariot and approached the blind king on foot, followed by his priests. Dyumatsena was seated upon kuśa-grass
beneath a large tree. When he understood that Āśvapati had come to see him, he received his guest very respectfully by offering him *arghya* as well as a cow in charity. Then, after Āśvapati was seated, Dyumatsena inquired about his purpose in coming to the forest. Without wasting time, Āśvapati disclosed how he wanted to offer his daughter to Satyavān in marriage. In response, Dyumatsena expressed his doubts as to whether Sāvitri would be happy while living an austere life in the forest. However, when Āśvapati gave him strong assurances in this regard, the matter was settled and the marriage took place soon thereafter.

Āśvapati then returned to his kingdom, and, after the departure of her father, Sāvitri took off her valuable clothes and ornaments and put on a simple red cloth and tree-bark. By her service, attitude and humility, Sāvitri soon became the favorite of all the forest dwellers. She especially pleased Satyavān by her sweet speech, mild temperament, skill in performing duties, and by the indications of love which she exhibited to him in private. And yet, Sāvitri was always filled with sorrow, for she could not forget the prophetic words of Nārada Muni, which she never disclosed to anyone. Finally, the time which Nārada had indicated drew near, and thus Sāvitri began to anxiously count the days. Three days before Satyavān's destined demise, Sāvitri began to fast. Then, the night preceding that fateful day was passed by her in great anguish. When the sun finally rose the next morning, Sāvitri thought, "Today is the day which I have long been dreading."

After performing her morning duties, Sāvitri went to offer her respects unto the *brāhmaṇas* and her in-laws. All the while she fervently absorbed her mind in praying unto the Supreme Lord, and at the same time the *brāhmaṇas* pronounced various benedictions upon her such as, "O blessed one, may you never become a widow."

Satyavān's mother and father begged Sāvitri to eat, but she told them that she would do so only after the day had come to an end. Satyavān then took his axe upon his shoulder and began to leave for the forest as usual in order to collect wood for the sacrificial fire. This time, however, Sāvitri quickly approached him and begged, "O Lord, please do not go without me today."

Satyavān replied, "My dear one, you have never before ventured into the
forest, even in my company. However, if you are insistent, then you can come with me provided that my mother and father give their permission."

Sāvitri then approached Dyumatsena and said, "My dear father-in-law, I would like to go with Satyavān into the forest today, for I have not even left this hermitage once during the year that I have resided here."

Dyumatsena readily gave his permission and then commented, "My dear daughter-in-law, during the whole time which you have dwelt here, this is the first thing that you have ever requested from me."

Sāvitri then went with her husband, and as they walked along the forest path, Satyavān pointed out to her the various features of the beautiful scenery. At heart, Sāvitri was very pained but she still tried to keep a cheerful countenance. Satyavān then collected some fruit and cut branches from the trees. Due to his hard labor, Satyavān had been perspiring heavily, and then, his whole body began to ache. Finally, he told Sāvitri, "My head hurts so much that it feels like it is being pierced by a hundred darts. Indeed, my entire body aches, and I do not think that I can even remain standing much longer. Therefore, I am going to lay down and sleep for awhile."

While remembering the words of Nārada, Sāvitri sat down on the ground and placed Satyavān's head upon her lap. Then, as her husband's final moment arrived, Sāvitri saw a huge person with dark complexion arrive before her. He had reddish eyes, he was dressed in red, and he wore a golden crown upon his head. Carrying a noose in his hands, this person was most dreadful to behold. Sāvitri gently placed her husband's head upon the ground, and then, with a trembling heart, she stood up and inquired, "My dear sir, what is it that you intend to do?"

The man replied, "I am Yamarāja, the lord of death. Because of your austerities and the great devotion which you have for your husband, I have personally appeared here. Now, I shall bind Satyavān with my noose and then take him to my abode."

Sāvitri then said, "I have heard that it is your agents who come in order to take away human beings at the time of death. Why have you personally come here to take my husband?"

Yamarāja explained, "O blessed one, due to Satyavān's greatness, he does
not deserve to be dragged away by my ghastly servants. It is for this reason that I have come here myself."

After saying this, Yamarāja forcibly pulled out from Satyavān's body a person about the size of a thumb. When the body thus became devoid of life, it lost all of its former luster and became repugnant to behold. Then, with the subtle coverings (mind, intelligence, and false ego) of Satyavān's soul tightly bound up with his subtle ropes, Yamarāja proceeded toward the South. Sāvitrī set out to follow the lord of death, and she was able to do so by dint of the power of her austerities and her chastity, combined with the mercy of Yamarāja himself. Still, Yamarāja repeatedly urged Sāvitrī by saying, "O virtuous lady, please desist! Instead of uselessly following me, go back and perform the funeral ceremonies for your dead husband. There is no need to accompany Satyavān any longer, for you have already fulfilled all of your obligations toward him."

Sāvitrī replied, "I shall always follow my husband, whether he goes of his own accord or is forced to do so by another. My dear Yamarāja, it is commonly understood that friendship is established when two persons have taken seven steps together. Therefore, if you do not mind, I shall say something to you."

Yamarāja nodded in consent, and so Sāvitrī began to discourse on the subject of morality. She then concluded by saying, "Simply to pass through the four stages of life: brahmacarya, gṛhastha, vānaprastha and sannyāsa, does not, in and of itself, constitute virtue. It is the perfect fulfillment of anyone of these āśramas that actually awards one tangible merit. Since I have attained the result of virtue in one of the āśramas (household life), I have no desire to pass on to the next (renounced life)."

Yamarāja became very pleased upon hearing these well-spoken words, and so he told Sāvitrī, "O pious woman, I shall grant you any benediction, with the exception of bringing your dead husband back to life."

Sāvitrī then requested, "May my father-in-law's sight be restored, and may he become as strong as the sun or fire."

Yamarāja granted this boon and then said, "My dear Sāvitrī, you should return home now, for you appear to be very fatigued."
Sāvitri replied, "I can never feel tired in the presence of my husband, and I shall go wherever he goes."

Taking advantage of Yamarāja's willingness to converse with her, Sāvitri continued to speak more enlightening words on the subject of morality. She then concluded by saying, "O Dharmarāja, one is very fortunate just to meet such a highly righteous person such as yourself. What then to speak of obtaining his friendship? Discussions with great personalities can never prove fruitless, and thus their association should always be sought after."

Once again Yamarāja praised Sāvitri for her fine speech and then offered her another benediction with the exception of bringing Satyavān back to life. This time, Sāvitri requested, "May my father-in-law's kingdom be restored to him, and may he never again lose it thereafter."

Yamarāja replied, "Rest assured that Dyumatsena will soon regain his kingdom. Now, since I have fulfilled all of your desires, you should desist from following me further and return home."

Sāvitri then requested, "My dear Lord, please continue listening to me for just a little while longer."

Yamarāja silently consented, and so she continued her discourse on the subject of morality and then concluded by saying, "O Dharmarāja, the highest duty for a pious person is to never injure other living beings by thought, word, or deed. Indeed, a righteous person is merciful even to his enemies when they seek his protection, because he is inclined to show love and charity toward everyone."

Once again Yamarāja praised Sāvitri's words and said, "O blessed one, your speech is just like nectar. Being very pleased, I shall offer you a third benediction, with the exception of bringing your dead husband back to life."

Sāvitri then requested, "My poor father has no sons. Therefore, please allow him to beget 100 sons through his queen Malavi, so that his dynasty will be perpetuated."

Yamarāja replied, "Rest assured that Aśvapati will become endowed with 100 illustrious sons. Now, please return home, for you have come far enough."

Sāvitri then said, "O Dharmarāja, I am very sorry. You see, in the
company of my husband, I lose all concept of time and distance. Therefore, I cannot even understand how far I have come. In fact, my mind has simply become more and more eager to follow Satyavān. Now, as we proceed along, I beg that you continue to listen to my words."

In this way, each time that Sāvitri continued to speak, she would appeal to Yamarāja in a flattering way. Once again, Sāvitri began to discourse on subjects of morality, and she concluded by saying, "O Dharmarāja, goodness and purity of heart are the only things which one can possess that inspire true confidence in others. For this reason, it is practically seen that the masses of people rely upon those persons whom they consider to be highly virtuous."

Yamarāja once again praised Sāvitri's words and then said, "O noble lady, you may take from me a fourth benediction, except the life of Satyavān, and after doing so, please depart for home."

Sāvitri then requested, "May 100 sons, produced from the semen of Satyavān, be born from my womb for the perpetuation of his dynasty."

Yamarāja granted Sāvitri's wish and then pleaded with her to return home. However, Sāvitri simply continued to describe the glories of righteousness and at last, Yamarāja declared, "O blessed lady, the more I listen to your words of wisdom, the more respect I gain for you. Therefore, I shall reward you with one last benediction."

This time, Sāvitri replied, "You have already given me the boon of having 100 sons. As you well know, this is impossible without having sexual union with my husband, and so you must bring Satyavān back to life now in order to make good your previous promise. O Lord, please restore my husband to life, for without him, I have no more interest in living, even if it were to be in heaven."

At this, Yamarāja finally relented by releasing the subtle body of Satyavān from his noose. He then said, "My dear Sāvitri, your husband will rise up to become even more strong and healthy, and he will live with you for 400 years. Indeed, Satyavān will achieve great fame in this world. You can also rest assured that the other benedictions which I had awarded you will become manifest in due course of time."

After saying this, Yamarāja returned to his abode, and Sāvitri went back to where her husband's lifeless and lusterless corpse was laying in the
forest. Sāvitrī sat down with Satyavān’s head upon her lap, and at that moment, he began to regain consciousness. Then, when Satyavān opened his eyes, he looked up at Sāvitrī with great affection, just as if he had returned home after a long trip abroad. Satyavān then exclaimed, "I have slept for such a long time! My dear, why didn’t you awaken me earlier? In my dream, I saw a fearful person who was trying to drag me. Where is he now?"

Sāvitrī replied, "You have certainly slept for a long time! Now, please get up for night has already fallen. That person whom you saw was Yamarāja the lord of death but fortunately he has now departed."

Satyavān stood up, and he began to recount his experience as follows: "My dear one, while engaged in cutting wood, I felt a horrible pain in my head, and so I was forced to lay down. Then, while sleeping, I saw an effulgent person come before me. Sāvitrī, what has happened? If you know the truth, then please tell me. Was I dreaming or was all of this a reality?"

Sāvitrī replied, "My dear husband, I will tell you everything in the morning. Now, we should hurry home, for the forest is full of wild beasts and Rākṣasas, and your parents must be very anxious on our account."

Satyavān then said, "We shall not be able to trace our way back home in the dark," and so Sāvitrī suggested, "There was a small forest fire nearby, and I can see how one of the trees is still burning. I can bring some fire to keep us warm, and then, after spending the night here, we can return in the light of the next morning."

However, Satyavān thought about his mother and his poor blind father and then replied, "O Sāvitrī, my parents often become very aggrieved if I return home even a minute late! Therefore, I cannot bear to think of the anxiety which I would be causing them by sleeping here tonight in the forest. Therefore, we must somehow try and return home right away."

Thus, they set out, with Sāvitrī supporting Satyavān by putting her right arm around his waist and his left arm upon her shoulder. By habit, Satyavān was able to discern the correct path, even in the dark, and as the moon rose above the eastern horizon, they proceeded on confidently.

Meanwhile, Dyumatsena had miraculously regained his eyesight, and
along with his wife Āśīvya, he began to search for Satyavān in the neighboring āśramas. However, when the old couple could not find Satyavān and Sāvitrī anywhere, they became highly mortified and continued their search in the surrounding forests. Whenever they heard even the slightest sound, they would keep still and think, "Here comes Satyavān and Sāvitrī."

Finally, Dyumatsena and Āśīvya, became so distressed that they began frantically rushing about here and there like madmen while lamenting piteously. The local ṛṣis then came to comfort them. After bringing them home, these sages began to narrate the histories of the bygone kings in order to divert the couple's mind from their grief. Still, Dyumatsena and Āśīvya continued to lament grievously, and so an elderly brahmaṇa named Suvarcas assured them, saying, "There is no doubt that due to Sāvitrī's piety, Satyavān is alive and well."

Gautama Ṛṣi then declared, "By dint of my severe austerities, I can understand the activities of others. Therefore, I can confidently assure you that your son is unharmed."

Many other ṛṣis confirmed Gautama's words, and so Dyumatsena and his wife became somewhat pacified. Then, later on that night, Satyavān and Sāvitrī returned, and thus there was a joyful and tearful reunion.

Thereafter, when everyone sat down together, the ṛṣis inquired, "O Satyavān, what is it that caused your delay? We are confident that you would never give your aged parents so much anxiety without sufficient reason."

Satyavān replied, "O Ṛṣis, after cutting wood in the forest, my whole body began to ache, and I felt a terrible pain in my head. Indeed, I could no longer stand up and so I had to rest for a long while. It is for this reason that I have come home so late."

Gautama Ṛṣi then said, "Actually, Satyavān does not understand the real reason for his delay, and why his father's vision was miraculously restored. Perhaps Sāvitrī can explain all of this properly."

Sāvitrī then said, "O brahmaṇas, before my marriage, Nārada Muni had predicted that Satyavān would die after exactly one year, and that destined day was yesterday. It is for this reason that I insisted upon accompanying my husband to the forest. When Satyavān became ill, he lost consciousness, and then Yamarāja himself came there to drag him
away. I followed my husband, however, and by pleasing Yamarāja with my speech, I received five benedictions from him: that my father-in-law would regain both his sight and his kingdom, that my father would receive 100 sons, that I would also receive 100 sons from Satyavān, and that Satyavān would be revived and thereafter enjoy life with me for 400 more years. It was for the welfare of my husband that I began fasting three days ago and thus performed the vow called Triratra.

After hearing this, the local sages praised Sāvitrī highly for rescuing her relatives from their various distressed conditions of life. The rṣis then retired to their hermitages, and the next morning, after performing their religious duties, they once again assembled. In front of Dyumatsena they began to glorify Sāvitrī again and again, as if they could not find the limit of satiation. Just at that time, some people arrived from the kingdom of Śālva and informed Dyumatsena, "O King, your enemy who had usurped the throne has been killed by his own minister. Now, all of the citizens implore you to return home in order to resume your rule over them, in spite of your blindness."

When these people learned that Dyumatsena had miraculously regained his vision, they became struck with wonder. Dyumatsena then worshipped all of the rṣis, and after taking their permission, he set out for the kingdom of Śālva along with Satyavān and Sāvitrī. Upon his arrival, Dyumatsena was installed upon the throne, and at the same time, Satyavān was made the heir-apparent. Soon thereafter, Aśvapati’s queen, rV1alavi, gave birth to 100 sons, and so did Sāvitrī in due course of time.

Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi then said, "My dear king, just as Sāvitrī was delivered from her distressed condition of life to one of great fortune, so will Draupadī when the time is ripe."

After hearing Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi’s discourse, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira felt great relief from his anxieties. King Janamejaya had previously heard about Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira’s fear of Karna and how it would be relieved by an act of Indra. At this point, he inquired about this topic and so Vaiśampāyana Ṛṣi narrated the following incident:

At the beginning of the Pāṇḍavas’ thirteenth year of exile, Indra decided to go and beg for Karna’s impenetrable armor and earrings.
Sûrya could understand Indra's intention, and so one night he appeared to Karna in a dream, assuming the form of a handsome brâhmaṇa. After being respectfully received by Karna, Sûrya said, "My dear son, Indra knows that you never refuse to give in charity whatever is demanded of you. Therefore, he is going to disguise himself as a brâhmaṇa and then come and beg you for your armor and earrings. I know that you have made a vow, but this time you must refuse. Somehow or other, pacify Indra with sweet words and then send him on his way. Your armor and earrings were produced from nectar and as long as you possess them, no one will be capable of slaying you in battle. Without these celestial ornaments however, you will surely be vanquished."

Karna then inquired, "O brâhmaṇa, since you are my well-wisher, please disclose your true identity." The brâhmaṇa replied, "My dear son, I am Vivasvân, the sun god. Therefore, out of regard for me, you should follow my advice."

Karna then respectfully explained, "O Lord, it is my great vow to give anything away to the brâhmaṇas upon request, and thus I do not want to be discouraged in this matter. Even if Indra comes to me in the guise of a brâhmaṇa, I will gladly give him my armor and earrings. I know that by that act I shall secure eternal fame whereas Indra will gain only infamy. O Sûrya, I know that the acts of giving charity to the brâhmaṇas and dying upon the battlefield not only bestow one great renown in this world, but also a heavenly destination in the next. Therefore, my heart is more inclined to securing an exalted reputation than mere opulence or a long duration of life."

Sûrya then argued, "My dear son, to give up your life for the sake of earning fame is useless. A dead man cannot enjoy the fame which he has eamed any more than a corpse can enjoy the garland that is hanging around his neck. Because you are my devotee, I want to protect you. Besides, in this connection there is a great mystery of which even the demigods are not aware. For now, you should simply follow my advice. Then, later on, you will understand the full significance of everything. When Indra approaches you, you must give him various excuses in response to his repeated requests for your armor and earrings. Somehow or other, you must dissuade him from his determination, for with these celestial ornaments, Arjuna will never be able to kill you in battle."
However, Karṇa replied, "O Lord, you must forgive me for what I have to say. Although you are my only worshipable deity and are more dear to me than my wives, sons or even my very self, I cannot allow myself to be dissuaded from my vow. I am more afraid of untruthfulness toward the brāhmaṇas than death itself. Indeed, I would cheerfully give up my life if a brāhmaṇa so requested. Besides, even if Indra takes away my armor and earrings, I am confident that I shall be able to defeat Arjuna by dint of my prowess and the weapons of Paraśurāma which I had received from Droṇācārya."

Upon seeing that Karṇa's determination was fixed, Śūrya finally gave him the following advice: "My dear son, the king of heaven is going to come and beg for your armor and earrings simply because he wants Arjuna to slay you. Therefore if you must give away these celestial ornaments, then you should do so only on the condition that Indra will give you his infallible dart in return."

Having said this, Śūrya suddenly vanished from Karṇa's sight. Then, the next morning, as he prayed before the deity of the sun god, Karṇa related to him the dream of the previous night. The Śūrya deity smilingly replied, "My dear son, this so-called dream was an actual fact, for it was I who had indeed appeared before you in your sleep."

Thereafter, Karṇa always expected the arrival of Indra in the guise of a brāhmaṇa.

King Janamejaya then inquired from Vaiśampāyana, "O Rṣi, what was the secret about Karṇa which Śūrya had alluded to in the dream?"

In reply, Vaiśampāyana then narrated the following story:

Once upon a time, Durvāsā Muni came to the palace of Mahārāja Kuntibhoja, and after approaching the monarch, he said, "O King, I would like to reside here for some time and accept food from you as alms, provided that no one is allowed to act in such a way as to displease me."

Kuntibhoja welcomed the very tall, handsome, and effulgent rṣi and then said, "O great sage, do not worry on this account. My daughter Pṛthā will see to all of your needs and I am confident that you shall become pleased by her impeccable service."

Kuntibhoja then called for his daughter and informed her, "My dear Pṛthā, I have accepted the great sage, Durvāsā, as a guest in my house,
and I am relying upon your aptitude for rendering service unto the brāhmaṇas. I have assured the ṛṣī that there will never be the slightest cause for his displeasure, and so you must make sure that my words do not prove false. My dear daughter, I warn you that if this brāhmaṇa becomes angry, then his wrath can destroy my entire dynasty. Because of your gentle nature, not even one servant in this palace is displeased with you and thus I consider you to be quite fit for waiting upon Durvāsā Muni. This ṛṣī is known to be very irritable and so you must painstakingly renounce all sense of self-importance and arrogance, which are the natural qualities of girls at the age of puberty."

Kuntī replied, "My dear father, rest assured that even though this brāhmaṇa may return home at any time during the day or night, I shall serve him so meticulously that he will never experience the slightest cause for dissatisfaction."

Kuntibhoja then embraced his daughter, and after instructing her about all kinds of particulars with regards to her duties, he presented her to Durvāsā Muni. The king then requested, "O great sage, please forgive any fault which this child may commit due to her tender age, brāhmaṇas never become angry at old men, children, and other ṛṣis, even if they are offended by them."

In turn, Durvāsā Muni gave the king his assurances in this regard. Kuntibhoja then showed him to the excellent rooms that had been made ready for his stay. Thereafter, Pṛthā began to serve Durvāsā Muni as if he were God and thus the ṛṣī became highly pleased with her. Sometimes, Durvāsā would go out after informing Kuntī that he would not return until the next morning. Then, he would unexpectedly enter the palace that very evening, or even during the middle of the night. In spite of this, Pṛthā was always ready, twenty-four hours a day, to serve him with sumptuous food and drink. Indeed, the ṛṣī found that the quality of her service improved as the days went by. Even when Durvāsā Muni would chastise her for some slight fault in the arrangements which she had made, Kuntī would never respond by saying anything the least bit disagreeable. When, at the most unlikely times, Durvāsā Muni would demand, "Bring me food!" Pṛthā would soon appear, saying, "My dear sir, everything is ready."

Every morning and evening, Kuntibhoja would call for his daughter and
inquire whether his guest was satisfied or not. Prthâ would always reply that Durvâsâ Muni was very satisfied, and thus the king would also become very pleased. Finally, after residing in Kuntibhoja's palace for one full year, when Durvâsâ Muni could not find a single real fault on Prthâ’s part, he called for her and said, "My dear princess, I have become highly satisfied by your faultless behavior and selfless service. I want you to take a benediction from me that win enable your fame to surpass that of all other women in this world."

Kuntî replied, "My dear brâhmaṇa, since you and my father are both pleased with me, I feel that I have already received ample benedictions." Durvâsâ Muni then said, "O blessed one, all of the trouble that you have undergone for my sake cannot go in vain! Therefore, I shall give you a confidential mantra which will enable you to call for any of the great demigods. As soon as you think of a particular demigod and recite this mantra, he will submissively appear before you, whether he is actually willing to do so or not."

Being afraid of incurring Durvâsâ's displeasure, Prthâ could not refuse his gift. After delivering the mantra to her, Durvâsâ Muni went to take his leave from Kuntibhoja, and indeed, after receiving the king's permission, he instantly vanished from that spot. Mahârâja Kuntibhoja was thus struck with wonder and from that time onward, he regarded his daughter with the greatest respect, for he could understand that she had successfully pleased Durvâsâ Muni after passing a most rigorous examination.

After the departure of Durvâsâ Muni, Kuntî began to wonder about the power of the mantra which she had received. Thus, at last, she curiously decided to test it, and at that moment, she could feel that her time for conception had arrived for the very first time. Being a pure and innocent unmarried girl, Kuntî blushed with shame and then, while seated upon her bed, she happened to gaze up at the morning sun. Indeed, Kuntî became highly fascinated while admiring the sun's splendor, and just then, she received celestial vision which enabled her to directly see its presiding deity, Sûrya. Then, since she was already under the sway of temptation to test the mantra which had been given to her by Durvâsâ Muni, Kuntî did so in order to summon the sun god.
As soon as he was invoked, Sūrya expanded himself by his power of yoga so that he could continue to distribute heat and light throughout the universe and at the same time appear before Kuntī. Sūrya then said unto the awe-struck Prthā, "O lovely princess, I am ready to execute your command."

Kuntī became highly mortified upon seeing the grave result of her impulsive act. Thus, she pleaded, "O lord of the sun, please forgive me for my childish curiosity! I am exceedingly sorry to have inconvenienced you in this way. Now, please return to your heavenly abode and do not be angry with me."

Sūrya replied, "My dear princess, I gave you the celestial vision to behold me. At that time you had desired to receive a child from me and so I shall now impregnate you for that purpose. O lovely-limbed girl, do not hesitate to surrender unto me. Otherwise, I shall become very angry. Indeed, I will not only curse you and your father, but the foolish Durvāṣā for giving you this mantra without considering your bad character! My dear Prthā, just look up into the sky and see how all of the demigods, headed by Indra, are watching us. If they see that I have been deceived by you, they will take great pleasure in deriding me for my foolishness!"

Because of her endowed celestial vision, when Kuntī looked up into the sky, she could actually see how all of the demigods had assembled there, and thus she became very frightened and ashamed. She then begged Sūrya, "O Lord, please return to where you have come from and give up the sinful intention of sexually polluting me. I am an unmarried girl and thus my most important religious duty is to keep my virginity intact. Besides, only the father has the right to give away the body of his unmarried daughter. Thus, for that reason as well, I am powerless to fulfill your request."

Sūrya responded, "O Princess, because you are an innocent child, I am treating you very mildly. However, the fact remains that if I leave here without having united with you, I will become the laughing stock of heaven. Therefore, you must yield to me, and in return, I promise to give you a son who is as glorious and powerful as myself. In this way, you shall earn praise and fame throughout the entire world.

Again and again Kuntī tried to dissuade Sūrya, but he would not relent. On the one hand she thought, "How can I save myself from the horrible
disgrace of having sexual intercourse before marriage? And, on the other hand she thought, "How can I save my father and Durvāśā Muni from a terrible curse?" Thus, Prthā became stupefied and simply remained silent for a long time, being unable to decide what to do. Then, finally, in a voice that was laden with bashfulness, Kuntī requested, "O Sun-god, I am very afraid of performing a sinful act which will degrade the reputation of my family. Therefore, please somehow enable me to remain a chaste virgin, in spite of my connection with you. If you are able to do this and if you consider your union with me to be virtuous, then I shall submit to you."

Sūrya then said, "O Princess, it is the nature of virgin girls to desire any man whom she sees, and thus she has been given the name 'kanyā' which is derived from the root-word 'kāma'. If you act according to your nature and thus fulfill my request, then it is not really sinful. Still, because you are so fearful, I shall enable you to remain a virgin, in spite of having sexual intercourse with me. And, you can rest assured that the child who is born from our union will become highly illustrious within this world."

Kuntī knew that there was no turning back now, and so she further requested, "O Lord, may the son who is born to me have natural earrings and impenetrable armor, and may he possess incomparable strength."

Sūrya consented and then said, "These natural ornaments have already been given to me by Aditi, and they were produced from celestial nectar."

Kuntī thus agreed to accept the sun-god's embraces and so he first of all fixed his mind in trance and then entered her body subtly, placing within her womb a portion of his very self. On account of the sudden surge of Sūrya's intense energy, Kuntī fell down almost unconscious onto her bed. Then, having thus gratified himself, Sūrya once again assured Kuntī that her virginity had remained intact, and after doing so, he departed for his abode.

Since Kuntī lived in the inner apartments of the palace where only women were allowed, she was able to conceal her pregnancy from others, confiding only in her personal maidservant. Then, in due course of time, Kuntī gave birth to a baby boy who was adorned with dazzling natural
armor and earrings. After consulting with her maidservant, Kunti reluctantly put the baby into a wicker-basket whose surface had been covered with layers of wax. After placing the baby upon fine soft sheets and putting in the basket various auspicious articles which were meant for his protection, Kunti left the palace in the dead of night, along with her maidservant, and went to the banks of the Aśva river. With tears in her eyes, Kunti placed the basket upon the water. Then, after setting it adrift, she broke down and cried bitterly while offering her blessings for the child's well-being. Kunti prayed to the demigods for her baby's protection and then she began to think of the fortunate woman who would hopefully be able to adopt him. Thereafter, Kunti returned home as the basket continued to flow on and on downstream.

From the Aśva, the basket flowed into the River Gharmanvati, which then carried it into the Yamunā. From the Yamunā, the basket flowed into the Gaṅgā and was then carried past the city of Campā, which was ruled over by a sūta king. Due to the will of Destiny and the power of the armor and earrings which had been made from nectar, the tiny baby remained alive and well all the while.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra had a sūta friend named Adhiratha who lived at Campā, and his wife's name was Rādhā. Although Rādhā was practically unparalleled on earth in terms of beauty, he never gave birth to a son. It so happened that as the basket was floating by on the waves of the Gaṅgā, Adhiratha and Rādhā came there to bathe. When Rādhā happened to see the floating basket, the river brought it nearby, and so with great curiosity she had someone go and fetch it. Because the basket was sealed tightly, she then called for her husband, and so, with the help of some tools, Adhiratha was at last able to open it. Inside, the surprised couple saw a baby boy who was brilliant, just like the sun. When they saw that the child was adorned with natural golden earrings and armor, they were struck with wonder and so looked at him with wide open eyes and gaping mouths. Adhiratha then took the baby upon his lap and said, "My dear wife, this child must have been sent to us from heaven by the demigods."

In this way, Adhiratha handed over the baby to Rādhā, and they gave him the name Vasusena. By means of spies, Kunti soon learned that her child had been adopted by a charioteer within the Aṅga kingdom.
Thereafter, Adhiratha and Rādhā gave birth to other sons, but as Vasusena grew up, he exhibited exceptional prowess and so he was sent to Hastināpura in order to learn the use of weapons under the direction of Dronācārya. There, when Karṇa saw Arjuna for the first time, a natural envious attitude of rivalry sprang up within his heart and that jealousy continued throughout his entire life.

It was Karṇa's life-long practice to worship the sun god after he had taken his noontime bath. At that time, he would unfailingly give to the brāhmaṇas whatever they would ask for in charity, for that was his determined vow. One day, Indra appeared before Karṇa just at that time. Disguised as a brāhmaṇa, the king of heaven said, "O pious sūta’s son, I have come here in order to ask for some charity. Therefore, please do not disappoint me."

Karṇa welcomed the so-called brāhmaṇa and then inquired, "What is it that you wish to take from me: gold, land, beautiful women, or something else?"

Indra replied, "I do not want any such thing. If you are actually true to your vow, then I request you to cut off your natural armor and earrings and present them to me. It is this gift which I desire more than anything else."

Karṇa then said, "O brāhmaṇa, I am able to give you land, cows, jewels, or anything else which you may aspire to possess. However, I am unwilling to give my natural armor and earrings."

However, in spite of being repeatedly urged to do so by Karṇa, Indra would not accept anything else. Finally, Karṇa said, "My dear brāhmaṇa, I am willing to present you with the entire earth after killing anyone who dares to oppose me. But, I cannot give you this armor and earrings for they were born along with my body, after having been produced from heavenly nectar. Without them, I would no longer be unconquerable on the battlefield."

Indra remained adamant, and so Karṇa next said, "O brāhmaṇa, I recognize that you are actually the king of heaven in disguise. Considering your exalted position, it is you who should offer me a benediction, and not beg for one like this! O Indra, besides, your request does not befit your noble character since it may bring about my
destruction and make you infamous as well. Still, if you are insistent, then I shall give you my armor and earrings, but only in exchange for a particular benediction which I desire."
Indra replied, "O Karna, I am aware that Surya knew of my purpose and I can understand that he must have revealed it to you. Now, if you are willing to part with your earrings and ornaments, then I shall in turn grant you the benediction of your choice."
At this, Karna joyfully said, "O king of heaven, give me your invincible dart that destroys countless numbers of warriors each time that it is released."
Indra then mentally summoned that dart and informed Karna, "O Suta's son, I will give you this awesome weapon which kills hundreds of demons upon being discharged, and then returns obediently to my hand. In your hands, however, it shall only slay one very powerful enemy, and after doing so, it will return to me."
Karna replied, "O Indra, this is acceptable to me, for I only desire to kill one particular person whom I am afraid of."
Indra then smilingly said, "O Karna, this dart will certainly kill one great warrior, but the person whom you are thinking of is being personally protected by Lord Narayana, the Supreme Personality of Godhead."
Still, Karna agreed to the exchange and then requested, "O king of heaven, after I cut off these ornaments, please arrange that there will be no unsightly scars to mar the beauty of my body."
Indra replied, "Do not worry, for after cutting off your armor and earrings, you will find that your body has become even more attractive. Indeed, your complexion will assume a wonderful golden hue, and you will feel great energy, like that of the sun. Now, I must warn you of one more thing. If this infallible dart is used at a time when your life is not in danger, or when you have other suitable weapons at your disposal, then it will kill you instead of your enemy."
Karna then received the blazing dart from the hands of Indra, and thereafter he began to cut off his natural armor with one of his own weapons. Although this certainly must have been extremely painful, Karna did not display even the slightest bit of emotion in his facial expression. When the demigods who had assembled in the sky in order to watch this crucial event saw Karna cutting off his armor, they began
to shout with joy and beat upon their celestial drums. Flowers then rained down from the sky upon Karṇa as he handed over the armor to Indra while it was still dripping with blood. Karṇa then cut off his earrings and presented them as well.

After receiving this charity from Karṇa, Indra considered himself to have successfully saved Arjuna's life and thus he departed for his heavenly abode in great happiness. When news of Karṇa's gift to Indra reached the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, they became exceedingly disheartened. On the other hand, when the Pāṇḍavas received this news, they immediately became very joyful due to experiencing a great sense of relief and encouragement.

Before Indra's visit to Karṇa, the Pāṇḍavas had left Kāmyakavana after hearing the discourses of Märkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi. Accompanied by the brāhmaṇas as well as the many servants who tended to their extensive possessions, which included innumerable cows, the Pāṇḍavas returned to Dvaitavana. Then, one day, a deer came to the āśrama of a ṛṣi who was living nearby, and while running here and there, the two sticks which the brāhmaṇa used to ignite his sacrificial fire became entangled in its antlers. The deer then quickly darted away, carrying the sticks with it, and when the brāhmaṇa saw this he became very anxious, thinking that he would not be able to perform his next fire sacrifice at the proper time. The aggrieved ṛṣi then approached the Pāṇḍavas, and after explaining to them his misfortune, he requested them to follow the deer's footprints in order to retrieve his sticks. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became very concerned after hearing the brāhmaṇa's plea, and so he immediately took up his bow and set out along with his brothers.

The Pāṇḍavas soon caught up with the deer and they could see how the string connecting the fire-sticks was entangled in its antlers. And yet, astonishingly enough, they were unable to pierce the deer with their arrows, in spite of trying to do so again and again. The Pāṇḍavas frantically pursued the deer a great distance but then, all of a sudden, it mysteriously disappeared from view. Thus, after such a long chase, the Pāṇḍavas felt extremely disappointed, especially since they were very eager to render this service to the brāhmaṇa. The Pāṇḍavas had become very tired and afflicted by hunger and thirst and so when they arrived at
a large banyan tree within the forest they sat down there to rest. With a
voice that betrayed his great frustration, Nakula then asked Mahārāja
Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, how is it that we have failed? Never before have
we been obstructed in achieving our virtuous objectives!"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear brother, there is no limit to
misery, and the root cause of a particular suffering is impossible for an
ordinary person to ascertain. Suffering and prosperity are certainly
awarded by the lord of justice, Yamarāja, according to one's virtuous and
sinful acts. Just how we have been put into this disgraceful position,
however, is beyond my power of understanding."
Indeed, the Pāṇḍavas continued to condemn themselves and all of them
thought, "It is surely because of our passivity at the time when we lost
our kingdom and Draupadī was dragged into the assembly of Kurus that
we are experiencing this present embarrassment."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear Nakula, please climb up into
this tree and see if you can see any reservoir of water nearby. I feel like I
am practically dying of thirst!"
After climbing into the tree, Nakula called down, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, I can
see a grove of those trees which grow by the side of lakes, and I can hear
the cries of water-cranes. Therefore, there must be some reservoir of
water nearby."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then ordered Nakula to get down from the tree
and go fill up their quivers with water. Nakula thus set out, and after
walking a short distance, he came to a nice lake which was filled with
crystal-clear water and which was inhabited by numerous cranes.
However, just as he was about to quench his thirst, a voice from the sky
announced, "You cannot drink here without permission, for this lake
belongs to me! Only if you are able to answer my questions will I allow
you to take any water."
And yet, Nakula was so thirsty that he disregarded this warning, and
after drinking a little water, he fell down dead upon the shore.
Meanwhile, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became very anxious when Nakula
did not return after a reasonable amount of time. Therefore, he ordered
Sahadeva, "Go quickly and bring back Nakula along with some water in
our quivers."
Soon thereafter, when Sahadeva arrived at the lake, he saw his dead
brother lying there and thus he became overwhelmed with intense grief. However, Sahadeva was so thirsty that he first of all approached the water in order to take a drink. As before, the voice from the sky then announced, "You cannot touch this water because this lake belong to me! Only if you answer my questions will I give you permission to drink." Sahadeva also ignored this warning and as soon as he took the first sip, he fell down to the ground deprived of life. After some time, when there was no sign of either Nakula or Sahadeva, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira anxiously ordered Arjuna to go and fetch them. Taking up his bow and unsheathing his sword, Arjuna set out, and after a few minutes he approached the lake. Upon seeing his twin brothers lying there dead, Arjuna quickly strung his bow and then looked around intently. Being unable to see any enemy present, however, and since he was overwhelmed by an unbearable thirst, Arjuna went to take a drink, and once again, the voice declared, "You cannot touch this water, for this lake belongs to me! Only if you are able to answer my questions will I give you permission to drink."
In response, Arjuna challenged, "I dare you to visibly come here and forbid me! Do so and I shall give you my answers in the form of deadly arrows!"
Arjuna then took up his bow and began to send forth torrents of arrows into the sky from where the voice had appeared to come. He then paused, and this time the voice said, "There is no need for you to waste your time, energy and arrows in this way. You can only drink the water after answering my questions, and if you do not comply, then you will die just like your brothers."
Still, Arjuna disregarded this warning, and as soon as he drank some water, he fell down dead upon the shore. Meanwhile, when Arjuna did not return after quite some time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira sent Bhīma out to search for his three brothers. When Bhīma arrived at the lake and saw Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva lying down dead upon the ground, he became exceedingly distressed and considered this to have been the work of a Yakṣa or Rākṣasa. In order to prepare himself to fight, Bhīma first of all approached the lake in order to quench his burning thirst. Again, the voice from the sky ordered, "Do not drink this water, for this lake belongs to me! I will only allow you to slake your thirst if you first of
all answer my questions." However, without even bothering to reply, Bhima drank some water, and as soon as he did he fell down dead onto the ground. Meanwhile, Mahäräja Yudhiñöhira waited a long time in great anxiety, and then he set out, his heart burning with grief. While going along the path, the king wondered, "Is this forest under the influence of some magic spell? Is it possible that my brothers could not find any water and so they have wandered off further in order to search for some?"

While speculating in this way, Mahäräja Yudhiñöhira came to the shore of the beautiful lake and there he saw all of his brothers lying upon the ground, bereft of life. His worst fears confirmed, the king began to wail aloud while shedding profuse tears, "How is it possible that Arjuna could die? All of the great demigods had assured me that he would conquer over my enemies and allow me to regain my kingdom."

While merged into an ocean of grief, Mahäräja Yudhiñöhira tried to ascertain the cause of his brothers' deaths. However, he saw that there were no footprints nor any evidence of the use of weapons. Thus, he concluded that his enemy must be extremely formidable. Mahäräja Yudhiñöhira then thought, "Perhaps this is the result of one of Duryodhana's wicked plans! Maybe he has poisoned the water!"

Mahäräja Yudhiñöhira then noticed how his brothers' faces remained unfaded, without the characteristic of deathly pallor. Because of this, the king reasoned that the water could not be poisoned and so he first of all decided to quench his burning thirst before continuing his investigation. Then, as Mahäräja Yudhiñöhira was about to enter into the water in order to refresh himself, he thought, "Only Yamaräja could have killed my brothers in this way."

Just at that moment, the voice from the sky once again announced, "Since this lake belongs to me, you cannot drink the water without first answering my questions! If you ignore my warning and try to drink the water without my permission, then you will become the fifth corpse lying on the ground. I am a crane who lives at this lake, and it is I who killed your brothers."

Mahäräja Yudhiñöhira replied, "Please disclose your real identity for I cannot believe that my heroic brothers could be killed by a mere bird. I
think that you must be one of the principle demigods."
The voice responded, "I am actually a Yakṣa who has taken the form of a crane." Yudhiṣṭhīra then saw before him a huge crane standing upon one leg in the middle of the water. The dazzingly effulgent crane then roared like thunder and informed Yudhiṣṭhīra, "O King, this lake belongs to me. Because your brothers had ignored my warnings by drinking the water without my permission, I killed them. Now, you must first of all answer my questions. Then, you can do as you like."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then replied, "I do not covet this water since it is the property of another. Still, if you so desire, then I shall answer your questions of my own volition."
Thereafter, the Yakṣa posed numerous questions, and Yudhiṣṭhīra answered them all very succinctly as follows:
The Yakṣa asked, "Who is really a helpful companion?" and Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "Steady intelligence is a very good friend who can save one from all dangers."
The Yakṣa asked, "How can one acquire something very great?" and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "One can attain everything desirable by the performance of austerity."
The Yakṣa asked, "What is amṛtā (nectar)?" and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra said, "Milk is just like nectar." The Yakṣa asked, "What friend is bestowed upon a man by the demigods?" Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "The wife is such a companion."
The Yakṣa asked, "What is the best of all possessions?" and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "Knowledge is one's most valuable asset."
The Yakṣa inquired, "What is the best of happiness?" and King Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "Contentment awards one the only true happiness."
The Yakṣa inquired, "For what purpose does one give in charity to the brāhmaṇas, dancers and musicians, servants and the king?" Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "For religious merit, prestige, maintenance and for relieving fear respectively."
The Yakṣa asked, "For what reason are friends forsaken?" and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra said, "It is only because of lust and greed that one forsakes his well-wishers."
The Yakṣa asked, "When is a sacrifice considered to be dead?" Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "A sacrifice is devoid of merit when there are no
gifts given in charity to the brāhmaṇas. Similarly, a kingdom is considered to be extinct when there is no good king."
The Yakṣa inquired, "What is the only food?" Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "The cow is the only food, for the milk which she gives is made into ghee. Ghee is necessary for the performance of sacrifices and it is the sacrifice alone which produces the clouds that makes the rain fall. It is from the rain that the seeds sprout and thus all kinds of foods are produced. Therefore, it should be understood that the cow is the root-cause of all food."
Thereafter, in answer to the Yakṣa's questions, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira defined forgiveness as the endurance of enmity; mercy as wishing for the happiness of all. False pride he defined as thinking of oneself as an independent actor. Laziness means not performing one's duty and real patience is controlling the senses. Atheism is simply defined as ignorance; wickedness means to speak ill of others; and the root of all desire is said to be possessiveness.
The Yakṣa then asked, "What is the king of knowledge?" and Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "The king of education is the attainment of knowledge pertaining to the Supreme Personality of Godhead."
When asked by the Yakṣa, "What is ignorance?" Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "True ignorance consists of not knowing one's constitutional duty."
The Yakṣa asked, "What is the best bath?" and Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "The true bath is to wash the mind dean of all its impurities."
The Yakṣa asked, "What is real charity?" and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "Real charity toward others is to protect them from the onslaughts of material nature."
The Yakṣa asked, "What is the cause of envy?" and Yudhiṣṭhira answered, "Envy is born of grief."
The Yakṣa then inquired, "Since dharma (virtue), artha (profit), kāma (desire) are opposed to each other, how can they exist together harmoniously?"
Yudhiṣṭhira then replied, "These three interests become congenial to each other when one's wife is virtuous."
The Yakṣa asked, "Who is it that is condemned to an everlasting hell?" Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "When a person calls for a poor
brähmaṇa, promising to give him charity, and then upon his arrival, tells him that he has nothing to offer, he goes to an everlasting hell."
The Yakṣa inquired, "What is it that makes one a true brähmaṇa: birth, behavior or learning?"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "It is behavior alone that qualifies one as a true brähmaṇa. Thus, brähmaṇas must be very careful to exhibit exemplary behavior. One whose behavior is faultless will never meet with obstructions on the path of life. Teachers and students alike, who are addicted to sinful habits, should be considered illiterate, even though they may be very learned in the sāstra. Only one who strictly observes religious principles should actually be considered learned. One who is expert in the knowledge of the four Vedas but whose conduct is not proper, is to be considered no better than a śūdra."
The Yakṣa asked, "Who is pleasing?" and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "A person who is accustomed to speaking in a pleasing manner becomes pleasing to all."
Finally, the Yakṣa, who was standing in the middle of the lake in the form of a huge crane, asked four questions of great significance: "Who is truly happy? What is the most wonderful thing? What is the real path to follow in this life? What is the real situation of this material world? (or, in other words, 'What is the news?')"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "One who cooks his own food, who is not a debtor, and who does not have to leave home in order to earn his livelihood is actually happy. The most amazing thing is that even though every day one sees that countless living beings are dying, still, he thinks and acts as if he will remain here forever. The real path of life cannot be ascertained by logic and argument, nor by simply going through the different Vedic literatures. It cannot even be understood by consulting with many learned ṛṣis. The best path is to follow in the footsteps of the pure devotees of the Lord, for they are actual mahājanas whose hearts are the sitting place of the real truth regarding religion. This material world, which is full of ignorance, can be compared to a frying pan. The sun is like the fire and the days and nights are like the fuel. The passing seasons are the stirring ladle, and time is the cook who is frying all living creatures in that pan. This is the real news of what is happening in this miserable material world."
The Yakṣa then congratulated Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira for his enlightening answers and said, "O King, you can now choose one of your brothers whom you wish to be brought back to life."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then selected Nakula and the Yakṣa inquired with great surprise, "How could you choose one of your step-brothers instead of Bhīma and Arjuna who are far more powerful?"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "When one gives up virtue, then it is he himself who is actually lost. The highest virtue is to never give pain to others. I selected Nakula so that both Mādrī and Kuntī would have living sons."
The Yakṣa congratulated Yudhiṣṭhira for his choosing Nakula to live and rewarded him by reviving all the dead brothers. As the Pāṇḍavas came back to life, their hunger and thirst was also mitigated. Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired: "O Yakṣa, what is your real identity? These brothers of mine are practically invincible, yet you have overwhelmed them with your own god-like prowess."
The Yakṣa replied, "O King, actually I am your father, Dharma, the lord of religious principles, and it was I, who, in the form of a deer, stole the brāhmaṇa's wooden sticks so that we would eventually meet. As Lord Dharma, I am the personification of fame, truthfulness, control over the senses, humility, and determination to adopt all things favorable for self-realization in relation to the Supreme Lord. Since I am pleased by your staunch devotion to religious principles, I shall grant any wish that you may desire."
Thereafter, Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja requested three boons from Dharmarāja. First, Yudhiṣṭhira requested that the brāhmaṇa's sacrificial fire may not be disturbed, and for this, Dharma returned the brāhmaṇa's wooden sticks. Secondly, Yudhiṣṭhira requested that the Pāṇḍavas may not be recognized by anyone during their final year of exile. To this, Dharma assured Yudhiṣṭhira that by his grace, no one would be able to identify the Pāṇḍavas, and that they could assume any identity they desired. Finally, Yudhiṣṭhira requested from Dharma that he may conquer over lust, anger, and greed, and that he may be ever-devoted to charity, austerity, and truthfulness. Dharma replied that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira already possessed these qualities and would certainly continue to do so. Thus, after having blessed King Yudhiṣṭhira, Dharma
disappeared. Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas took rest, and after a peaceful sleep, they returned to the brāhmaṇa’s hermitage to return his wooden sticks.

It is said that anyone who has subdued his senses and recites this story about the meeting of King Yudhiṣṭhira and Dharmarāja will live happily with his sons and grandsons for a hundred years. And those who hear this story will never take pleasure in performing sinful activities.

The time had now arrived for the Pāṇḍavas to prepare for their thirteenth year in exile. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira requested the brāhmaṇas who had accompanied them during their exile to grant them permission to leave. Recounting their twelve long years of exile in the forest and Duryodhana's determined hostility towards the Pāṇḍavas, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became overwhelmed with grief and asked the brāhmaṇas if the Pāṇḍavas will ever be restored to their former positions as kings. In response, Dhaumya replied, "O King, rest assured that even powerful demigods like Indra have adopted disguises and even hid in order to vanquish their enemies. Even the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in His many incarnations as Vāmana, Rāmacandra, Hayagrīva, and others, assumes many different forms in order to vanquish His enemies. In the same way, you must now disguise yourselves in order to fulfill your promise to live in the forest for the thirteenth year undetected, and then confront the evilminded sons of Dhrītarāṣṭra."

After Dhaumya encouraged Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira by these words, Bhīma said, "O King, out of obedience and great respect for you, Arjuna has kept his anger in check, and I am constantly subduing Nakula and Sahadeva. As soon as you desire, we shall all unleash our terrible prowess and vanquish all your enemies!"

Thus, after Bhīma encouraged Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira in this way, the brāhmaṇas bestowed their benedictions upon the Pāṇḍavas and took their leave. The Pāṇḍavas, along with Draupadi and Dhaumya, set out from the camp a short distance and then conspired how to conceal their identities during the thirteenth year of their exile.

Following the instructions of Yamarāja, the Pāṇḍavas decided to spend their final year of exile at the kingdom of Virāṭa, the ruler of the Matsyas. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear brothers, in order to
remain unrecognized, we must each assume a different role for engaging in the service of the king."
Arjuna inquired, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, what sort of role do you intend to play?"
The king replied, "I shall act the part of a brāhmaṇa named Kaṅka and present myself before the king as being very skilled at the art of dice-playing. In this way, I will become Virāṭa's courtier (court-jester) and keep him always amused. Bhīma, what sort of role do you want to play?"
Bhīma replied, "I shall introduce myself as a cook named Vallabha, and aside from pleasing the king by preparing sumptuous food, I will entertain him by defeating all challengers at wrestling."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next asked Arjuna, the foremost of all warriors and bowmen, what role he planned to assume. Arjuna replied, "My dear brothers, I shall declare myself to be a eunuch named Brhannala. I shall put on the dress of a woman and wear a long braid of hair and earrings. I shall cover with bangles the scars on my arms which have been caused by the constant striking of my bowstring. With an air of gaiety I shall entertain the king and his consorts by telling funny stories and I will also teach the palace ladies the arts of music and dance."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next questioned Nakula, who then said, "My dear brothers, I will use the name Granthika and become the keeper of the king's horses."
Then, in reply to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's inquiries, Sahadeva said, "I shall introduce myself as Tantripal, and I will offer to take care of the king's cows."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then asked Draupādi, "O princess of Paṇcāla, I wonder what sort of service you shall be able to render to the king. You have never been accustomed to perform any womanly work."
Draupādi replied, "My dear husbands, I shall represent myself as a sairindhrī (a maidservant who is expert in hairdressing and other feminine decorations) and in this way I will engage in the service of Virāṭa's queen, Sudeśṇa."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira approved of this role but then warned, "My dear Draupādi, you must never act in such a way as to become the object of attention for lusty men."
It was then declared that the Pāṇḍavas and Draupādi would claim to
have been formerly engaged in the service of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira before his exile to the forest. The king then called together all of those who had accompanied him and said, "My dear Dhaumya, you should take everyone to the kingdom of the Pañcālas and remain there during the next year. The only exception will be Indrasena and the other drivers, for they should take our chariots to Dvāraka so that they will remain under the care of the Yādavas. When questioned, all of you must say, "We have no idea about where the Pāṇḍavas have gone." Now, my dear Dhaumya, please instruct me as to how I can pass through the forthcoming year with the least amount of difficulty."

Dhaumya replied, "O King, I approve of the arrangements which you have devised for remaining incognito, but you must take special care to always protect Draupadī. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, it is very difficult to live with a king. One who does so must strictly act according to the proper etiquette in order to avoid incurring his displeasure. Kings are very sensitive regarding their unrivaled position, and anyone who threatens their supremacy and dignity are never forgiven, even if they happen to be their very own brother. Therefore, one should never dare to advise a king unless he is requested to do so. Instead, one should constantly endeavor to win the king's good graces by means of pleasing speech and frequent praises. One should never display superior abilities in the presence of the king, even if it is done without pride. One should never try to force the king to act in some particular way just to suit one's whims. Instead, one should always follow the king, just like a shadow. A person must never anger the king by disclosing any royal secrets. And, whatever clothing or paraphernalia one receives from the king as a gift, must be kept very carefully and used with great respect."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira praised Dhaumya for this very good advice, and then he requested the ṛṣi to perform all kinds of auspicious rites in preparation for their departure for the matsya kingdom. Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas set off on the long journey, and gradually they passed through many kingdoms. Sometimes, Arjuna had to carry the weary Draupadī while going along the forest path. Finally, when the Pāṇḍavas reached the outskirts of Virāṭa's city, Arjuna put down Draupadī, and then Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired from him, "Where should we hide our weapons? If we keep them with us then the people will certainly become
alarmed. Besides, the famous Gāndīva bow would be recognized, and thus our identities would also be disclosed."

Arjuna replied, "I saw a large śamī tree nearby in a secluded forest which borders on a dreary cemetery. I think that if we hide our weapons in this tree they will remain undiscovered."

The Pāṇḍavas then went to the śamī tree, and after unstringing their bows they put them along with their swords and other weapons. Nakula then climbed up into the tree and hid all of the weapons by tying them to some branches which were densely clustered together. Nakula then took a corpse from the cemetery and hung it in the tree so that the unbearable stench would keep people away. Some cowherds then passed that way, and when they suspiciously asked the Pāṇḍavas what they were doing, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "This is the body of our 180-year-old mother who has just passed away. We have hung it here in this tree because this has always been our family tradition."

The Pāṇḍavas then chose five names of Gandharvas which they could use to call upon each other at times of emergency, and thereafter, they proceeded toward the city. While going along, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to meditate upon Yogamāya (goddess Durgā) who had been born as the younger sister of Lord Kṛṣṇa and then had ascended into the sky when the evil king Kaàsa had tried to dash her upon the stone floor. Aspiring to invoke her mercy, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira praised Yogamāya's glories, and then prayed for her protection. Then, being very pleased by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's worship, the goddess suddenly appeared before the Pāṇḍavas, and her celestial beauty was dazzlingly effulgent. As the wonder-struck Pāṇḍavas stood before her with folded hands, Yogamāya informed Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, you can rest assured that all prosperity will be yours by my grace. Please give up all of your fears, for I guarantee that while residing in the kingdom of the Matsyas you shall never be recognized." After saying this, the goddess disappeared from view, and so the Pāṇḍavas continued on.

Then, before entering the city, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira dressed himself like a brāhmaṇa and took up his golden dice, which were inlaid with emeralds. Carrying the dice in a cloth which he kept slung over his shoulder, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira entered the royal court and came before
Virāṭa. When the king saw the handsome appearance and royal features of the new arrival, he could not believe that he was a brāhmaṇa. Virāṭa thus sent his ministers to find out the visitor's identity and upon being questioned, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "I am a poor brāhmaṇa who has lost everything due to great misfortune. I have come here to the matsya kingdom in the hopes of engaging in the service of the king."

Virāṭa happily accepted the so-called brāhmaṇa, and when he asked more about his identity, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira explained, "My name is Kaṅka, and I am noted for my skill at dice. Formerly, I was engaged in the service of King Yudhiṣṭhira but now, since I am bereft of that service, I have come to your kingdom."

Virāṭa then exclaimed, "O Kaṅka, you appear to be just like a demigod! Therefore, I think that it would be more fitting for you to rule over this kingdom while I remain your subordinate."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "I simply want to display my wisdom and play dice. I have no ambition to become a big ruler. O King, my only request is that while engaged in gambling, I should never be goaded into disputes with lowly persons."

Virāṭa then declared, "My dear brāhmaṇa, do not worry, for I hereby promise to kill or banish from my kingdom anyone who dares to displease you. You shall become my personal associate, and thus I will provide you with all kinds of royal opulence. You will become my trusted minister and shall always accompany me on my chariot. Now, please consider this kingdom to be as good as your own and thus make free use of all its facilities."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was then escorted to his quarters and next, Bhīma arrived at the royal court. He was dressed in black, and he carried a cooking ladle and spoon as well as an unsheathed sword. Upon seeing Bhīma's lion-like strides, his incomparable strength and celestial beauty, Virāṭa thought to himself, "This must be the king of the Gandharvas or perhaps Indra himself, coming here in disguise."

Virāṭa sent his ministers to question the visitor, and in response to their inquiries, Bhīma explained, "My name is Vallabha. Because I am an incomparable cook, I desire employment in the king's kitchen."

Virāṭa then said, "My dear sir, I cannot believe that you are a mere cook, for your appearance is more like that of the king of heaven!" Bhīma
replied, "O King, I was formerly Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's cook, and I am also a wrestler of unrivaled prowess. I shall therefore amuse you by wrestling with lions and elephants while simultaneously pleasing you with the most sumptuous food."

Virāṭa exclaimed, "I am willing to give you my entire kingdom to rule! However, if your desire is to become the royal cook, then you may take charge of my kitchen at once."

Thereafter, Draupadī began to wander about through the city streets, disguised as a sairindhrī and wearing a single cloth that was very costly but which had become ragged and black with dirt. As Draupadī roamed about as if distressed, people approached her and asked, "O unfortunate lady, what is it that you want?"

Draupadī replied, "I simply desire to render some service in exchange for my maintenance."

No one could believe this, however, on account of Draupadī's exquisite beauty and her sweet, cultured speech. Virāṭa's queen Sudeśṇa, the daughter of the king of Kekaya, then happened to see Draupadī as she stood upon the palace terrace. Out of curiosity, Sudeśṇa called down to Draupadī, asking her identity. Then, when Draupadī explained that she was a sairindhrī, the queen could hardly believe it, thinking that the unknown woman could very well be the goddess of fortune herself. Sudeśṇa then said, "O blessed lady, your bodily features seem to indicate that you are an Apsarā or some other heavenly goddess. Your heels are not prominent and your shapely thighs touch one another. I can understand that your intelligence is great because your words are very solemn, although uttered with a voice that is as sweet as a swan's. Your navel is deep, and there is a natural reddish color on your palms, soles and cheeks. Your breasts and hips are very full and rounded, while at the same time your waist is exceptionally thin. There are lines resembling those of the conchshell visible on your neck, and there is no sign of your veins showing from beneath your soft, smooth skin. Your fragrance, which is just like that of a lotus flower, is discernible to me even from this distance, and thus I cannot believe that you are a maidservant."

Draupadī replied, "O Queen, I am not a celestial goddess. I am a sairindhrī who formerly served Draupadī as well as Lord Kṛṣṇa's favorite queen, Satyabhāmā."
Sudeśṇa then said, "O sairindhri, I would be very glad to respectfully keep you as my hair-dresser, but because of your exquisite beauty, King Virāṭa would surely fall in love with you, and thus completely forget about me."

Draupādi replied, "My dear queen, do not worry, because your husband, or any other man, will never be able to come near me since I am being protected by my five powerful Gandharva husbands. Indeed, anyone who tries to make an advance toward me will be immediately killed by them."

Being thus assured, Sudeśṇa agreed to take Draupādi into her household. Draupādi then said, "O Queen, you must also agree to fulfill these two conditions of mine: May I never be made to wash anyone's feet, nor eat the remnants of anyone's food."

Sudeśṇa gave her consent and next, Sahadeva arrived at the king's gośāla, dressed like a cowherd man. When, from a distance, Virāṭa saw Sahadeva's celestial appearance, he sent some men to summon him. Thereafter, when Sahadeva was brought into the royal court, he replied to Virāṭa's inquiries by saying, "O King, I am a vaiṣya named Ariṣṭanemi, although generally I am called Tantripal. Formerly, I engaged in the service of the Pāṇḍavas by taking care of their innumerable cows. However, I am now bereft of that service, and so I have come here to the matsya kingdom."

Virāṭa replied, "My dear sir, I cannot believe this! You must be either a brāhmaṇa or more likely, a kṣatriya who is fit to rule over the entire earth! Therefore, please give up all pretension and disclose to me your real identity."

Sahadeva then displayed his extensive knowledge of cattle, and while doing so he described the art of distinguishing a bull that is capable of making a barren cow conceive, simply by smelling its urine. After hearing all this, the astonished King Virāṭa immediately placed Sahadeva in charge of his 100,000 cows.

Next, a person of imposing size and possessing very handsome and powerful bodily features entered the city gate. Although his strides were like those of an elephant and he shook the very earth, this person's dress and ornaments were that of a woman. Therefore, when Arjuna entered the royal court, Virāṭa was practically struck with wonder and
exclaimed, "You appear to be a great chariot-warrior, and thus I cannot believe that you are a eunuch! My dear sir, I have now become old, and for some time I have desired to renounce my kingdom in order to retire to the forest. Therefore, please allow me to accept you as my son so that I can install you upon the throne for ruling the Matsyas."

Arjuna replied, "O King, I am afraid that you have misjudged my qualifications. My name is Bṛhannala, and because I am very proficient in the arts of singing and dancing, I wish to become the instructor of your daughter, Uttarā. Please do not ask me to relate the circumstances under which I had become a eunuch, for this would be too painful for me."

Virāṭa then said, "I shall certainly accept you as my daughter's teacher, but you appear to be more fit for ruling over the earth." Virāṭa then tested Arjuna's skill in dancing and music, and after consulting with his ministers, the king had his sexual status determined by some young women. When Arjuna was thus found to be genuinely impotent, he was sent to live in the women's apartments of the palace. There, Arjuna began to give instructions to Uttarā, along with her many friends and maidservants, and very quickly he won their heart-felt affections.

Next, Nakula appeared at the royal court, observing the horses as he walked along the road. Upon seeing Nakula, Virāṭa considered him to be just like a demigod, and so he sent some men to summon him. Then, after coming before Virāṭa, Nakula introduced himself by saying, "O King, I am a very expert caretaker of horses, and so I wish to offer my services unto you."

Virāṭa readily consented and then, in answer to the king's inquiries, Nakula explained, "My name is Granthika. Formerly, I was engaged in tending to the horses of King Yudhiṣṭhira. Now, unfortunately, I am bereft of that service, and so I have come here seeking employment."

After hearing this, Virāṭa put all of his horses and charioteers under Nakula's charge. Because Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was very adept at the mysteries of dice, he soon endeared himself to the king as well as the princes and other royal attendants. Indeed, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira would make them all sit down in a row inside the dice-hall, and whatever he won by gambling he would distribute to his brothers and Draupadī. In the same way, Bhīma was able to distribute food, Arjuna got many
valuable clothes from the women, and Sahadeva gave milk products to his brothers and Draupadī. Nakula distributed the ample rewards which Virāṭa gave to him on account of being very pleased with his service, and Draupadī also tried to look after her husbands as best she could.

The Pāṇḍavas thus lived very comfortably in this way, but they were always on the alert, for they were afraid of being discovered, and at the same time, always expecting some danger at the hands of their enemy, Duryodhana. During the fourth month of their stay, a great festival in honor of Lord Brahmā was organized, and so thousands of huge wrestlers assembled at the matsya capital from all over the world in order to display their prowess. Among the visiting wrestlers there was one who towered over all others, and his name was Jīmūta. Thereafter, when this giant challenged the other wrestlers, none of them dared to come before him, being afraid of his immense size and strength. When Virāṭa saw Jīmūta thus strutting proudly around the arena without finding a single combatant, he ordered his cook, Vallabha, to answer the challenge. Although Bhīma was reluctant to exhibit his real strength openly, he did not want to disobey the king's orders. Thus, after offering his respects unto Virāṭa, Bhīma boldly entered the wrestling arena and challenged Jīmūta to fight. As the contest began, both wrestlers exhibited their extraordinary prowess in the hopes of gaining victory. Indeed, as they gradually displayed their various skills and marvelous energy, Bhīma and Jīmūta became highly pleased to find that they had obtained worthy opponents. Thus, the two giants enthusiastically beat each with their fists, they threw each other down onto the ground, and also squeezed one another in their tight embraces. One would grab the other by the legs and begin to whirl him around. Then, after throwing his opponent down he would slap him with the palms of his hands and kick him with his feet and jab him with his knees. In this way, Bhīma and Jīmūta delighted each other as well as the astonished spectators. Finally, Bhīma seized Jīmūta in his arms while letting out a terrible roar. Then, after picking Jīmūta up over his head, Bhīma whirled him around 100 times until he lost consciousness due to the centrifugal force. At last, Bhīma dashed the giant wrestler to the ground, and in this way Jīmūta gave up his precious life. King Virāṭa and the other spectators were
highly amazed upon witnessing Bhima’s extraordinary prowess, and they were very delighted as well. Indeed, the king joyfully presented Vallabha with many valuable gifts as a reward for his heroic accomplishment. Thereafter, some more wrestlers who dared to fight were killed by Bhima, and finally, when there were no more human combatants, Virāṭa had him battle tigers, lions and elephants.

While living at the matsya capital incognito, the Pāṇḍavas used to gratify King Virāṭa in various ways. Sometimes, Bhima would fight with huge lions in the inner apartments of the palace for the pleasure of the ladies. Arjuna entertained the king and palace ladies by his singing and dancing. Nakula showed off his trained horses to the king, and Sahadeva exhibited his well-disciplined bullocks. Being very pleased, Virāṭa bestowed innumerable gifts upon the Pāṇḍavas and yet, Draupadī would still feel great distress to see how her powerful husbands had to render menial service in this way.

After ten months had passed, Virāṭa's commander-in-chief, Kīcaka, happened to see Draupadī one day, and as he continued to gaze at her celestially beautiful features, he became so lusty that he made up his mind to possess her at all costs. Kīcaka happened to be the brother of Sudeśṇa and so, with a heart that burned with desire, he approached her and said, "My dear sister, I could not help but notice your beautiful sairindhrī. Simply by seeing her once, my heart has become completely captivated. Who is this girl? I must have her as my wife without fail. Let her become my master, and I shall provide her with all of the wealth which is at my disposal."

Kīcaka was confident of success, and so after speaking with Sudeśṇa he directly went to Draupadī, like a jackal approaching a lioness, and frankly spoke as follows:

"O fair one, please tell me about yourself, for I have become captivated by your exquisite beauty and sweet speech. All of your bodily features seem to have been created just to impel the lusty desires of men. Your beautifully plump and well-shaped breasts, which do not allow any space to remain between them, resemble in shape lotus-buds, and they appear to be the very whips of Cupid, urging me on. O sweetly smiling one, there is a burning desire within my heart that is increasing my hope to unite with you. Now, please extinguish this blazing fire with the rain
cloud of your loving embraces. Why should you continue to live here in misery as a mere maidservant? Become my wife and enjoy royal opulence just like a queen. I promise you that I shall give up all interest in my old wives in order to become your faithful follower and slave!"

Draupādi first of all replied to Kīcaka politely, hoping to dissuade him peacefully:
"O Sūta's son, since I am of such a low birth, I would never make a suitable match for you. Furthermore, because you are desiring to possess the wife of another, this sinful aspiration should be given up."

However, Kīcaka had completely lost control of his senses due to insatiable lust. Thus, even though he knew very well the dangers of trying to entice someone else's wife, he once again addressed Draupādi with that intent:
"O foremost of beautiful women, you should know that I am the real lord of the matsya kingdom, for it is upon me that everyone depends for protection. It is actually I who am the most handsome, powerful, and opulent person within this kingdom. Therefore, how can you prefer to remain a lowly maidservant when you have the chance of becoming my wife and enjoying my unimagined wealth? My dear, I am fully under the sway of Cupid. I cannot possibly forget about you and thus, for your own sake, you had better yield to me voluntarily."

Although the powerful Kīcaka hoped to intimidate Draupādi in this way, she responded by harshly reproaching him as follows:
"You wretch! Do not foolishly throwaway your life in this manner, for I am being protected by my five invincible Gandharva husbands. If you try to take me by force then they will immediately come here and kill you!"

After being rebuked in this way, Kīcaka became practically mad with lust and rage. Returning to Sudeśña, he implored, "My dear sister, you must act in such a way that your sairindhrī will become my lover. I am practically burning up with desire for her, and so if you do not help me I shall become desperate!"

Sudeśña took pity upon her wretched brother and replied, "My dear Kīcaka, listen to my plan. Procure some wine and then I shall send my sairindhrī to you on the plea of fetching it. In that secluded setting, you should be able to gain her favor."
These words gave Kécaka hope, and after returning home, he collected the finest wine and arranged for a sumptuous feast. Kécaka then sent word to his sister, and she in turn called for Draupadé and ordered, "O sairindhri, please go to my brother's palace and bring me some wine for I am feeling very thirsty."

Draupadé replied, "O Queen, Kícaka is shameless and lusty. You should remember how I had accepted service here on the condition that no man would be allowed to force his intentions upon me. Therefore, please send someone else."

Sudeṣṇa was insistent, however, and while handing Draupadé a golden container she said, "Please give up these nonsensical fears! Rest assured that since you are being sent on my account, there is no chance that my brother will insult you."

At last, Draupadé reluctantly departed, and as he walked through the street, she began to pray for the help of the demigods. Being very afraid, Draupadé hoped that because of her chastity, Kícaka would not be able to harm her. The sun god became compassionate upon Draupadé after hearing her prayers, and so he sent a Rákṣasa to invisibly guard over her. Thereafter, when Kícaka saw that Draupadé had arrived at his palace, he became overjoyed and thought, "She must have regretted how she had foolishly rejected me earlier!" Kícaka then welcomed Draupadé and frankly proposed, "O lovely lady, I am so anxious to accept you as my wife and place before you whatever opulence are at my disposal."

Draupadé calmly replied, "The queen is thirsty, and so she has sent me here to fetch some wine. Now, please give it to me quickly so that I can return to her without delay."

Kícaka then said, "Someone else can deliver the wine" and, without warning, he grabbed hold of Draupadé's right arm. At this, Draupadé harshly rebuked Kícaka, saying, "You sinful wretch! Rest assured that I shall soon have the pleasure of seeing your dead body being dragged along the ground by my husbands!"

Draupadé jerked her arm out of Kícaka's grip, but then, as she tried to run away, he grabbed onto her upper garment. This was intolerable for Draupadé and while breathing heavily and trembling with rage, she forcibly pushed Kícaka backwards, making him fall down on the floor.
Draupadī then started running toward the court of King Virāṭa hoping to take shelter of Yudhiṣṭhīra there. Kīcaka quickly got up and then, while chasing Draupadī, they both came into the presence of the king. The shameless wretch caught Draupadī by the hair, causing her to fall to the ground. Kīcaka then kicked the helpless Draupadī and in response, the invisible Rākṣasa gave Kīcaka such a forceful push that he reeled backwards and also fell down. Both Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhīra were present at this time, and the sight was certainly intolerable for them. Indeed, Bhīma's face became contorted with rage as he ground his teeth, and he furrowed his brow. He was just about to rush at Kīcaka, but Yudhiṣṭhīra forbade him due to fear of their being discovered. Draupadī then got up, and while continuing to weep, she entered the royal court. Then, upon seeing her husbands sitting there complacently, Draupadī became so agrieved and angry that her eyes appeared to be ablaze with fire. The outraged Draupadī then harshly condemned Virāṭa and his ministers for passively allowing her to be kicked in their very presence. However, the king simply replied, "Since I have not yet learned the nature of the dispute between you and Kīcaka, I cannot take any action."

Draupadī then explained everything, and after hearing the story, the ministers greatly condemned Kīcaka and came to console her. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then addressed Draupadī, his brow covered with perspiration on account of repressed anger: "O blessed woman, you should now return to Sudeśṇa's apartment. Even though your Gandharva husbands did not see it fit to immediately come to your aid, they will surely kill the person who has offended you."

At this, Draupadī sarcastically replied, "My husbands are certainly very kind to me. However, since the eldest one is addicted to playing dice, they are open to exploitation at the hands of anyone and everyone!"

With her hair disheveled and her eyes red with anger, Draupadī then ran to Sudeśṇa's quarters. When the queen saw her maidservant agitated and weeping, she inquired about the cause, and so Draupadī related to her all that had happened. Sudeśṇa then said, "O pious lady, do not become overly aggrieved. If you so desire, then I shall even have my wicked brother killed."

Draupadī replied, "O Queen, there is no need for you to bother in this regard, for there are others who will surely slay him."
Draupadî then retired to her own room, and while bathing, she thought, "How can I relieve myself from the unbearable grief which has been caused by this outrage? My only refuge is Bhîma, for he is always ready to satisfy me without considering so-called etiquette and morality."
Having come to this conclusion, Draupadî rose up from her bed during the middle of the night and went to where Bhîma was staying. After entering his room, the intelligent and diplomatic princess of Pañcâla first of all inquired, "Oh! How is it that you can bear to sleep while the person who has insulted me is still living?" There was no response, however, and so Draupadî next embraced the sleeping Bhîma and said, "Get up! You should not remain complacent while the one who has offended your wife goes unpunished!"
Bhîma then woke up with a start and asked, "My dear Draupadî, why have you come here? What is the matter? My dear one, rest assured that I shall deliver you from your unhappiness. Indeed, it is only I who deserve your full confidence in this regard, for it is I alone who have rescued you from all perils."
Poor Draupadî was overburdened by the pressure of having to tolerate her miserable existence, and she thus took this opportunity to give full vent to her pent-up grief. Being exceedingly frustrated on account of her wretched condition, and that of her husbands', Draupadî harshly criticized Yudhiṣṭhira's fondness for dice, considering it to be the cause of all their suffering. Draupadî's heart then softened somewhat, and she continued to lament as follows:
"O Bhîma, I feel such anguish upon seeing how the most virtuous of personalities and the emperor of the entire earth has now been reduced to rendering menial service to another. It is unbearable for me to watch Yudhiṣṭhira acting as a miserable dice-player and to see how you are being forced to act as a lowly cook. When you are ordered to fight with fierce elephants and lions within the palace, I become afraid for your life. Indeed, I almost faint, and when Sudeśna sees this and considers how we had entered the royal service on the same day, she suspects that you are my secret lover. Oh, how painful it is for me to see the foremost of all chariot-warriors and bowmen, Arjuna, who is capable of conquering the whole world, now dressed like a woman with braided
hair, bangles, and earrings. Nakula and Sahadeva are similarly being forced to take such menial positions and what to speak of myself, for I must accept the miserable life of a maidservant. I am only able to maintain my wretched life by clinging to the hope that we shall soon regain our prosperity. However, this is also uncertain, for we are all playthings in the hands of Destiny. Who else could bear to live so miserably, in spite of being surrounded by so many powerful husbands, brothers, sons and other relatives? Look at my blistered hands! These hands would formerly grind sandalwood paste only for my mother-in-law, Kuntī, but now, they must labor for the service of others!"

While showing Bhīma her blistered hands, Draupadī broke down crying, and as she held her hand in his, Bhīma also began to cry. Then, after controlling himself, Bhīma said, "My dear Draupadī, when I saw Kīcaka kick you, I immediately decided to exterminate the entire race of the Matsyas. Being restrained by Yudhiṣṭhira, however, I controlled my anger and thus desisted from doing anything in retaliation. However, I felt that my pent-up rage would burn my body to ashes! Indeed, the very fact that I have not yet taken revenge against Duryodhana, Śakuni, Duḥśāsana and Karna is like a spear which is piercing my heart. Now, my dear Draupadī, you should refrain from criticizing Yudhiṣṭhira so harshly, for if he were to ever hear you speak like this, he would certainly commit suicide. Console yourself by remembering how there were many chaste and glorious women in the past who also had to suffer greatly while following their righteous husbands. Just consider Sītā, the consort of Lord Viṣṇu Himself! You must therefore be patient and wait for the little time that remains to pass."

Draupadī replied, "O Bhīma, it was only due to my extreme frustration that I indulged in criticizing Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira."

Draupadī then explained to Bhīma how she had been repeatedly accosted by Kīcaka, and she concluded by saying, "After this last incident, he will surely try to punish me severely the next time we meet. O my dear husband, please kill the wicked wretch without further delay. Otherwise, if I once again have to endure such an insult, I shall certainly give up my life!"

Draupadī then buried her head in Bhīma's chest, and he in turn consoled her while wiping the tears from her face. Bhīma then said, "My dear one,
arrange for a meeting with Kīcaka tomorrow night in the newly constructed dance hall. This place is deserted after dark, and so if you lure Kīcaka there, I promise to kill him without fail."

Thereafter, Draupadī returned to her room, and the next morning, Kīcaka came to the royal palace just to meet her. After once again imploring Draupadī to accept him, Kīcaka was very pleasantly surprised to hear her speak as follows:

"O great hero, I have decided to accept your embraces, but only on the condition that you keep our meeting a secret. I am exceedingly afraid of being detected by my Gandharva husbands."

Kīcaka eagerly consented, and then Draupadī said, "O handsome warrior, come to the dance hall after dark, for I shall be anxiously awaiting you."

Kīcaka then returned home in a joyful mood, and he began to decorate himself in expectation of the long-waited fulfillment of his lusty desires. Being fully absorbed in imagining how he would be able to meet Draupadī that night, Kīcaka thought that the day would never come to an end. Draupadī also found that the time was passing very slowly, for she remembered all of the horrible things which Kīcaka had said and done, and thus, she could not wait to see him slain.

Draupadī then went to the kitchen and informed Bhīma that she had arranged to meet Kīcaka as planned. Bhima was also very delighted to gain the opportunity to kill Kīcaka, and thus, as soon as the sun began to set, he eagerly set out for the dance hall. Then, when all was dark, Bhima went inside and sat down upon the fine bed that had been placed there and began to wait for Kīcaka just as a lion awaits the arrival of a deer. Soon thereafter, at the appointed time, Kīcaka arrived at the dance hall after having dressed and decorated himself magnificently for the occasion. Blinded by lust, Kīcaka approached the bed in which Bhima was lying and, in the darkness, he assumed that the reclining form was the lovely Draupadī. Kīcaka then smilingly said, "O lovely moon-faced maiden, I have come here after setting aside a spacious apartment for you in my palace, filled with great wealth and numerous maidservants."

Bhima then sarcastically responded, "O Hero, I am so fortunate to meet you like this in the dead of night, for I have heard that as a lover you are unrivaled within the three worlds."
Bhíma then jumped up from the bed and laughingly challenged, "You wretch! I am the sairindhrí's Gandharva husband, and I shall now slay you for your wickedness!"

After saying this, Bhíma grabbed Kícaka by the hair. Kícaka jerked himself free, however, and then grabbed hold of Bhíma's arms. A fierce wrestling match then ensued as the two infuriated warriors violently threw each other about. After some time, Kícaka grew tired, however, and thus his entire body began to tremble. Still, in order to make one last attempt at gaining victory, he rushed at Bhíma and struck him forcefully with his knees. As a result, Bhíma fell to the ground, but then he quickly got up and slapped Kícaka on the chest. Bhíma knew that his opponent had weakened, and so he next grabbed Kícaka by the hair and began to squeeze him in his arms. Thereafter, Bhíma whirled Kícaka around and around until he lost consciousness and then he threw him violently to the ground. Pouncing upon Kícaka, Bhíma strangled him around the neck while simultaneously breaking his limbs with his knees.

In this way, the wicked Kícaka gave up his life, and in order to complete the job, Bhíma angrily pounded his body until it became a formless mass of flesh.

Draupadí was present there, and so, for her satisfaction, Bhíma lit a torch so that she could view Kícaka's mangled remains. In this way, Bhíma felt great satisfaction for having relieved himself of a great burden by fulfilling his obligation toward his beloved wife. Bhíma then returned to the kitchen while Draupadí happily called for the dancing-hall attendants who lived nearby and showed them how Kícaka had been killed by her Gandharva husbands. When these men came with torches and saw the blood-soaked body of Kícaka, devoid of a head, neck, legs, and arms, they became struck with wonder and concluded that it must indeed have been the work a powerful Gandharva.

King Viráta and Kícaka's relatives then arrived at the dancing-hall, and upon seeing the dead warrior's body, they began to cry loudly due to grief. Indeed, everyone who saw the mangled body became struck with fear and their hair stood up on end. The relatives then took Kícaka's remains outside in order to perform the funeral ceremonies, and there, they saw Draupadí nearby, leaning up against a pillar. Considering her to be the cause of Kícaka's death, the relatives became highly enraged.
and demanded that she be cremated along with the slain hero's body. When the relatives of Kīcaka repeatedly implored Virāṭa in this way, the king finally gave his consent, thinking that Draupādī must have been Kīcaka's secret lover. Thus, Draupādī was forcibly seized by Kīcaka's relatives, who, after tying her to the funeral carrier, proceeded to the crematorium while Virāṭa departed for his palace. Draupādī cried out piteously for her "Gandharva" husbands, using the names which they had previously decided upon: Jaya, Jayanta, Vijaya, Jayatsena, and Jayadvala. From his bed in the kitchen, Bhīma could hear Draupādī's loud wailing, and so he immediately jumped up, changed his clothes in order to disguise himself, and then left by the back door. Indeed, as Bhīma hurried along the path, his body began to expand because of his intense desire to kill all of the sūtas. When he came to the city wall, Bhīma climbed up a tall tree, and after jumping to the other side, he hastened toward the crematorium. Then, while going, Bhīma spotted an especially tall and massive tree, and so he uprooted it and placed it upon his shoulder to use as a weapon. Thereafter, when the sūta relations of Kīcaka saw Bhīma charging at them while impetuously knocking down the trees which blocked his path, they panicked, considering him to be a Gandharva. Leaving aside the funeral pyre and Draupādī, the sūtas started running toward the city in great haste. Bhīma chased after them, and by wielding his gigantic tree, he killed 105 sūtas before turning back. Bhīma then untied Draupādī, and after comforting her, they both departed for their residences by separate paths. Some people had witnessed the massacre of the sūtas, and so they reported the matter to King Virāṭa, explaining how the sairindhriī had been rescued by her Gandharva husband. These citizens then implored, "O King, because the sairindhriī is so beautiful, men become naturally sexually attracted to her. Therefore, something should be done so that the Gandharvas who are protecting her will not come and destroy the entire kingdom the next time that she is insulted." Virāṭa first of all ordered the citizens to perform the funeral ceremonies for all the slain sūtas. Then, turning to Sudeṣṇa, he said, "O Queen, tell your sairindhriī to go elsewhere." Actually, Virāṭa was also afraid of the Gandharvas' wrath, but as an excuse he said, "My dear Sudeṣṇa, a man is not supposed to become offended by the behavior of women. Therefore,
you must be the one who dismisses your maidservant."
Meanwhile, after bathing and washing her clothes, Draupadi returned to the city, and upon seeing her, all of the citizens fled due to fear of the Gandharvas. While going along the road, Draupadi happened to pass Bhima and so she spoke in such a way that was understandable to him alone, offering her obeisances unto the so-called Gandharva who had saved her. Then, Draupadi saw Brähannala coming out of the palace, surrounded by many young girls. When Arjuna expressed his pleasure that Draupadi had been saved, she angrily replied, "O Eunuch, what business is this of yours? You simply spend your time dallying with so many women. What do you care about my distress?"
Arjuna then said, "O sairindhrî, do not think that only you are suffering. You can rest assured that I am also passing my days very miserably in this wretched condition."
The girls accompanying Arjuna also expressed their happiness that Draupadi had been rescued, and while surrounding her, they took her into the palace. Draupadi then approached Sudeśṇa, and so the queen reluctantly informed her, "O sairindhrî, due to his fear of the Gandharvas, Virâṭa has ordered that you must leave the kingdom at once."
Draupadi then begged, "O Queen, please allow me to stay here for just thirteen more days, for at that time the Gandharvas will come here to take me away. You can assure the king that my Gandharva husbands will be very pleased with him if he just grants me this small favor."

Meanwhile, after searching through countless forests, towns, and villages, within numerous kingdoms, the Kauravas' spies returned to Hastināpura and presented themselves before Duryodhana, who was seated in the royal court along with his brothers Droṇa, Karna, Kṛpa, Bhīṣma, and Suśarmā, the Trigarta warrior. The spies reported, "O King, although we traced their chariot-tracks all the way to Dvārakā, we could not find the Pāṇḍavas there, nor at any other place. One interesting piece of news, however, is that Kīcaka, the arch enemy of the Trigartas, has been killed along with his brothers and other relatives by some invisible Gandharvas."
After hearing this, Duryodhana pondered over the situation for some
time. He then told the assembly, "I am unable to decide what should be done next. I thus request all of you who are present here to kindly advise me."

Karna suggested, "O King, let us send out more and better-skilled spies, and have them search with greater thoroughness."

Dusasana then commented, "I think that either the PANDAVAS have hidden themselves so well that they cannot be discovered, or else they have died, leaving no trace."

Drona countered this by saying, "O King, this is a foolish conclusion. Such great personalities would never perish, even under the most awkward circumstances. The PANDAVAS will surely return to Hastinapura after the conclusion of their period of exile, and so you had better prepare yourself to make peace with them."

Bhisma then said, "My dear Duryodhana, Drona has spoken reasonably. However, if you still wish to find out where the PANDAVAS are staying, then you should search in that kingdom where righteousness is upheld. Go to where the people are happy, prosperous and undisturbed by the onslaught of material miseries, and where nature is supplying all of her gifts in abundance. These are the natural results of the PANDAVAS' auspicious presence."

Susarma, the mighty king of the Trigartas, then took advantage of the situation to speak as follows:
"O King, formerly, I was defeated by Kiskaka and King Virata. However, now that his wicked general is dead, Virata must be very disheartened. Therefore, let us seize upon this good opportunity to attack the matsya kingdom and plunder all of Virata's wealth, especially his thousands of excellent cows."

Karna applauded this idea by saying, "O King, this is much more constructive than worrying about the PANDAVAS, who are now destitute and powerless anyway."

Duryodhana also liked Susarma's suggestion, and so he ordered Dushasana to array the Kaurava army at once after taking permission from Dhrtarashtra. Duryodhana then turned to Susarma and said, "O chief of the Trigartas, proceed with your army this very day and seize Virata's cattle. I shall set out tomorrow, along with the other Kauravas."

Thus, it was just at the expiry of the PANDAVAS' thirteenth year in exile.
that Suśarmā and the Trigartas began to plunder Virāṭa's cattle. The cowherd men fearfully rushed to the royal court, and after informing the king of the situation, they implored him to rescue the cows from the clutches of the Trigartas. Virāṭa then quickly assembled his army, which was commanded by his brothers, Śatānīka and Madirakshya, and his eldest son, Śaṅkha. Virāṭa then ordered Śatānīka, "Give chariots to Kaṇka, Vallabha, Tantripal, and Granthika, for I am convinced that they are actually great kṣatriyas and not the persons whom they make themselves out to be."

The Pāṇḍavas were then given armor to wear, and after mounting upon their chariots, they set out with cheerful hearts. The matsya army overtook the Trigartas by mid-afternoon, and thus a terrible battle ensued, raising so much dust that the soldiers became almost invisible. Soon, the ground was strewn with innumerable severed heads and limbs, and as the fighting continued, neither side was able to gain the upper hand. At last, Virāṭa directly confronted Suśarmā, and as the two kings fought furiously, they pierced each other with countless arrows. After the sun had sunk below the horizon and darkness had set in, the battle was suspended for awhile until moonrise. At that time, Suśarmā and his younger brother began to route the matsya army. Suśarmā then rushed at Virāṭa and managed to kill his horses and chariot driver. Virāṭa got down from his disabled chariot, but Suśarmā quickly took him captive and then placed him upon his own chariot. When the surviving matsya warriors thus saw Suśarmā carrying off their king toward Hastināpura, they fled from the battlefield in fear. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then ordered Bhīma, "My dear brother, you must go and release Virāṭa so that we can repay him for his having maintained us during this past year."

Bhīma replied, "O King, you can stand along with Nakula and Sahadeva and watch the feat that I shall now accomplish with this uprooted tree!"

However, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira warned, "O Bhīma, I am afraid that if you perform some super-human feat, we shall be recognized. Therefore, just fight with your bow and other ordinary weapons while Nakula and Sahadeva guard your chariot wheels."

Bhīma obediently took up his mighty bow and then charged at Suśarmā while simultaneously challenging him to fight and giving assurances to King Virāṭa. When Suśarmā looked back, the onrushing Bhīma appeared
to him just like a second Yamarāja. Still, the Trigarta king turned around, along with his army, in order to face the onrushing foe. Within a few moments, Bhīma slaughtered numerous Trigarta soldiers and so Suśarmā began to shower arrows upon him. The Matsyas had rallied by this time, and they also began to slay thousands of Trigarta warriors. Mahārāja Yudhiśṭhira then impetuously rushed at Suśarmā, but the Trigarta king checked him and his horses with numerous sharp arrows. Bhīma then rushed at Suśarmā, and after killing his horses, he dragged his charioteer to the ground. Madirakshya then came to rescue Virāṭa and so Suśarmā got down from his disabled chariot and began to run away from the battlefield. Even though he was quite elderly, Virāṭa also jumped down from the chariot, and after grabbing his brother's mace, he began to chase Suśarmā like a lusty youth. At this time, Bhīma challengingly derided Suśarmā for fleeing like a coward, and so the Trigarta king suddenly turned around and charged at him impetuously. In order to be fair, Bhīma also got down from his chariot and stood upon the ground. Then, when the onrushing Suśarmā came close, Bhīma grabbed him by the hair, lifted him high up into the air and smashed him to the ground. Then, while Suśarmā lay there, writhing in agony, Bhīma first of all kicked him in the head. He then placed his knee upon the Trigarta king's chest and proceeded to pound him with his fist until he lost consciousness. Upon beholding this, the entire Trigarta army panicked and fled, leaving aside Virāṭa's cattle and the other booty which they had plundered. Bhīma did not kill Suśarmā, however, now that Virāṭa and his cattle were rescued, and in consideration of Yudhiśṭhira's lenient nature. Instead, he tied up the Trigarta king and then took him to where his elder brother was staying. Then, when Mahārāja Yudhiśṭhira saw the Trigarta king's plight, he smilingly ordered Bhīma to release him. Bhīma then told Suśarmā, "I shall let you go, provided that you publicly declare yourself to be Mahārāja Yudhiśṭhira's slave, for that is the customary treatment which is given to one who has been vanquished in battle." Mahārāja Yudhiśṭhira intervened, however, and after giving Suśarmā unconditional freedom, he warned, "O chief of the Trigartas, never again act in such an abominable way. You should remain satisfied with
whatever you have acquired by righteous means."
After being untied, Suśarmā came and offered his obeisances to Mahārāja Yudhiśthira as well as to Virāṭa. Then, with his head bowed low in shame, he departed. The Pāṇḍavas spent the rest of the night on the battlefield and Virāṭa honored them greatly for having come to his rescue. Indeed, he offered the Pāṇḍavas his entire kingdom to rule, but Yudhiśthira replied, "O King, we simply wish you well. We want nothing more than this. Now, please send some messengers to the city and have them publicly proclaim your victory."

Meanwhile, as the Matsyas and Trigartas had been busy fighting with each other, the Kaurava army arrived at Virāṭa's kingdom, and after driving off the cowherd men, they confiscated 60,000 cattle. The cowherd chief then mounted upon his chariot and went to where Virāṭa's proud son, Bhuminjaya (also known as Uttara) was staying. Uttara had been practically left alone to guard the city and so the cowherd chief informed him, "O Prince, all of our cattle have been seized by the Kauravas. Go now and rescue them after defeating our enemies in battle. Remember how your father had many times bragged about you, considering you to be a very great warrior."
Since Bhuminjaya was addressed by the cowherd chief in front of many women, he began to boast by saying, "I would gladly go and retrieve our cows after vanquishing all of the Kauravas in battle. Unfortunately, however, I have no good charioteer, and thus I cannot display my real prowess."
Upon hearing this, Arjuna whispered to Draupadī, "Go and inform Uttara that I used to be Arjuna's charioteer. Tell him that I shall now take up the reins of his chariot so that he can gain victory."
Draupadī then shyly approached Uttara and said, "O heroic prince, I used to be engaged in the service of the Pāṇḍavas. Once, I heard about how Brḥannala had taken up the reins of Arjuna's chariot when that great warrior had enabled Agni to devour the Khāṇḍava forest." Uttara replied, "O sairindhrī, I would be ashamed to ask Brḥannala to become my charioteer."
Draupadī then suggested that his sister, Uttarā, could make the request. Thus, Uttarā went to Brḥannala and said, "Virāṭa's cattle have been
forcibly taken away by the Kurus. If you are able to, then please drive my brother's chariot so that he can fight with our enemies and retrieve what rightfully belongs to us."

Having gained some courage, Bhuminjaya then smilingly approached Brhannala and also requested him to take up the reins of his chariot. Arjuna jokingly replied, "O Prince, how could I possibly drive your chariot in battle? If you want a song or a dance, then I am ready to entertain you."

Bhuminjaya insisted, however, and so, at last, Brhannala agreed. Then, just to enjoy some fun, when Arjuna took up the armor that was handed to him, he began fumbling with it as if he had no idea how to wear it. Thus, Bhuminjaya had to put it on Brhannala with his own hands while all of the palace ladies laughed with great delight. Then, when he was about to set out, Uttara approached Brhannala and requested, "After defeating the Kurus, please bring back some fine cloth so that my friends and I can decorate our dolls."

Arjuna smilingly replied, "O Princess, I shall gladly do so if Bhuminjaya is able to defeat these great heroes."

Bhuminjaya and Brhannala then set out, and before long, they came upon the Kuru army, which was under the protection of Duryodhana, Karnä, Kṛpa, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Aśvatthāmā and many other great warriors.

When Uttara saw all these great personalities, his hair stood up on end due to fear. He then told Arjuna, "I feel like I am about to faint away! I cannot dare to fight with such great warriors. Therefore, please turn back at once!" In response, Arjuna chided Uttara by saying, "O heroic prince, remember how bravely you had spoken in front of all the palace ladies. I do not want you to become a coward and so I shall now take you into the midst of the Kuru warriors."

Uttara was so afraid, however, that he replied, "I don't care if the Kurus steal all of our cattle or even kill them! I don't care if everyone laughs at me for being a coward, but I am not going to fight under any circumstance!"

After saying this, Uttara jumped from the chariot onto the ground, threw down his bow, and then began to run away as fast as he could. Brhannala ran after him while reminding him that death on the
battlefield is always preferable to such a cowardly act. Indeed, the Kauravas warriors could see Bṛhannala running after Uttara, his long braid of hair fluttering in the wind. Some laughed heartily, but others appreciated the eunuch's powerful bodily features and lion-like stride and thus guessed that he must be Arjuna trying to call back the terrified son of Virāṭa. While the Kauravas were thus speculating, Arjuna grabbed Uttara by the hair after going less than 100 paces. Uttara then begged, "O Bṛhannala, please let me go! If you set me free then I shall give you vast amounts of wealth in charity as a reward." Without even replying, however, Arjuna laughingly dragged Uttara back toward the chariot. Uttara was practically mad with fear, and so Arjuna began to pacify him, saying, "O Prince, if you are too afraid to fight, then take up the reins and drive the chariot while I battle the Kurus myself."

Uttara gradually regained some composure and after getting up into the driver's seat, he was ordered by Arjuna to go to where the Pāṇḍavas' weapons were being concealed in a śamī tree. When the Kauravas saw Uttara driving the chariot, they began to more seriously suspect that the eunuch was indeed Arjuna, and thus a dreadful fear entered their hearts. Droṇa then addressed the assembled warriors as follows: "O great heroes of the Kuru dynasty, please listen as I describe to you all of the evil omens which have suddenly become visible. A hot dry wind has begun to blow and the sky has taken on an exceedingly gloomy aspect as thunder resounds in the heavens. The weapons of the Kauravas are fearfully coming out of their cases of their own accord and our flags are trembling for no apparent reason. I can hear jackals howling hideously and our horses are shedding tears. From all these signs, we can understand that there will be a great massacre, and I am convinced that the unknown warrior who has come to face us is none other than Arjuna!"

Turning to Bhīṣma, Droṇa then said, "I am sure that Arjuna will vanquish us all in battle!"

Karna overheard this and so he harshly responded, "O Preceptor, why do you always glorify Arjuna? He is not even equal to one-sixteenth part of either myself or Duryodhana!" Duryodhana then said, "If this eunuch is actually Arjuna, then we are very fortunate. Being discovered by us, the
Meanwhile, after arriving at the śamī tree, Arjuna ordered Uttara, "O Prince, climb up and get the weapons of the Pāṇḍavas which have been concealed here for a long time." Uttara objected however, saying, "I have heard that there is a corpse hanging in this tree. I am a royal prince and so I cannot go near such a contaminated place."

Bṛhannāla then assured Uttara that there was no such corpse, and so the prince reluctantly began to climb up into the tree. There, near the top, he found the Pāṇḍavas' weapons, covered with cloth, and when he unwrapped them, he found five greatly effulgent bows, the sight of which made his hair stand up on end. Being highly astonished, Uttara desired to hear about these weapons, and so Arjuna first of all described the Gāṇḍiva bow as follows:

"O Prince, this bow was first used by Lord Śiva, and it remained in his possession for 1,000 years. Thereafter, it was given to Lord Brahmā, who kept it for 503 years, and then it was passed on to Indra who possessed it for 85 years. Indra then gave the Gāṇḍiva bow to Soma who kept it for 500 years before passing it on to Varuṇa. Varuṇa kept it in his possession for 100 years before finally handing it over to me 65 years ago, when Agni devoured the Khāṇḍava forest. Arjuna also described the other bows and some of the other weapons, and after hearing about them, Uttara inquired, "O Bṛhannāla, where are the Pāṇḍavas now?"

Arjuna then revealed his true identity to Uttara as well as those of his brothers and Draupādi. Being very astonished, Uttara exclaimed, "I shall only believe this if you can recite to me the ten names of Arjuna!"

Arjuna replied, "For various reasons I am called Arjuna, Phālguṇī, Jiśṇu, Kṛiṣṭi, Śvetadvāhana, Vibhatsu, Vijaya, Kṛṣṇa, Savyasācin, and Dhanaṇḍaja."

Uttara asked, "O son of Kuntī, how have you received all of these different names?"

Arjuna replied, "O Prince, I am called Dhanaṇḍaja because I had procured vast amounts of wealth after conquering over numerous kings. I am called Vijaya because I always come out victorious after approaching my enemies in battle. I am called Phālguṇī because at the time of my birth the Uttara Phālguṇī constellation was ascendant. I am
called Kirīṭi in commemoration of the time when Indra placed a crown upon my head before sending me off to conquer over the Dānavas. I am called Vibhatsu because I have never performed an abominable act on the battlefield. I am called Śvetavāhana because my chariot is drawn by white horses. I am called Savyasācin because of my ability to draw the Gāndiva bow equally well with both hands. I am called Arjuna because of my clear complexion and pure actions. I am called Jīṣṇu because I am the son of Indra and also because I am irrepressible in battle and I subdue all adversaries. Finally, I am called Kṛṣṇa because of my blackish skin."

Uttara then offered his obeisances and said, "O Arjuna, I am so thrilled to learn of your real identity, and I can assure you that my fear has been dispelled. Please pardon me for my cowardliness. Now, let me take up the reins of your chariot so that I can see you display your unrivaled prowess."

Arjuna then said, "O Prince, quickly put all of the weapons into the chariot. While engaged as my driver, you must always remain confident that I shall be able to defeat all of the Kurus."

Uttara thus cast off his fear, and after getting down from the śamī tree, he put the Pāṇḍavas' weapons into the chariot. He then said, "O Arjuna, I am very curious to know one thing if you do not mind telling me. How is it that such a great hero as yourself could become reduced to playing the part of a eunuch?"

Arjuna replied, "I am acting like this just to fulfill the vow of my elder brother Yudhiṣṭhira. Now that our final year of exile has ended, my manliness has been restored."

After saying this, Arjuna took off his bangles and put on the leather gloves which are used for wielding the bow. Then, while concentrating his mind, Arjuna summoned all of his celestial weapons, and thus they immediately appeared before him in order to offer their services. Arjuna bowed to the celestial weapons and then requested them to always dwell within his memory. Arjuna then strung his bow, and when he gave it a loud "twang" the entire sky became filled with the dreadful vibration. Indeed, when the Kauravas heard this sound, they became convinced without a doubt that the unknown warrior was Arjuna. Then, as the they were about to set off, Uttara admitted, "O Arjuna, in spite of
having full confidence in your supreme abilities, I am afraid because we shall have to face so many unconquerable warriors."

Arjuna simply laughed and then replied, "O Prince, just think of how I had to fight against all of the Gandharvas, demigods, and demons at the time when Agni devoured the Khāṇḍava forest. Similarly, at the time of Draupadi's svayāmvara, I had defeated all of the great warriors who opposed me and then later on, I single-handedly vanquished the Nivāta-kavacas and Pulomās. Now hoist the flag of Hanumān upon my staff, and let us set out without further delay."

The two quickly departed, but then when Arjuna suddenly blew upon his mighty conchshell, the tumultuous sound made the horses fall down to their knees. Uttara also became stunned with fear and thus sat down upon the chariot, dumb-founded. Arjuna then took up the reins, and after making the horses stand up, he embraced Uttara and said, "O Prince, calm yourself for there is no reason to be afraid. As a warrior, you must have heard the sounds of many powerful conchshells in the past. Why then did you become practically stunned this time?"

Uttara replied, "My dear Arjuna, the combined sound of the twang of your Gāṇḍīva bow, the blowing of the Devadatta conchshell, and the roaring of all the ferocious creatures which are sitting upon your flagstaff have bewildered my mind."

Arjuna then said, "Uttara, just plant your feet firmly upon the floor of the chariot and hold on tightly to the reins, for I am going to blow my conchshell once more." When the mighty Devadatta was once again sounded, mountain-peaks were seen to split in half, and Uttara jumped right out of his seat. Then, as the prince fearfully clung to the chariot's railings, Arjuna once again had to comfort him.

Meanwhile, Droṇa noticed some more inauspicious signs, and so he informed Duryodhana, "O King, just see the crows which are perched atop our flagstaffs. Our weapons have lost all luster, and our horses are making frightful sounds. Indeed, the entire earth appears to be trembling, and thus with certainty, we can expect to meet with defeat at the hands of the Pāṇḍavas. Anyway, let us send the cattle on ahead and then array our forces in preparation for the impending battle."

Duryodhana replied, "O brāhmaṇa, since the thirteenth year has not yet
come to an end, if this is really Arjuna, then the Pāṇḍavas will have to undergo another term of exile in the forest."

Being doubtful, however, Duryodhana then turned to Bhīṣma and said, "O Grandsire, please calculate exactly when the Pāṇḍavas' year of living incognito will come to an end."

Then, once again addressing Droṇa, Duryodhana said, "O Preceptor, I do not think that it is the Pāṇḍavas who are attacking us. After all, they are supposed to get back their kingdom peacefully at the end of the thirteenth year of exile. Maybe the Trigartas are approaching us after having seized Virāṭa's cattle. Or, if the Trigartas were defeated, then this may be the Matsyas who have come here to attack us."

Duryodhana was irritated because Bhīṣma and Droṇa seemed reluctant to fight. Karṇa then spoke as follows in order to cheer up the king: "My dear Duryodhana, there is no use in listening to what Droṇa has to say, for he is partial toward Arjuna. Indeed, I think that he has been planted within our midst by the Pāṇḍavas. This would explain why he always exaggerates while praising them. In the same way, Droṇa has described all of these so-called evil omens just to try to scare us."

"My dear king, please consider things rationally. Does not the wind always blow, and is it unnatural for the clouds to sound with thunder? What do these natural phenomena have to do with the arrival of the Pāṇḍavas? Rest assured that I shall fulfill my vow by easily vanquishing Arjuna, especially since he has become so emaciated because of a harsh forest life. Actually, what is the need for anyone else to fight? Let the rest of you take away Virāṭa's cattle, as Droṇa suggests. Or, if you like, you can all remain here in order to witness my prowess in battle."

Kṛpa could not bear to hear these boasting words, and so he retaliated by saying, "O Karṇa, perhaps you have forgotten all about Arjuna's heroic accomplishments. Otherwise, how could you foolishly claim that you will defeat him? Such a statement is just like that of a man who binds himself hand and foot, ties a stone around his neck, and then declares, 'I shall swim across the ocean!' All of us together: yourself, myself, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Duryodhana, and Aśvatthāmā may be able to contend with Arjuna, but it is madness for you to proclaim that you can fight him alone."

Being enraged because his father had been insulted, Aśvatthāmā hotly
said, "O Karna, you are a great fool for boasting like this. What is the basis for your great pride? When did you ever defeat Arjuna, or for that matter, any of the Pandavas? How can you be so proud when you had to resort to deceitful means in order to take away Yudhishthira's kingdom and hand it over to Duryodhana? Are you proud of having dragged the helpless Draupadi into the assembly of Kurus? Are these things the cause of pride for real kshatriyas? Let Shakuni fight with the Pandavas now, not with dice, but with arrows! Then we shall see the outcome! I am not going to tarnish my good name by ganging up with so many other warriors in order to fight unfairly with Arjuna!"

Bhisma praised these words but then warned, "O Asvatthama, if Arjuna does attack, then it is the duty of all of us to fight him. In you and your father reside a combination of brahminical and kshatriya prowess that is surpassed only by Parashurama. Now you should forgive Karna. Just consider that his so-called boasting or insulting words were actually meant for enlivening the Kauravas."

Duryodhana then turned to Droña and pleaded, "O Preceptor, kindly forgive any offense which Karna may have committed so that our unity can be preserved."

In this way, Droña became pacified, and thereafter, he arranged the Kaurava army in such a way as to give maximum protection to Duryodhana. Bhishma was then once again called upon to ascertain whether the Pandavas' period of exile had ended or not. Bhishma's judgment was considered to be authoritative, and after making some hasty calculations, he declared, "O King, the one year period for which the Pandavas were required to remain incognito has already come to a close. Indeed, you can be assured of this simply because the Pandavas would never even dream of acting deceitfully. Being guided by the truthful Yudhishthira, the Pandavas would never attempt to take back their kingdom before their period of exile has expired. Now, since we shall have to oppose Arjuna, we should quickly prepare ourselves to fight!"

Duryodhana then said, "Yes! I have no intention of voluntarily giving the Pandavas back their share of the kingdom. Therefore, let us prepare to fight them without delay!"

Bhisma then suggested, "O King, you should take one-fourth of the army
and depart for Hastināpura. Let another one-fourth escort the cattle while the remaining one-half can stay here in order to fight along with us against Arjuna and the Matsyas."

Duryodhana agreed, and so the cattle were sent off while Bhīṣma busied himself arraying the remaining Kaurava warriors. Arjuna then came upon the scene, and he, first of all, released four arrows: two of which offered obeisances at Droṇa's feet, the other two which whizzed past his ears, announcing that the Pāṇḍavas' period of exile was over. Arjuna had Uttara halt his chariot at some distance from the Kaurava army so that he could survey the opposition. Arjuna's reasoning was that if he could simply vanquish Duryodhana, then the others would automatically desist, and thus he carefully looked for the Kaurava king. Then, when Arjuna found that Duryodhana was absent, he rightly concluded that the king must have been sent ahead with the cattle. Thus, Arjuna ordered Uttara, "O Prince, avoid the Kaurava army; take the road to Hastināpura so that we can overtake Duryodhana and retrieve the plundered cattle."

From Arjuna's course, Kṛpa could understand his intention, and thus he ordered the entire Kaurava army to go and protect Duryodhana. Meanwhile, as Arjuna approached the army which protected Duryodhana and the cows, he began to cover the entire sky with his showers of arrows, so that the Kaurava soldiers were thrown into confusion. Then, taking advantage of this, Arjuna ordered the creatures on his flagstaff to roar more loudly, and he twanged his bow and blew upon his conchshell, causing the earth to tremble. At this time, the Kaurava army became practically stunned with fear, and so Arjuna took the opportunity to make the cattle turn back toward Virāṭa's capital. After accomplishing this, Arjuna rushed to encounter Duryodhana, but by this time, all of the other great Kuru heroes had come to assist their king. Arjuna then ordered Uttara to, first of all, take him to Karṇa, and upon seeing this, many other Kuru warriors came to oppose him. Vikarṇa was the first to attack Arjuna, but he soon fled from the battlefield after his bowstring and flagstaff had been cut to pieces. Arjuna then created a great slaughter among the Kaurava soldiers, and he killed a younger brother of Karṇa named Saṅgrāmajit.
The enraged Karna then rushed at Arjuna while all of the other great warriors stood aside in order to become spectators. Both heroes proceeded to release ceaseless showers of arrows, thus piercing each other along with their drivers and horses. Arjuna then became so highly inflamed with rage that he appeared to be just like a lion who had been rudely awoken from slumber. Indeed, the excited Arjuna pierced every part of Karna's body so forcefully that the suta's son had to flee from the battlefield out of fear of his life. The other Kuru heroes then attacked Arjuna, but they also soon became afflicted by his torrents of arrows. Indeed, Arjuna threw the entire Kaurava army into confusion, and whoever came close to him was immediately sent to the abode of Yamaraja. Thus, everyone became highly amazed while witnessing Arjuna's unprecedented prowess.

Karna then returned to the battlefield, but the relentless Arjuna pierced him in the ear and then killed his horses and driver. With Karna out of the way, Arjuna next decided to display his skill before Krpa. First of all, however, he ordered Uttara, "Go and circumambulate Krupa-carya with our chariot. Only if he attacks me first, shall I engage in fighting him. We shall approach Bhishma only after all others have been vanquished, for he will no doubt prove to be the greatest obstacle on the path toward victory."

Just then, all of the great demigods appeared overhead in their celestial chariots illuminating the entire sky by their effulgence. The demigods hoped to witness a duel between Arjuna and Bhishma, for it would surely entail an unprecedented display of celestial weapons in the hands of human beings. The fragrance of their heavenly garlands lent a sweet scent to the breeze, and thus the fatigue of all the warriors became relieved. Indra gazed upon his dear son with insatiable eyes while Uttara took his chariot toward Krpa. Then, as he approached the son of Saradvan, Arjuna sounded his conchshell, causing a tumultuous sound to resound all the way up to the heavens and reverberate back to the earth. Krpa could not tolerate this sound, and so he angrily blew upon his own conchshell, and then after taking up his bow, he pierced Arjuna with ten arrows.

Thereafter, both mighty bowmen proceeded to unleash unending showers of arrows, and at last, Arjuna pierced Krpa's horses so sharply
that they reared up, dislodging the brāhmaṇa from his seat. Arjuna desisted from fighting out of respect for his former teacher, but then after a moment, Kṛpa recovered himself, and so the fierce duel resumed. Arjuna then managed to break Kṛpa's bow and sever his armor so that it fell right off his body. At this, Kṛpa angrily picked up another bow, but once again, Arjuna broke it. Indeed, again and again, Kṛpa picked up new bows, and each time he did so, Arjuna immediately broke them to pieces.

Finally, when not a bow remained, Kṛpa picked up a spear and hurled it at Arjuna. As the spear came whizzing toward him like a blazing meteor, Arjuna deftly cut it to pieces with his arrows. He then cut off the head of Kṛpa's charioteer, cut down his flagstaff, and while smiling derisively, pierced Kṛpa himself in the chest with a powerful arrow. Since he was now without a driver, Kṛpa jumped down from the chariot, and as a last resort, he took up his mace and hurled it at Arjuna. By use of his arrows, however, Arjuna performed a most remarkable feat by deflecting that mace back toward Kṛpa himself. The warriors who were protecting Kṛpa then rushed at Arjuna so that the old preceptor could be safely escorted away from the battlefield.

Next, Droṇa rushed impetuously at Arjuna while blowing upon his mighty conchshell. As Arjuna turned to meet Droṇa, he very humbly said, "O Preceptor, since our period of exile is now over, we are very eager to avenge the wrongs that were inflicted upon us. However, I shall not attack you unless you discharge the first arrow."

In response, Droṇa released twenty arrows, but Arjuna cut them all to pieces before they could reach him. Then, as Arjuna and Droṇa proceeded to send forth showers of arrows, all the other warriors became spectators. While marveling at Arjuna's and Droṇa's skillful display of weapons, everyone thought, "Just see the severity of kṣatriya behavior! Even a disciple may sometimes have to fight with his own guru!"

The arrows which Droṇa released practically touched each other, tip to tail, as they flew through the sky, and thus they appeared to be one continuous line. Because of their feathers, the arrows looked just like birds flying south during the autumn season. Then, as Arjuna began to counteract Droṇa's arrows, the entire sky became filled with arrows. Droṇa was very pleased to see how Arjuna neutralized all of his arrows
so wonderfully, and he continued to playfully fight with his pet disciple. Gradually, however, as the two great warriors displayed their range of celestial weapons, innumerable Kaurava soldiers became mangled by Arjuna's arrows so that the entire army began to panic. Arjuna then started to release his arrows more quickly, so that thousands of them completely covered Droṇa's chariot, causing the Kauravas to gasp with fear and the demigods to applaud with delight. Arjuna then severed Droṇa's armor and upon seeing this, Aśvatthāmā and other warriors rushed to the old preceptor's aid. Then, when Arjuna turned to face Droṇa's onrushing son, the wounded Droṇācārya took the opportunity to leave the battlefield.

Arjuna answered Aśvatthāmā's showers of arrows with his own, and thus a fierce duel ensued. However, Aśvatthāmā's horses soon became so afflicted that they could not longer ascertain the proper directions. And yet, in spite of his handicap, Droṇa's son somehow managed to cut the string of Arjuna's Gāṇḍīva bow. Even the demigods applauded this most wonderful feat, and Aśvatthāmā quickly followed with another arrow that pierced Arjuna in the chest. The undaunted son of Kuntī then laughingly put another string onto his bow and as the other Kauravas stood by and watched, he resumed fighting. Finally, Aśvatthāmā's arrows became exhausted, and since Arjuna possessed inexhaustible quivers, the son of Droṇa decided to desist from further fighting.

Next, Karṇa rushed forward to fight while twanging his bow menacingly, and upon seeing him, Arjuna became highly enraged. Turning away from Aśvatthāmā, Arjuna approached Karṇa while challenging, "O sūta's son, you shall now reap the bitter results of your wicked behavior toward my brothers and Draupadi."

Karṇa countered his challenge by claiming, "O Arjuna, you are simply boasting. What is the value of words which are spoken by one who is about to die?"

At this, Arjuna replied, "O Karṇa, who else but you would flee from the battlefield after witnessing the death of your younger brother, and then still have the audacity to brag?"

After saying this, Arjuna charged at Karṇa and released torrents of sharp arrows. Karṇa responded with a shower of arrows, but then Arjuna severed the strap holding his quiver. In retaliation, Karṇa pierced
Arjuna’s hand which held the Gāṇḍīva bow, making him momentarily loosen his grip. Arjuna quickly recovered himself, however, and then angrily broke Karna’s bow into fragments. Karna then desperately hurled a dart, and as Arjuna cut it to pieces, the warriors who supported the sūta’s son rushed at him. Arjuna dispatched all of these soldiers to the abode of Yamarāja as soon as they came near, and then he killed Karna’s horses. Finally, after loosening Karna’s armor, Arjuna pierced him in the chest with a mighty arrow, making him fall momentarily unconscious. Indeed, when Karna at last recovered, he felt so much pain that he had to leave the battlefield, while being derided by Arjuna and Uttara. At last, Arjuna ordered Uttara to approach Bhīṣma. However, after so much fighting, Virāṭa’s son had become badly shaken, and so he reluctantly replied, "O Arjuna, I can no longer properly guide the chariot. My mind has become stupefied by the glare and din of all the celestial weapons, and I am also overwhelmed by the horrible stench of the fat, blood and flesh. Due to the intense action on the battlefield, my memory and my hearing have become impaired, and my eyes have been dazed by your incessant showers of arrows. My head is spinning so rapidly that I can hardly even hold the reins anymore."

Arjuna then began to pacify Uttara by saying, "O Prince, you have displayed wonderful skill while guiding my chariot during the heat of this furious battle. Rest assured that I am fully capable of consuming the entire Kaurava army. Now, if you have regained some composure, please approach Bhīṣma without further delay."

Uttara became somewhat comforted by Arjuna’s kind words, and so he once again took up the reins and began to penetrate the ranks of the enemy soldiers. Then, as Bhīṣma came forward to encounter him, Arjuna immediately cut down his flagpole, making it crash onto the ground. Four Dvātarāṣtras: Duḥśāsana, Vikarṇa, Duḥśala, and Viviṃśati then surrounded Arjuna. However, within a few moments, Arjuna broke Duḥśāsana’s bow and pierced his chest with five arrows, making him turn his back and flee. When Vikarṇa attacked, Arjuna pierced him in the forehead, causing him to fall down unconscious onto the floor of his chariot. Then, when Duḥśala and Viviṃśati rushed at him, Arjuna simultaneously pierced them both and killed their horses. Thus, the two brothers had to dismount, and after getting up onto other chariots, they
were carried away from the battlefield. Thereafter, all of the Kaurava chariot warriors staged a massive assault upon Arjuna, but as a result, the battlefield soon became strewn over with their mangled bodies. Indeed, as the Kaurava army became thrown into confusion, it appeared as if Arjuna was dancing in their midst. Arjuna then proceeded to create a vast river of blood, and many of the Kaurava warriors became so dispirited that, even in the presence of Duryodhana, they began to flee from the scene of battle. Within that created river of blood, the disheveled hair of the slain warriors appeared to be just like floating straws, and the bows and arrows were like small boats. The flesh and fat were the river’s mire, and the broken chariots and the bodies of dead elephants were like islands. Being attracted by the smell of flesh and blood, numerous fierce Rākṣasas roamed the battlefield from one end to the other, gorging themselves upon the corpses.

Bhīṣma then blew upon his lion-like conchshell in order to enliven the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and as he rushed toward Arjuna, the grandsire pierced the fierce creatures upon his flagstaff with eight arrows. Arjuna was very glad to have the chance of combating Bhīṣma, and in retaliation, he knocked his white umbrella to the ground. Thereafter, an exceedingly fierce encounter took place, and all the other warriors stood by at a distance as spectators. The Kauravas highly applauded Bhīṣma for successfully withstanding Arjuna’s onslaught of arrows, and while doing so, they declared that except for Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Droṇa, no one else on earth could do so.

Arjuna then cut Bhīṣma’s bow in half, and so the grandsire quickly picked up another one, and after stringing it, he continued to send forth showers of arrows. The fight appeared to be between equals, for the spectators could not discern even the slightest difference between the two in terms of skill. Still, the soldiers who were protecting Bhīṣma fell down dead upon the ground in great numbers. In the sky, Citrasena began to converse with Indra about the glories of both warriors and so, as a token of appreciation, the king of heaven sent showers of celestial flowers raining down upon them. Thereafter, when Bhīṣma came close by at his left side, Arjuna laughingly cut his bow in half, and then pierced him in the chest with ten arrows. This gave Bhīṣma great pain,
and so he had to support himself by leaning against the railing of his chariot for quite some time. Indeed, when the charioteer saw how Bhīṣma was practically unconscious, he quickly took him off the battlefield to safety.

Duryodhana next approached Arjuna, and while shouting loudly, he pierced the Pāṇḍava hero in the forehead with an arrow. Although blood streamed from his wound, Arjuna simply became more enraged and retaliated with a swift volley of arrows. Then, when Vikarṇa suddenly charged at him, riding upon an elephant, Arjuna quickly pierced the beast in the forehead, making him tremble violently before falling down dead. As the terror-stricken Vikarṇa ran to the shelter of Vivīśatī’s chariot, Arjuna pierced Duryodhana in the chest with a fierce arrow, which made him vomit blood. At this, the Kaurava warriors panicked and fled, making Duryodhana become very alarmed upon being left unprotected, and so he quickly turned his chariot around and retreated. Arjuna then took this opportunity to chastise the wicked son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra by saying, "O King, how can you sacrifice your honor as a kṣatriya by turning your back and fleeing from the battlefield? Come back here and fight with me. Otherwise, the name 'Duryodhana' which was given to you will be rendered useless."

Being struck with these harsh words, Duryodhana turned his chariot around and thus, once again, stood ready to fight. Karṇa, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Krpa, Duḥśāsana, and innumerable other warriors came to the king’s aid, and thus Arjuna soon became besieged by showers of arrows. Arjuna first of all countered all these arrows, and then he invoked the Sanmohana weapon, which he had obtained from Indra. This wonderful weapon immediately spread its influence over the entire battlefield so that all of the Kaurava warriors became stupefied and inert, making them appear just like statues. When Arjuna thus saw how all of the enemy soldiers had become unconscious, their bows slipping form their hands, he remembered the request of his friend, Uttarā. Thus, he ordered Bhuminjaya, "O Prince, quickly drive into the Kaurava ranks and take away Droṇa's and Krpa's fine white clothes, Karṇa's yellow outfit, and Aśvatthāmā's bright blue garments. However, do not approach Bhīṣma, for he knows how to counteract this weapon, and thus he cannot actually be stupefied."
Thereafter, Uttara went to these great warriors, and after getting down from the chariot, he took off their clothes, leaving them with only their under-garments. Uttara then, once again, mounted onto the chariot, but then, as he was taking Arjuna away from the battlefield, Bhīṣma suddenly attacked them with his arrows. Arjuna immediately turned to face his adversary, and within a short time, he not only pierced Bhīṣma deeply, but killed his horses and driver as well. Meanwhile, Duryodhana had recovered his senses, and upon seeing Bhīṣma's plight, he inquired, "O Grandsire, how is it that you are allowing Arjuna to escape? Somehow or other you must do something to stop him!"

Bhīṣma replied, "O King, due to Arjuna's righteousness, he did not kill us all while we were helplessly stupefied. In consideration of this favor which he has shown us, I suggest that we desist from fighting. Allow Arjuna to return the cattle which we have plundered without any further impediment."

Duryodhana was also no longer eager for battle, and so, after hearing Bhīṣma's words, he simply heaved a deep sigh and then remained silent. Thereafter, the Kauravas set out for Hastināpura, and when he saw this, Arjuna followed them for awhile, just to worship his superiors. Then, after offering his respects to Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, and Aśvatthāmā, Arjuna released one arrow that smashed Duryodhana's crown into fragments. Arjuna then blew upon his Devadatta conchshell and twanged the mighty Gāṇḍiva bow, thereby shattering the hearts of the enemy soldiers.

Finally, Arjuna ordered Uttara to turn back towards the capital of the Matsyas, and at this time, the demigods also departed for their respective abodes. The residents of heaven were greatly delighted to have witnessed Arjuna's prowess, and thus they glorified him for his victory. Arjuna soon caught up with the cows, and as he proceeded to escort them back to the city, some of the Kaurava soldiers who had fled from the battlefield came and voluntarily surrendered themselves out of fear. Arjuna assured these warriors of their safety and then allowed them to return to Hastināpura. He then turned to Uttara and said, "O Prince, you are the only one who knows my true identity. Therefore, when we return to the royal court, I want you to proclaim this victory as your
own. Otherwise, if Virāṭa discovers that it was the Pāṇḍavas who have been living with him as his menial servants, he may become afraid and thus hide himself."

First of all, Arjuna went to the śamī tree. Hanumān and the other ferocious creatures then departed into the sky, while the banner upon which they had been perched suddenly disappeared. Uttara then put up his own flag, which bore the symbol of a lion, and he put the Pāṇḍavas' weapons back into the tree. Arjuna once again tied his hair into a braid and put on his bangles. Then, while taking up the reins of the chariot, Arjuna said, "My dear Uttara, please send the cowherd men ahead and have them proclaim your victory. We shall enter the city later on, after bathing the horses and taking a little rest."

Meanwhile, Virāṭa had returned to his city along with the Pāṇḍavas, after having defeated the Trigartas. Then, as he was seated upon his royal throne, Virāṭa inquired about his son, Bhuminjaya, and so the palace ladies joyfully responded, "O King, taking only Bṛhannala with him, your son has gone out to fight with the great Kuru warriors who have plundered our cattle."

Upon hearing this, Virāṭa became very aggrieved at heart. He then ordered his ministers, "Let the army set out at once in order to come to Uttara's aid. Send back word to me immediately whether my son is alive or not. Since he has entered the battlefield with the support of only one eunuch, I think that he has surely been slain."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then smilingly said, "O King, with Bṛhannala as his charioteer, your son could defeat all of the demigods and demons combined, and so what to speak of a mere band of mortals."

Just at this time, the messengers arrived, proclaiming Uttara's victory and the recovery of the plundered cattle. When Virāṭa heard this news, he felt such great ecstasy that all of the hairs on his body stood on end. Indeed, after amply rewarding the bearers of good news, the king ordered that the entire city be immediately decorated. Then, he commanded that his daughter Uttarā, along with all of her girlfriends, as well as many musicians, princes, and prostitutes, go out to receive Bhuminjaya after dressing themselves very nicely. When these arrangements had thus been taken care of, Virāṭa felt like enjoying the happy occasion, and so he turned to the sairindhrī and ordered, "Go and
fetch the dice, for I would like to play with Kaňka."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then warned, "O King, one who is intoxicated with joy should not be so foolish as to play with a cunning gambler."
Virāṭa replied, "I already intend to give away vast amounts of charity today. Therefore, what is the harm if I happen to lose a little at dice?"
Still, Kaňka again warned, "O King, you should consider the inherent evil of gambling. Remember how Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira lost his entire empire while engaged in a game of dice."
Virāṭa was insistent, however, and so the play immediately began. Then, while taking up the dice, Virāṭa started to brag about how his son had single-handedly defeated all of the great Kuru warriors. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O King, this is not very surprising, because Brhannala had acted as Uttara's charioteer."
This comment irritated the king, however, and so he responded by shouting, "O foolish brāhmaṇa, how can you dare to compare a eunuch with my heroic son? I consider this to be a great insult, and it is only in consideration of our friendship that I am willing to forgive you. However, let me warn you that if you want to continue living here, then you had better be very careful to never say such a thing again!"
And yet, in spite of this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O King, I do not think that your son actually deserves any credit for this victory. No one else but Brhannala could fight against Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, Duryodhana, Aśvatthāmā, and Karṇa!"
At this, Virāṭa flared up with rage. Picking up one of the dice, he violently threw it at Kaňka, striking him in the face. Virāṭa then screamed, "Do not ever dare to speak like this again!"
As blood flowed from his nose, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira caught it in his cupped hands and then glanced at Draupadī, who was standing nearby. Understanding the intentions of her husband, she quickly brought a golden dish filled with water and then carefully caught all of blood before it could touch the ground.
Meanwhile, Uttara entered the city as the citizens joyfully welcomed him and covered him with flower garlands. Uttara then sent a messenger to announce his arrival, and upon receiving the news, Virāṭa called for his son with great pleasure. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then took aside the messenger and whispered, "Make sure that you only summon Uttara and
not Bṛhannala, for Bṛhannala has vowed to kill anyone who draws blood from me. If he comes here and sees my wound, then he will surely kill the king along with all of his ministers."

The messenger then departed, and soon thereafter, Uttara entered the royal court. While offering respects to his father, the prince saw how Yudhisṭhira, covered with blood, was being attended by Draupadī. He thus inquired, "My dear father, who has dared to perform the sinful act of harming Kaṅka?"

Virāṭa replied, "It was I who struck the fool! He actually deserves much greater punishment, for he has dared to praise Bṛhannala while I was glorifying you for your victory over the Kurus."

Uttara then begged, "O King, please try to pacify Kaṅka. Otherwise, you will surely be ruined by the brāhmaṇa's curse."

Upon hearing this, Virāṭa became a little conscious of his offense, and so he humbly approached Mahārāja Yudhisṭhira and begged him for forgiveness. Yudhisṭhira then said, my dear king, I have already forgiven you, because I know that powerful persons tend to act with unreasonable severity when there is a question of insult. However, it is a fact that if the blood which you had drawn had fallen upon the ground, then without a doubt, you would have been destroyed along with your entire kingdom."

Mahārāja Yudhisṭhira's bleeding then stopped, and thereafter, Bṛhannala entered the royal court. After offering his respects to Virāṭa and Kaṅka, he stood by silently. At this time, the king once again began to glorify his son by saying, "I am simply amazed at how Bhuminjaya could have fought with and defeated such great warriors as Bhīṣma, Kṛpa, Droṇa, Aśvatthāmā, Karṇa, and Duryodhana."

Uttara then explained, "O Father, it was not I who had vanquished the Kauravas. Actually, as soon as I saw those great warriors, I began to run away out of fear. At that time, a certain son of a demigod came there and stopped me. Then, after instilling confidence in me, he got up onto my chariot in order to fight. That powerful, celestial hero threw the entire Kaurava army into confusion and then rebuked the fleeing Duryodhana. Finally, after stupefying the great warriors, he had me take away their valuable clothing before returning home."

Virāṭa then asked, "My dear son, please tell me who that celestial youth
was, for I wish to worship him for having saved you along with my cattle."

Uttara then replied, "After the battle was over, that demigod's son disappeared after assuring me that he would once again show himself after a day or two."

Thereafter, with Virāṭa's permission, Bṛhannala presented the costly garments of the Kurus to Uttarā, and she was highly delighted to receive them. Then, on the third day after the battle, the Pāṇḍavas bathed, dressed in royal white robes, and adorned themselves with valuable ornaments. Their vow of exile having been completed, the Pāṇḍavas entered the royal court early in the morning and took their seats on the thrones which were reserved for visiting kings. After awhile, Virāṭa came there at his appointed time in order to begin executing his royal duties. Although the Pāṇḍavas certainly looked very magnificent, Virāṭa was taken aback to see them seated in such a way. Then, after thinking over the matter a moment, he angrily said to Yudhiṣṭhira, "O Kaṅka, how can a court jester dare to wear a royal robe and sit upon a throne which is reserved for kings?"

Desiring to joke with Virāṭa, Arjuna smilingly replied, "My dear king, don't you know that Kaṅka is actually the emperor of the entire world, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira in disguise? He is the foremost of all human beings and the very embodiment of virtue. Don't you think that he deserves to sit upon this throne?"

Virāṭa doubted Arjuna's words and so he inquired, "O Bṛhannala, if Kaṅka is really Yudhiṣṭhira, then where are Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva? Where is their illustrious wife, Draupadī?"

Arjuna replied, "Your cook Vallabha, who is seated here, is none other than Bhīma. It is he who was the so-called Gandharva that killed the wicked Kīcaka. Your keeper of horses is actually Nakula, and your caretaker of cows is Sahadeva. I am Arjuna, and the sairindhri is our wife Draupadī."

Since the Pāṇḍavas had revealed their own identities, Uttara took this opportunity to explain, "My dear father, the one whom I had spoken of as the son of a demigod is actually Arjuna. It was he who came to my rescue and vanquished the Kauravas in battle."

After hearing this, Virāṭa could realize how much he had offended
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and so, desiring to please the Pāṇḍavas, he immediately offered his beautiful young daughter, Uttarā, to Arjuna. Virāṭa then humbly approached Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and in order to make an alliance, he offered his entire kingdom for the Pāṇḍavas to rule. Virāṭa then repeatedly embraced all of the Pāṇḍavas with great affection, and he once again requested Arjuna to accept the hand of his daughter in marriage. Arjuna then replied, "O King, I shall happily accept Uttarā as my daughter-in-law."

Virāṭa was a little disappointed upon hearing this, and so he inquired, "My dear Arjuna, why are you unwilling to accept my daughter as your own wife?"

Arjuna then explained, "My dear king, I have been living with Uttarā for the past year, and during that time, I have always treated her just like a daughter. Besides, since she has already attained the age of puberty, people will doubt whether she has remained a virgin while we were living together. However, by accepting her as my daughter-in-law, I am testifying to her purity. I greatly fear false accusations, and so I would prefer that she becomes the wife of Abhimanyu, the favorite nephew of Lord Kṛṣṇa."

Virāṭa then happily consented, as did Yudhiṣṭhira, and thereafter, both kings sent out invitations for the royal wedding. The Pāṇḍavas then moved to a small town named Upaplavya, which was situated within Virāṭa's kingdom. Lord Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Abhimanyu, Subhadra, and many of the great Yadu heroes came there, as did Drupada and his sons, the king of Kāśi, and many other illustrious kings and their armies. Virāṭa entertained them all in the best royal style, and at this time, Indrasena arrived from Dvārakā with the Pāṇḍavas' chariots. The wedding of Uttarā and Abhimanyu took place in Virāṭa's palace, and Lord Kṛṣṇa gave all of the Pāṇḍavas gifts of indestructible value. After the completion of the fire-sacrifice, Virāṭa offered not only his kingdom but his very self to the Pāṇḍavas. Finally, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira took whatever he had received from Lord Kṛṣṇa and the other kings and distributed it to all of the brāhmaṇas.

The day after Uttarā and Abhimanyu's wedding, all of the kings who had come to attend assembled at the royal court. In the front sat Virāṭa,
Drupada, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and Their father Vasudeva, the Pāṇḍavas, some of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s sons such as Pradyumna and Sāmba, Abhimanyu, and the sons of Virāṭa and Draupadī. These great heroes conversed among themselves about various topics for some time, and then they finally became pensive and silent. Indeed, everyone expectantly looked toward Lord Kṛṣṇa who then began to speak as follows:

"O rulers of the earth, we all know how Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was deprived of his kingdom and exiled to the forest by deceitful means. This misfortune was not forced upon the Pāṇḍavas because they were lacking in prowess. They voluntarily accepted so much hardship just to honor Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's vow. Now that the Pāṇḍavas have successfully passed through one year of living incognito, it is up to us to decide what should be done next."

Everyone listened to this grave and meaningful speech with rapt attention while sitting on the edge of their seats. Lord Kṛṣṇa then suggested, "My dear heroes, all of you who are present here should now offer advice which is consistent with morality and which is for the benefit of both the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira would never even dream of accepting the sovereignty of the three worlds if it were obtained by dishonest means. On the other hand, he would be satisfied to take even a single village, if it were earned righteously. Still, we must always keep in mind how the Kauravas have continually harassed the Pāṇḍavas, right from their very childhood. The Pāṇḍavas deserve to receive back all that was rightfully gained by them before the gambling match. Thus, if the Kauravas do not voluntarily return the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom, then we must be prepared to fight! However, let us not judge things hastily. After all, Duryodhana has not yet expressed his intentions. Therefore, let us send a qualified ambassador to Hastināpura, in order to request the Kaurava king to peacefully return half of the kingdom to the Pāṇḍavas."

Balarāma then said, "My dear assembled kings and princes, I fully agree with what my brother Kṛṣṇa has said. Duryodhana should give back to the Pāṇḍavas their rightful share of the kingdom, and thus an ambassador should at once go to Hastināpura and very humbly request him to do so, so that a war can be avoided. However, I do not think that
Duryodhana and Śakuni should be blamed. After all, Yudhiṣṭhira did voluntarily accept the challenge to play at dice. Now, of course, the Pāṇḍavas have fulfilled their condition of exile, and so they should be given back whatever they had lost."

At this point, Sātyaki angrily interrupted, saying, "O Balarāma, you are speaking most nonsensically! I shall never tolerate anyone who attributes even the slightest fault to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. O carrier of the plow, you speak like this because you are a coward! Everyone knows that Śakuni won the gambling match by employing deceitful means. Therefore, why should Yudhiṣṭhira have to humble himself by begging for the return of his rightful kingdom? I think that we should send arrows instead of ambassadors to Hastināpura, for we all know that Duryodhana has no intention of making a peaceful settlement. If no one else has the courage, then I am ready to single-handedly send all of the Kurus to the abode of Yamarāja! We should simply tell Duryodhana that he must either return the kingdom to Yudhiṣṭhira this very day or else face the dire consequences!"

Drupada then said, "O Kings, I agree with Sātyaki! It is foolish to imagine that Duryodhana will peacefully return half of the kingdom to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Dhṛtarāṣṭra will allow Duryodhana to do whatever he likes, and out of stupidity, Bhīṣma and Droṇa will support the Kaurava king, as will the foolish Śakuni and Karna. What Balarāma has said is quite proper if we were eager to obtain a peaceful settlement. On the other hand, I do not feel that the vicious Duryodhana even deserves such gentlemanly treatment. The puffed-up Kaurava king needs to be brought to his senses, and mild behavior on our part will only lead him to believe that we are cowards and weaklings. Therefore, let us adopt a hard line, and since war is inevitable, we must immediately try to gain the upper hand. Messengers should be quickly sent to all the great kings of the world so that we can acquire as many allies as possible and amass our army without delay. We can rest assured that Duryodhana is doing this very same thing and so we must act very swiftly, for etiquette will compel the kings to accept the side which submits their request first. Meanwhile, we can also send an ambassador to Hastināpura, and I suggest that my priest be employed for this purpose. You can all instruct him about what to say in front of the elders of the
Lord Kṛṣṇa then once again spoke as follows: "O respected rulers, I feel that Drupada has spoken quite correctly. Only a foolish person would not first try to utilize political means in the hopes of resolving this dispute peacefully. You must also keep in mind that we, the Yādavas, are equally connected with both the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas in terms of our family relationship. Therefore, we must first of all send a very polite message to Duryodhana. Then, only if he refuses our request, will we consider making preparations for war. In the meantime, other allies may be gathered, as suggested by Drupada. There is one thing, however, which all of you may know from Me for certain:

If it comes to war, then Arjuna will mete out to Duryodhana and his allies their deserved fate, and in this matter there is no doubt!"

Everyone present agreed with Lord Kṛṣṇa's approach. Lord Kṛṣṇa and the other Yādavas then took permission from Virāṭa and departed for Dvārakā while the Pāṇḍavas began preparing for war. With the help of Drupada and Virāṭa, the Pāṇḍavas immediately sent out invitations to all the kings of the world. Thus, within a short time, mighty rulers of men began to pour into Upaplavya from all corners of the globe. By means of spies, the Kauravas learned of the Pāṇḍavas' plans, and so they also began to collect their allies in the same way. Thus, the entire earth became crowded with warriors as they traversed its surface in order to join with either the Pāṇḍavas or the Kauravas.

Meanwhile, Drupada sent off his elderly and learned priest to Hastināpura as the Pāṇḍavas' ambassador, after instructing him how to deal with the Kurus in such a way that there would be the best chance for establishing peace. Drupada especially advised the brāhmaṇa to speak from the viewpoint of virtue so that with Vidura's support, Bhiṣma, Droṇa and Kṛpa might slacken in their staunch support of Duryodhana. Drupada considered that if some dissension could be created in this way, then Duryodhana would have to spend all of his time reconciling himself with his generals. As a result, the Kaurava king would be unable to adequately prepare for war, while the Pāṇḍavas could amass their allies without impediment. In this way, Drupada intelligently instructed the brāhmaṇa how to sow seeds of sympathy for the Pāṇḍavas within the Kuru's hearts, and thus create disunion among them.
After the departure of Drupada’s priest, Arjuna decided to go to Dvārakā. By means of spies, Duryodhana learned of this, and so he quickly left Hastināpura for the capitol of the Yādavas. It so happened that both Arjuna and Duryodhana arrived at Dvārakā on the very same day, although the Kaurava king was the first to enter Lord Kṛṣṇa’s palace. There, Duryodhana found that Kṛṣṇa was sleeping, however, and so he took his seat upon a very opulent chair which he found placed near the Lord’s head. Soon, thereafter, Arjuna entered the room, and after bowing down in order to offer obeisances, he stood at Lord Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet with folded hands. Now, it so happened that when Kṛṣṇa awoke, His glance first fell upon Arjuna. Then, when He saw that Duryodhana had also come to see Him, Lord Kṛṣṇa inquired, “O best of the Bhāratas, I hope that both of you are well. Now, please disclose the purpose of your coming here to visit Me.”

Duryodhana quickly replied, “My dear Kṛṣṇa, I have come to solicit Your help in the impending war between ourselves and the Pāṇḍavas. Although You are equally related to both sides as our cousin, because I have come here first, You should grant my request without hesitation.” Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, “My dear Duryodhana, there is no doubt that you were the first to enter My room. However, since I happened to see Arjuna first upon awakening, I shall arrange to help both of you. I have under My rule, ten crores of powerful cowherd warriors, known as Nārāyaṇas, who practically rival Me in strength. I will give these soldiers to one side and then personally assist the other side after vowing to never take up a weapon during the battle. Now, since it is customary for juniors to be given the first choice, I shall let Arjuna select either Myself or My warriors.”

Without the slightest hesitation, Arjuna happily chose Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, and in turn, Duryodhana was very satisfied to receive the Nārāyaṇa warriors. Then, feeling himself to have succeeded in his mission, Duryodhana took leave of Kṛṣṇa and next went to see Lord Balarāma. Lord Kṛṣṇa’s elder brother was certainly very favorably disposed toward Duryodhana. Still, in reply to the Kaurava King’s request for help, Lord Balarāma spoke as follows, “My dear Duryodhana, at the time of Abhimanyu’s marriage, I had spoken very highly of you, even to the extent of contradicting Kṛṣṇa. Still, My words were not
accepted by Him. Please try to understand that I am inseparable from Lord Kṛṣṇa, and it is My eternal vow to never act against His supreme will. Therefore, after considering the matter very carefully, I have firmly decided not to take any part in the impending war."

Duryodhana could understand Balarāma's predicament and so, after embracing Him in great friendship, he departed for the palace of Kṛtavarmā. Thereafter, when this great Yadu hero promised his allegiance along with his one akṣauhinī of soldiers, Duryodhana became highly delighted. Meanwhile, after Duryodhana's departure, Lord Kṛṣṇa had asked Arjuna, "O son of Kunti, why did you choose Me instead of My powerful army, since I shall not even be able to fight?"

Arjuna replied, "My dear Lord, I know that all prowess, fame, and victory reside with You alone. Therefore, even if You do not fight, that opulence will follow You onto the battlefield, enabling me to certainly come out victorious. My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, it is my long cherished desire that You become my charioteer. Now, since You have agreed to personally assist me, kindly fulfill my wish."

Lord Kṛṣṇa agreed to drive Arjuna's chariot, and thereafter, they both set out for Upaplavya. Meanwhile, after receiving Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's invitation, Śalya, the king of the Madras, set out to join the Pāṇḍavas, taking with him his sons and one akṣauhinī of soldiers. Such an army was so large that while camping at night, it would cover an area of twelve square miles.

Duryodhana learned of Śalya's intention to join the Pāṇḍavas, and so he cleverly had a rest camp constructed alongside the road upon which the king of the Madras was traveling. This camp was adorned with a magnificent pavilion, which was filled with all imaginable objects of enjoyment, was staffed by a most expert and extensive team of personnel. Duryodhana also went there, but he remained hidden at the time of Śalya's arrival. Duryodhana's servants then gave Satya a most royal reception, and indeed, the arrangements were so opulent that the king began to feel himself superior even to Indra, the king of heaven.

After being unstintingly lavished with food, drink, and entertainment, Śalya became extremely satisfied. Then, thinking that all of it had been provided by Yudhiṣṭhira, Śalya called for the servants to reward them in order to please his magnanimous host. The pleasantly surprised servants
then went and reported everything to Duryodhana, who then personally came and presented himself before his maternal uncle. When Śalya saw that it was actually Duryodhana who had gone to so much trouble to receive him, he embraced his nephew and said, "My dear king, you have pleased me very much by your gracious hospitality. Now, please let me do something for you in return."

At this, Duryodhana happily replied, "O Uncle, I would like you to become the commander of my vast army." Śalya immediately agreed and then said, "My dear Duryodhana, please return to Hastināpura and I shall first of all pay a visit to the Pāṇḍavas before joining you."

Duryodhana gave his consent but then added, "O Śalya, please come to Hastināpura quickly and do not forget your promise to me."

Once again, the two embraced and thereafter, they departed for their respective destinations. Upon reaching Upaplavya, Śalya was very respectfully received by the Pāṇḍavas. In turn, he inquired about their welfare and then embraced Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva one after another. Śalya then sat down with Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and said, "O King, I am very happy to see that you have successfully completed your term of exile. I am confident that you shall be able to defeat your enemies and thus regain your deserved kingdom. Now, I must inform you that while coming here, I was met along the way by Duryodhana. Because he offered me such a royal reception, I felt obliged to pledge my allegiance unto him."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then replied, "My dear uncle, it is very good that you have properly rewarded Duryodhana for his hospitality. Therefore, I will not lament about you having joined sides with him. However, I would like to request one favor from you as follows: There is no doubt that Arjuna will have to fight with Karṇa to the death. At that time, you will certainly become Karṇa's driver, for with the exception of Lord Kṛṣṇa, there is no other charioteer as skilled as you. Whether improper or not, I beg you to protect Arjuna at that time by speaking so that Karṇa will lose all enthusiasm for fighting."

Śalya replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, when the time comes, I will speak in such a way that Karṇa's pride will be cut down, and he will become so discouraged that Arjuna will easily slay him. I shall never forgive Karṇa for his insulting words to Draupadi. Therefore, rest assured that I shall
help you to defeat him. My dear Yudhishthira, you should be confident that all of your sufferings will ultimately lead to victory. Do not lament, for, after all, even Indra and Śacī once had to undergo similar hardships long, long ago."

Mahārāja Yudhishthira was curious to hear about this incident, and so Śalya began to narrate as follows: After Indra had killed his son, the three-headed Viśvarūpa, the great sage Tvaśṭā caused a monstrous demon named Vṛtra to emerge from his sacrificial fire. Thus, there ensued a fierce battle between Vṛtrāsura and all of the demigods. At last, Indra was able to slay the huge demon with his thunderbolt, which had become enhanced with a portion of Lord Viṣṇu's unlimited potency. All living beings felt great pleasure and relief upon the death of Vṛtra, and thus they glorified the king of heaven for his victory. In turn, Indra worshipped Lord Viṣṇu, and yet, instead of feeling delight, the king of heaven became very morose because he had become afflicted by the sinful reaction for killing a brāhmaṇa. Indeed, in an attempt to avoid the terrible sinful reaction, which was pursuing him in her personified form, Indra at last hid himself within the waters of the Mānasa-sarovara. However, due to being overpowered by the influence of the sinful reaction, he lost all of his prowess, and thus he practically could no longer be recognized.

In the absence of Indra, the earth became plunged into chaos. Due to lack of rain, all water gradually dried up in the lakes and rivers. Thus, as all of the vegetation began to wither, men and animals were put into extreme distress. The demigods and rṣis also became very anxious since they were bereft of their leader, and after consulting together, they decided to install the pious King Nāhuṣa upon the royal throne of heaven. Thus, the demigods and rṣis appeared before Nāhuṣa and requested him to take the post of Indra. Keeping his self-interest in mind, however, Nāhuṣa first of all refused by saying, "O residents of heaven, I am not powerful enough to act as the protector of the entire universe. As a result, I would certainly be vanquished in no time."

The demigods and rṣis replied, "O King, rest assured that we shall empower you with the results of our austerities. In this way, you will become so powerful that you shall be able to absorb the prowess of
whosoever happens to stand before you. Thus, having become supremely powerful, you shall be able to rule over the universe without impediment or fear."

At this, Nāhuṣa agreed, and soon thereafter, he was installed as the king of heaven. And yet, even though Nāhuṣa had certainly acted very virtuously while residing upon the earth, after being awarded the highest post in heaven and its accompanying power, his mind quickly turned toward sensuality. Thus, Nāhuṣa always kept himself surrounded by the Apsarās, enjoying their company in the heavenly gardens, while being waited upon by Nārada, Viśvāvasu, the personified six seasons, and numerous others who provided musical as well as other kinds of entertainment.

Then, one day, as Nāhuṣa was enjoying himself in this way, he happened to see Indra's favorite queen, Śacī. Becoming struck by her beauty, Nāhuṣa turned to his attendants and said, "Why should not this most lovely lady wait upon me like the others? After all, I am now the king of heaven! Go and bring her to me, after I have returned to my palace."

Thereafter, when Śacī learned of Nāhuṣa's order, she fearfully went to Brhaspati in order to live under his protection. After explaining Nāhuṣa's intentions, Śacī implored, "My dear preceptor, previously you had described me as the most chaste among women, and destined never to become a widow. Now, you must insure that your words do not prove false."

Brhaspati replied, "O Queen, I can assure you that you need not have any fear of Nāhuṣa. Very soon you shall be reunited with your husband."

Meanwhile, when Nāhuṣa learned that Śacī had taken shelter of Brhaspati, he became exceedingly angry. Upon seeing this, all of the demigods and great rṣis went to him and pleaded, "O King, please give up your sinful intention of enjoying the wife of another. Due to your wrath, all of the creatures within the universe are being afflicted by great fear."

However, Nāhuṣa had already become overwhelmed by lust after seeing Śacī, and thus he could not appreciate this good advice. In reply, he argued, "O Celestials, why are you speaking to me like this? Indra himself had raped Ahalyā, the wife of a rṣi, and he had also performed many other sinful and deceitful acts. Why did not you all endeavor to stop him at these times? Besides, I do not have to concern myself with your
arguments, for it is I who am the king! Therefore, I order you to hand over Śacī to me at once. Let me warn you: If my command is neglected, then it will create a very dangerous situation for you!"

Because Nāhuṣa was able to absorb the prowess of all who came before him, the demigods and ṛṣis were very afraid of him. Thus, they assured the king that they would do his bidding and thereafter, they approached Bṛhaspati. The demigods then begged the preceptor, "O best of the brāhmaṇas, please hand over Śacī to us for the satisfaction of Nāhuṣa. The king has become even more powerful than Indra himself, and thus it is befitting for her to accept him as her lord."

Upon hearing this, Śacī burst into tears and beseeched Bṛhaspati by saying, "O Lord, please save me from this dangerous situation!"

Bṛhaspati gave Śacī assurances and then said, "My dear, do not be afraid, because I am determined never to abandon one who has helplessly taken shelter of me."

Then, turning to the demigods, Bṛhaspati said, "You can all go home now, for I shall never agree to give Śacī to Nāhuṣa. Lord Brahmā himself has said, 'A person who abandons someone who has fearfully taken shelter of him, will himself become bereft of protection when it is directly needed. Indeed, the seeds which are planted by such a heartless person will not sprout, his children will die untimely, and the demigods will no longer accept his offerings but instead afflict him with severe punishments.'"

Upon hearing this, the demigods begged, "O Preceptor, we are very afraid of Nāhuṣa's wrath! What will happen to us if we fail to comply with his wishes? You must therefore find some way to extricate us from this great danger!"

Bṛhaspati then said, "O Demigods, please listen to my plan. Let Śacī approach Nāhuṣa, and by giving him false hope, she can stall for time. In this way, Śacī can be saved, for very soon Nāhuṣa will fall down from his powerful position as a result of his own offenses."

Thereafter, as instructed by Bṛhaspati, Śacī bashfully appeared before Nāhuṣa. The king was overwhelmed with joy to see her, and in a voice that trembled with emotion, he said, "O most beautiful one, I have been conquered by your youthful beauty, therefore please become my wife."

While shaking like a banana tree in the wind, the terrified Śacī replied,
“O King, since the whereabouts of my husband are unknown, I beg you to first of all allow me some time to try and find him. Then, if my attempt fails, I shall surely accept you with great pleasure.”

Nāhuṣa was prepared to do anything to gain Śacī’s favor, and so he agreed to her concession and then dismissed her. Śacī then returned to the house of Bṛhaspati, while the demigods began to seriously think about how they could reinstate Indra upon his heavenly throne. At last, the demigods approached Lord Viṣṇu and requested, “O Supreme Personality of Godhead, please prescribe some means whereby Indra can become freed from the reaction for having killed a brāhmaṇa.”

Lord Viṣṇu replied, “O Celestials, if Indra performs a horse-sacrifice for My satisfaction, then he will become purified and thus enabled to become reinstated in his former position. Besides this, you can rest assured that Nāhuṣa will soon fall from his heavenly post as a result of his own fault. Therefore, you should all be patient and wait for that time to come.”

Thereafter, the demigods located Indra within the Mānasa-sarovara, and they engaged him in performing a horse-sacrifice. At this time, Indra was able to distribute his sinful reaction for having killed a brāhmaṇa to women, trees, rivers, and the earth. Being thus relieved, the king of heaven regained his lost prowess, and thus he felt renewed confidence. Then, in order to take back his former post, Indra went to Nāhuṣa, who was seated upon the royal throne in heaven. However, as soon as Indra saw how Nāhuṣa had become practically unapproachable due to his acquired benedictions, he fearfully fled from heaven and once again descended upon the earth. Thereafter, making himself invisible to others, Indra began to wander about, absorbed in grief.

When she learned what had happened, Śacī also became very miserable, and in her desperation, she took to the worship of the goddess of Divination, for she controls the means of ascertaining all unknown things. Śacī fervently prayed to the goddess, begging that she show her kindness by revealing where Indra could be found. The goddess of Divination then appeared to her in a dream, and after being respectfully worshipped by Śacī, the goddess explained, “O Queen, due to your chastity, you shall soon come to know where your husband is staying. Simply follow me, and I will take you there!”
In Śacī's dream, the goddess of Divination set out, and so she followed. In this way, the goddess and Śacī traversed many heavenly forests and mountains. Then, after crossing the Himavat while going north, they finally reached the sea. Within the water they saw an island which was 100 yojanas (800 miles) in length and breadth, and was covered with trees and plants. Then, upon that island, they came to a lake which was filled with five-colored lotuses that were surrounded by swarms of humming bees. In the middle of the lake was a very dense cluster of these lotus flowers, and in the center of this cluster was an especially large, white lotus, resting upon a very tall stalk. Accompanied by the goddess of Divination, Śacī was able to penetrate into that lotus stalk. There, she found Indra, who was residing within the fibers in a very tiny form. Having also assumed a minute form, Śacī began to glorify her husband's past heroic deeds. In response, Indra finally inquired, "O Śacī, how were you able to find me? Why have you come here?"
Śacī then explained how she had received help from the goddess of Divination. She also described how she was being persecuted by Nāhuṣa, who would take her by force upon the expiration of a certain time limit. Finally, when Śacī implored Indra to kill Nāhuṣa, he replied, "This king is now too powerful for me to defeat. However, there is another means of vanquishing him. Go to Nāhuṣa and tell him that if he approaches you while riding upon a palanquin drawn by great brahmarśis, then you will deem him fit for becoming your husband."
Śacī then awoke, and considering the dream factual, she decided to obey the command of her husband. Thus, Śacī once again went to Nāhuṣa. Finding him very glad to see her and ready to execute her every order, she then said, "O King, I consider you to be a much greater personality than Indra. Therefore, I want to accept you in a way which is befitting your superior position. Whereas Indra had formally used horses, chariots and elephants as conveyances, you should have a unique vehicle which is not found anywhere within the society of demigods and demons. O King, if you were to come to me riding on a palanquin carried by brahmarśis, then I would be most happy to submit to you."
Nāhuṣa was very pleased to hear Śacī speak like that, and so he replied, "O lovely one, I like this idea very much. Since the whole universe is under my control, there will be no difficulty for me to arrange for the
sapta-ṛṣis to carry my palanquin. Now, you can return home, and I shall come to you shortly, according to your desire."

Being intoxicated with false pride, Nāhuṣa did not even care for the exalted position of the great ṛṣis, and thus, after summoning them, he demanded that they carry his palanquin. Meanwhile, the distressed Ācī returned to Bṛhaspati and said, "O Preceptor, I have very little time remaining now. Very soon, Nāhuṣa will come here, riding upon a palanquin that is carried by brahmārṇīs. You must find Indra and somehow enable him to come to my rescue!"

Bṛhaspati replied, "O Queen, I can assure you that Nāhuṣa's destruction is very near at hand, for he is about to commit an offense toward the great ṛṣis. Still, I shall perform a sacrifice to insure Nāhuṣa's fall, and at the same time, I will request Agni to locate your husband."

Bṛhaspati then began to perform the sacrifice, and as he poured the offerings of ghee into the fire, he requested Agni to search for Indra. Agni then took the form of a woman and with the speed of mind, he began to look all over the earth. Indeed, it was only after a moment that he returned to Bṛhaspati and informed him that Indra was nowhere to be found. Agni had not searched within the waters, however, for that element was very fearful for him. Bṛhaspati thus ordered him to go out once again, and this time look within all of the oceans, rivers and lakes. At first, the god of fire refused. However, when Bṛhaspati glorified him at great length and then guaranteed to empower him so that he would remain unaffected by the water, Agni finally gave his consent.

Thereafter, the fire-god entered all bodies of water, from the great seas down to the tiny ponds. In this way, he finally came to the lake in which Indra was staying. At last, after searching through all of the lotus flowers, Agni found the king of heaven lying within the fibers of a big lotus stalk, practically bereft of his normal prowess. Agni quickly returned to inform Bṛhaspati, and so the preceptor took the demigods and went to that lake and presented himself before Indra. First of all, the demigods glorified indra's past heroic deeds at great length, and then they pleaded, "O King, rise up now and defeat your enemy."

By the good wishes of the demigods and Bṛhaspati, Indra immediately regained his full confidence and energy. Thus, as if waking from a deep slumber, he inquired, "O residents of heaven, what is it that you wish for
Bṛhaspati replied, "O King, in your absence, Nāhuṣa was empowered by us to rule over the universe. However, he soon became extremely puffed-up due to his acquired power and prestige, and thus he has become a source of anguish for all living beings. Therefore, you must come out of hiding, and after vanquishing Nāhuṣa, resume your rightful position!"

Then, as Bṛhaspati was speaking, Kuvera, Sūrya, Yamarāja, Soma, and Varuṇa all came to that lake. Indra received them very respectfully and then requested, "O chief of the demigods, please help me to defeat Nāhuṣa, for I feel incapable of doing so simply by dint of my own strength."

The demigods unanimously agreed to assist Indra in whatever way they could, and as they were conversing in this manner, the great ṛṣi, Agastya, came there. After being highly honored, Agastya explained, "O Celestials, Nāhuṣa has already been thrown down from his position as the king of heaven. One day, the king ordered me and the other great brahmārṣis to carry him upon his palanquin. While doing so, we became quite exhausted. Thus, we stopped for awhile in order to rest, and during this interval we began to discuss various topics. Then, in the course of our conversation, we happened to question Nāhuṣa about the authenticity of certain Vedic hymns which are chanted while sprinkling water over cows. The deluded king then replied, '⁠O ṛṣis, these hymns are not actually genuine and thus chanting them will produce no effect.' "Upon hearing this, we informed Nāhuṣa, 'O King, you have become overwhelmed by demoniac tendencies! All of the great sages in the past have accepted Vedic knowledge as absolutely perfect and without any tinge of the four human defects.' "Nāhuṣa had become possessed by Falsity personified, and thus he became angry on account of our criticism. He then arrogantly touched me with his foot. Because of this, and in consideration of how he had blasphemed the Vedas and also forced us to carry him as if we were animals, I cursed Nāhuṣa saying, 'O foolish king, you shall immediately fall down to the earth. Taking the form of a giant serpent, you will have to remain in that abominable condition of life for 10,000 years before at last being delivered!!'"

Agastya then implored Indra, "O King, come back to heaven now and
resume your old post for the welfare of all living beings within the universe."

Having heard about Nāhuṣa's downfall, Indra happily consented, and without delay, he departed for heaven. All of the creatures within the three worlds thus became relieved from the great burden of Nāhuṣa, which they had tolerated for a long time, and thus they glorified Indra upon his return. Later on, the great sage Aṅgirāś came into Indra's royal court and recited the mantras of the Atharva Veda. Being very pleased with him, Indra gave the ṛṣi the name Atharvāṅgiras, and he also ordained that the great sage would henceforth receive a share of the offerings from all sacrificial performances.

Śalya then encouraged Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira by saying, "O King, you should not grieve on account of the miseries which you have had to suffer along with your brothers and Draupadī. I can assure you that Karṇa and Duryodhana will also be overthrown, just as King Nāhuṣa was."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear uncle, I am very grateful to you for having narrated this wonderful history. Now, once again, I humbly request you to somehow or other dampen Karṇa's spirits when you are called upon to drive his chariot during his encounter with Arjuna."

Again, Śalya assured Yudhiṣṭhira that he would do this, and at last, after taking permission from the king, he departed for Hastināpura.

Yuyudhāna (Sātyaki) then arrived at Upaplavya with an army of one akṣauḥiṇī. Dhṛṣṭaketu, the king of the Cedis, also came there with one akṣauḥiṇī, as did Jayatsena, the king of Māgadha and Pāṇḍya. Thus, including the armies of Drupada, Virāṭa, and the five Kekaya kings, the allied forces of the Pāṇḍavas totaled seven akṣauḥiṇīs.

On the other side, Bhagadatta came to Duryodhana's camp with one akṣauḥiṇī, as did Bhūriśravas, Śalya, Kṛtavrma, and Jayadratha. Sudakṣīna, the king of the Kāmbhojas, also brought an army of one akṣauḥiṇī, as did Nila, the king who ruled over Māhiṣmatī. The two Avantī kings brought one akṣauḥiṇī each and there were five other Kekaya princes who also came with one akṣauḥiṇī of soldiers. Adding these to the Kaurava army, Duryodhana's combined forces came to eleven akṣauḥiṇīs. As a result of this huge assembly of warriors,
Hastināpura became overcrowded, and indeed, the entire surrounding area became transformed into one sprawling army camp. Meanwhile, Drupada's aged and learned priest arrived at Hastināpura, and he was very respectfully received by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma, and Vidura. Then, in the royal assembly, amidst all of the leaders of Duryodhana's army, the brāhmaṇa spoke as follows:

"My dear kings and princes, kindly hear what I have to say. Because Pāṇḍu and Dhṛtarāṣṭra were brothers, the kingdom of the Kurus should in all due rights be shared equally by their sons. Is there any reason why the Pāṇḍavas should be denied their legitimate paternal inheritance? And yet, even in their childhood, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra tried in so many ways to remove the Pāṇḍavas from the scene. Toward this end, even the most dire and treacherous plans were devised, and the culmination of all this was the exile of the Pāṇḍavas to the forest after a deceitful game of dice. You can all imagine just how much suffering the Pāṇḍavas have had to tolerate during the last thirteen years. And yet, in spite of this, the sons of Pāṇḍu want a peaceful settlement just so they can take back whatever is rightfully theirs. O Kings, you all very well know of the Pāṇḍavas' incomparable prowess and so I advise you to avoid a war that would prove disastrous to your dynasty. If you simply follow the dictates of morality and give back the Pāṇḍavas their share of the kingdom, then so much future anguish will be avoided."

First of all, Bhīṣma commented, "O Kings, the ambassador for the Pāṇḍavas has certainly spoken to us in strong language. On the other hand, it must certainly be admitted that the sons of Pāṇḍu deserve their rightful share of the Kuru kingdom. It is also to be considered that if peace is concluded, then we shall avoid wholesale destruction at the hands of Arjuna's superior prowess."

Becoming enraged after hearing this statement, Karṇa turned to Duryodhana and arrogantly interrupted Bhīṣma by saying, "O King, you should never think that you have to return the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom out of fear. Why should we be intimidated by anyone? Of course, if the Pāṇḍavas were to personally come here and very humbly beg for it, then I am sure that you would be willing to give them some kind of kingdom to rule over as subordinates."

At this, Bhīṣma angrily retorted, "O Sūta's son, have you already
forgotten how Arjuna single-handedly vanquished you along with all of the other Kuru warriors?"

Then, in order to pacify Bhīṣma, Dhṛtarāṣṭra exclaimed, "O Kārṇa, what the grandsire has said is quite correct!"

Then, turning to the envoy, Dhṛtarāṣṭra said, "O brāhmaṇa, I shall carefully consider what is to be done, and when a conclusion has been reached, I will send Sañjaya as a messenger to the Pāṇḍavas."

In this way, Dhṛtarāṣṭra dismissed Drupada's priest. Then, after the brāhmaṇa had left the assembly, Dhṛtarāṣṭra called for Sañjaya and said, "I want you to go to Upapalavya and speak to the Pāṇḍavas in such a way that they will become pacified. There is no one more virtuous than Yudhiṣṭhira and I shall never forget how he has always been obedient to me, even while ruling the entire earth as its emperor. Indeed, I can truthfully say that after examining the Pāṇḍavas' characters throughout their lifetime, I have never been able to find out a single serious fault. My dear Sañjaya, I am sure that if they are appeased, war can be averted, for everyone loves the Pāṇḍavas except my dull-headed son and the wicked Kārṇa. I want to avoid war at all costs, because I know that with the help of Kṛṣṇa, who is Lord Viṣṇu Himself, the Pāṇḍavas are invincible. I am convinced that if the two Kṛṣṇas ride to battle together on the same chariot, then all of my sons will be annihilated. Therefore, go to the Pāṇḍavas and speak in favor of peace on my behalf."

Sañjaya was the son of Gavalgaṇa and a sūta by caste. Taking Dhṛtarāṣṭra's instructions upon his head, he departed at once for Upapalavya. After his arrival, Sañjaya was greeted by the Pāṇḍavas, and in turn he informed Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira how Dhṛtarāṣṭra was inquiring after his welfare. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired about the welfare of the Kurus at Hastināpura and in reply, Sañjaya said, "O King, I can assure you that Dhṛtarāṣṭra sincerely desires that you and his sons may live together peacefully. He is actually very sorry about all of the miseries which you have had to suffer on account of his wicked son. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's message to all of you who are present here is this, "I first of all prostrate myself before Lord Kṛṣṇa and the venerable Mahārāja Drupada. I then implore all of you to act in such a way that peace may be established between yourselves and my sons. This is also the wish of Bhīṣma and so I hope that at all costs a disastrous war may be averted."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then replied, "O Sañjaya, it is also our fervent wish that a war may be avoided and peace established. My brothers and I are never interested in selfishly enjoying happiness. We are only concerned with performing our duty in accordance with the tenets of the virtue. One who eagerly follows the dictates of his sense, hoping to become happy in that way, actually ends up being forced into performing so many abominable actions which bring on increased suffering. One who incessantly hankers after sense-gratification inflicts pain upon his own body, whereas one who forgoes such urges, avoids innumerable miseries. Unfortunately, Dhṛtarāṣṭra has always given up the virtuous path in order to be misled by his self-interested son. Therefore, he has invariably neglected the good advice of Vidura in favor of pampering Duryodhana, who is ambitious, malicious, envious, wrathful, harsh speaking, always absorbed in sensuality, inclined to transgress moral laws, and always vicious, stubborn, and extremely proud. My dear Sañjaya, I am willing to accept a peaceful settlement, but only if Indraprastha is returned to me."

Sañjaya then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you must avoid fighting with the Kauravas at all costs. It would be better for you to live by begging in the kingdom of the Vṛṣṇis than to allow yourself to be driven by greed and thus fight for your kingdom. As you well know, the highest virtue is to give up desires altogether. Therefore, do not give way to wrath now, after having lived a lifetime of strict moral behavior. If, at this time, you are thinking to regain your kingdom by use of force, then why didn't you do so at the time of the gambling match when all kings were your allies? Since then, the Kauravas have greatly increased in strength, whereas your strength has diminished. Thus, it would be a most inopportune time for you to fight. Even if you were to emerge victorious, which is certainly doubtful, what happiness could you derive after killing Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, and the other Kuru warriors? My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I know that you are by nature very compassionate and forgiving. If you are preparing yourself to fight simply because your allies are urging you on, then it would be better for you to run away, leaving them aside."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Sañjaya, it appears highly doubtful whether you actually know the true meaning of virtue or not. Of course, the subject of righteousness is very subtle, because morality is variously
conceived according to one's occupation. Furthermore, in times of distress or emergency, that which is so-called immoral may become highly virtuous. Therefore, I am not going to rely upon my own, insufficient judgment as to what should be done. I will leave everything in the hands of Lord Kṛṣṇa, for He is not only the perfect knower of what is virtuous and what is sinful, but He is Himself the giver of all fruits of action. Indeed, Lord Kṛṣṇa is the knower of everything, He is all-pervading, and He is all-powerful. Therefore, He shall decide whether it is sinful for me to fight or not, and whatever He orders will be implicitly followed by us, his unalloyed devotees."

Thus, at Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's invitation, Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke as follows: "My dear Sañjaya, you can rest assured that I am the well-wishing friend of both the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. As such, I also desire peace, but at the same time I can see that there is very little hope of coming to a suitable agreement with the greedy and envious Duryodhana. O Sañjaya, how can you dare to criticize Yudhiṣṭhira by claiming that his intentions are sinful? Do you think that you are more well-versed in morality than either Yudhiṣṭhira or Myself? You are foolishly advocating that he become inactive, even though work is always far more virtuous than idleness.

"O Sañjaya, simple knowledge is never sufficient. Suppose a person has sufficient understanding about various foods. Still, until he actually eats, his hunger will never become appeased. Of course, if the Pāṇḍavas can find a means for avoiding a war, then they shall surely utilize it. Still, considering how Yudhiṣṭhira's kingdom had been unlawfully usurped by Duryodhana, it would be far better for him to die fighting for what is rightfully his than to acquiesce. It is a kṣatriya's sacred duty to fight for a righteous cause, just as much as it is the duty of a brāhmaṇa to study the Vedas. If a śūdra were to study the Vedas, then his lack of intelligence would lead him down the wrong path and thus put him in a worse position than if he had never made such an attempt. It is for this reason that śūdrās are forbidden to study the Vedas. Instead, they are trained to submissively follow the brāhmaṇas so that they can unfailingly be led down the right path."

"O Sañjaya, everyone has his respective moral duties. If Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the other elderly Kurus had not allowed Draupadī to be insulted, then I
could have excused them. However, because they had all sat silently, with the exception of Vidura, as Draupadi was dragged into the assembly by Duḥśasana, I consider them to be imbeciles. Sañjaya, you have the audacity to speak about morality now, but at that time you had also remained silent. Because Karṇa had spoken so crudely to Draupadi, calling her the Kauravas' slave, and urging her to accept another husband; because Duḥśasana had chided the Pāṇḍavas as they dressed themselves in deerskin while preparing to depart for the forest; and because Śakuni had arrogantly suggested that since all else was lost, Yudhiṣṭhira should wager his wife; these three persons are doomed to destruction. Their only atonement will be if they voluntarily give Yudhiṣṭhira back his kingdom with great respect."

"O Sañjaya, just to give them that opportunity, I am personally going to Hastināpura and I will give Duryodhana good advice and thus try to settle the matter peacefully. However, only if the Kuruṣ pay Me due respect upon My arrival and agree to My proposals unconditionally, will they be saved from the clutches of death. The Pāṇḍavas are just as ready to wait upon their old, blind uncle as they are prepared to fight. The choice is in the hands of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and thus you should return to Hastināpura now and relay to him all that has been said by Me."

Sañjaya then took his leave from Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and begged, "O King, if the words which I have spoken from the core of my heart were in any way offensive to you, then please forgive me."

In reply, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gave Sañjaya his leave and then said, "I can assure you that your are very dear to me and my brothers, just as Vidura is. On my behalf, please meet with all classes of citizens upon your return to Hastināpura. Assure them of my well-being and also inquire about their welfare. In addition, I want you to relay this message to Duryodhana: 'Your obsession to rule over the Kuruṣ without a rival is most unreasonable. Although the thought of sharing the kingdom with us must torture your heart, you will have to give Indraprastha back to me willingly or else be prepared to fight.'"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira continued, "O Sañjaya, you should especially appeal to Dhṛtarāṣṭra by reminding him of how he had raised us in our childhood and then bestowed upon us our kingdom when we attained maturity. Ask him for what reason we should now be denied that
sovereignty. Remind Bhīṣma of how he had helped to revive the line of Śantanu when it had almost become extinct. Ask him how he can now encourage this fratricidal war, which will completely destroy the Kuru dynasty. O Sañjaya, you should assure all of the Kurus that we are willing to forgive the insults which we had received, even Duḥśāsana's dragging of Draupadi, provided that we are given at least one province, or even five villages to rule. We are anxious to achieve a peaceful settlement just so that the Kurus may not unnecessarily be slain. Sañjaya, you must convince the Kurus that I am not saying this out of fear, for we are living here quite happily and we are fully confident of our prowess. According to the response which we receive from the Kauravas, we shall determine our course of action, for we are fully prepared for both gentleness and severity."

Sañjaya then started out for Hastināpura, and upon his arrival there, he immediately went to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was seated upon his throne. Sañjaya first of all conveyed Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's good wishes for his welfare and that of the other Kurus, and then he described the Pāṇḍavas' own well-being. At last, Sañjaya said, "O King, it is my opinion that the destruction of the Kurus is at hand as a result of the wicked deeds which your sons performed with your sanction. O descendent of Bhārata, by giving in to Duryodhana's whims, you have spoiled your good reputation in this life and your chances for elevation in the next. The entire blame for the impending war rests entirely upon your shoulders, just as all hopes for a peaceful settlement also depend upon you alone. Now, since I am very tired from today's journey, I beg that you allow me to retire for the night. Tomorrow morning, I shall read Yudhiṣṭhira's message in the assembly of all the Kurus."

After Sañjaya had left, Dhṛtarāṣṭra called for Vidura. Being always ready to serve his elder brother, Vidura quickly came and stood before him with a respectful attitude. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "Sañjaya has returned from Upaplavya, and he will read Yudhiṣṭhira's message tomorrow morning in the royal court. However, I am in so much anxiety while wondering about Yudhiṣṭhira's intentions that I cannot obtain any sleep. My dear brother, please speak to me in such a way that my mind will become pacified."
Vidura was always eager to advise his misguided elder brother and so he replied, "O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, a lusty person, a thief, one who has lost his wealth, one who has failed to achieve his desired success, and a weak person who is under attack from a stronger one, can never sleep peacefully. My dear king, I hope that you are not restless on account of a greedy desire for acquiring wealth which belong to another."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "O Vidura, please speak to me some words of wisdom which are full of moral import."

Vidura frankly replied, "Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira is the emblem of morality, but you are just the opposite. After handing over the rule of the kingdom to your own son and banishing the Pāṇḍavas to the forest, it is foolish for you to hope for peace and prosperity. However, even though you never apply such teachings practically, because you are requesting me to do so, I shall describe the characteristics of a wise and virtuous man. A great soul is one who is beyond the influence of material dualities. Such an elevated person does not become flattered upon receiving honor, nor does he become angry when insulted. He discards desires for immediate but flickering gratification of the bodily and mental urges, and instead, acts for obtaining eternal benefit. He listens very patiently and attentively and he can understand a matter quickly. He does not discuss the affairs of others unless someone requests him to give personal advice. He never strives for the unattainable, and he does not grieve for that which has been lost. Even when there is a calamity, he does not become bewildered by sorrow. Whatever he starts, he diligently carries through to completion, and he never allows his valuable time to be wasted in idleness or frivolity. He is not a faultfinder, but he is always anxious to praise the good qualities of others. These are the characteristics of a person who has actually become elevated in knowledge due to following the path of virtue.

"O King, I shall now describe to you the fool, who is just the opposite of the wise man. A fool does not hesitate to employ unfair means in order to achieve his goals, and his mind is always filled with desires for sensual gratification. He takes a long time to accomplish that which can be quickly done, and he treats those who are actually well-wishers as if they were enemies, while giving inimical persons royal treatment. He who divulges his schemes, who is always full of doubts, and who trusts an
unworthy person, is a fool. He who comes to a place uninvited and then talks excessively without being asked to do so, is a great fool. He who blames others when he himself is at fault, and he who is miserly and selfish, is also a fool. Who could be more heartless than a wealthy person who dresses nicely and eats fine food but does not provide such things for his dependents?

"My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, a weapon or poison generally is fatal to only one person. However, the bad advice which is followed by a ruler can destroy his entire kingdom. Therefore, a king must not be a fool, nor can he afford to surround himself with fools.

"Forgiveness is often described as the foremost of all virtues. The only fault of forgiving a person is that others consider the forgiver to be weak or cowardly. This is not actually a defect, however, for there is great power in forgiveness, and thus it becomes a valuable ornament for even the strongest of persons. A man of forgiveness is always glorious, as is the poor man who is charitable. A miserly rich man and a puffed-up poor man should be tied up with heavy weights around their necks and then thrown into a river!

"The property of a wife, son, or servant is considered to actually belong to the husband, father, or master, respectively. A guru who cannot properly explain the knowledge which is contained in the śāstra; a king who is not able to give his subjects protection; and a wife who speaks disagreeably; these three should be abandoned like a sinking ship. If neglected, these six things are quickly destroyed: cows, one's service, agriculture, a wife, one's learning, and the wealth of a śūdra. Thieves subsist upon careless persons; learned persons subsist upon the ignorant; women subsist upon lusty men; physicians subsist upon the ailing; and priests subsist upon the performance of sacrifice."

These were just some of the gems of wisdom which Vidura gave to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Then, after speaking for a long time, Vidura concluded by saying, "O King, your brother Pāṇḍu was able to receive five sons who are as glorious as great demigods. Due to circumstances, you raised the sons of Pāṇḍu and taught them everything, and thus they have become fully obedient to your commands. Now, you should return to them their rightful share of the kingdom. If you do this, then you will become happy and your good reputation will be firmly established in the worlds of men
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "O Vidura, please speak some more so that the burning anxiety which is robbing me of my sleep may be relieved. Please tell me what is really on Yudhiṣṭhira's mind. What will actually prove to be beneficial for both the Pāṇḍavas and my sons alike?"
Vidura replied, "O King, when a person actually desires to benefit someone, then he should speak the unadulterated truth, even if unpalatable. Because I am your well-wisher, you can be assured that I will tell you that which is truly beneficial for your sons. My dear brother, you should never act impulsively nor should you employ unrighteous means in order to achieve your ends. Before doing anything, an intelligent person carefully considers the nature of an act, its consequences, and his personal abilities as well. In other words, in order to act properly, one must first of all gain control over his mind and senses. A king who hopes to control his ministers without having conquered over his own self, will surely come to grief. Similarly, a king who tries to defeat his enemies without having gained control over his ministers, will also meet with destruction. On the other hand, a king who controls his senses, considering them to be his enemies, will be able to control his ministers and thereafter successfully conquer all adversaries.
"When a fool tries to injure a wise man by using harsh speech, he takes upon himself the results of the derided person's sinful actions. If a forest is cut down, the trees may once again grow, but a heart that is wounded by harsh words never recovers. Arrows can be extracted from the body, but the dagger of harsh words, once plunged deep into the heart, can never be removed. The arrowy harsh words which can issue forth from one's mouth should therefore never be discharged by a learned person.
"When a man's doom has been ordained by the demigods who control destiny, it is seen that he loses his good intelligence and thus can no longer restrain himself from performing abominable actions. Such a condemned person thinks that wrong is right and right is wrong, because his intelligence has been stolen away by illusion. My dear brother, I must warn you that your sons possess such clouded intelligence, and it is for this reason that they have created enmity with the Pāṇḍavas. O King, you should therefore allow the obedient and virtuous Yudhiṣṭhira to rule
over the earth instead of your wicked sons."
Without responding to this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra simply praised Vidura by saying,
"My dear brother, you have spoken very well on the subject of true
wisdom. And yet, I am still not satiated by hearing your nectarean
words. Therefore, please continue to speak for some more time."
Vidura then said, "O King, the virtue of kindness or mercy is superior to
the act of bathing in all of the holy places of pilgrimage. Thus, I urge you
to be as kind to the Pāṇḍavas as you are to your own sons. I shall narrate
to you the following story just to illustrate this point:
There was once a girl of unrivaled beauty named Keśinī. Desiring to find
a good husband, Keśinī arranged for her svayaṁvara. When Virocanā,
the king of the Daityas, heard the news, he came there. Keśinī then
asked Virocanā, 'O King, please tell me who are superior: the brāhmaṇas
or the Daityas?'
"Virocanā replied, 'My dear beautiful girl, in my opinion, the Daityas are
better than the brāhmaṇas.'
"Keśinī then said, 'The brāhmaṇa Sudhanva will come here tomorrow. I
therefore request you to remain here for the night so that I shall be able
to see you both together.'
"Virocanā agreed, and the next morning, Sudhanva arrived. Keśinī
offered the brāhmaṇa arghya, a nice seat, and water for washing his feet.
Virocanā then said, 'My dear Sudhanva, please come and sit with me
upon my royal couch.'
"However, the brāhmaṇa replied, 'My dear king of the Daityas, I could
never think of myself as your equal and thus sit on the same seat with
you.'
"Virocanā remarked, 'O brāhmaṇa, what you have said is a fact! Only a
wooden plank, an animal skin, or a straw mat are the seats which you are
worthy of accepting.'
"Sudhanva then explained, 'My dear king, only a father and his son, two
brāhmaṇas of the same age and learning, two kṣatriyas, two vaiśyās, or
two śūdras should sit together, and not others. Your father, Prahlāda
always used to respect my father by sitting on a lower seat. Thus, I can
understand that you are simply a spoiled child who is ignorant of the
real truth.'
"At this, Virocanā responded by challenging, 'O brāhmaṇa, let us bet all
of our wealth as to who is actually superior. Then, we can take the
judgment of a learned person who is qualified to give a proper answer!' "Sudhanva returned the challenge by saying, 'O King, why should we
wager wealth? Let us stake our very lives!' "Virocanā agreed and then asked, 'O brāhmaṇa, who shall we approach
that is competent to answer our question?' "Sudhanva suggested, 'Let us go to the ever-truthful Prahlāda, for he
would not lie even to save his own son.' "Both Sudhanva and Virocanā were excited with rage. When Prahlāda
saw them approach in such an angry mood, he asked them, 'My dear
Virocanā, have you now befriended Sudhanva? I am very surprised
because I have never seen you two together before.' "Virocanā replied, 'My dear father, we are not at all friends. Indeed, we
have wagered our very lives, and for that reason, we have come to
request you to answer our question truthfully.' "Putting aside the matter at hand, Prahlāda called for water, honey, and
a cow to be given in charity, so that he could worship his brāhmaṇa
guest. However, Sudhanva was very anxious to settle the question at
hand and so he said, 'My dear Prahlāda, I have already received these
things before coming here. Now, I simply request you to give me an
answer without delay:
Who is superior, a brāhmaṇa, or your son Virocanā?' "Prahlāda then pleaded, 'O Sudhanva, since Virocanā is my only son,
please excuse me. Do not try to force me to answer this question.' "Sudhanva was insistent, however, and so Prahlāda finally said, 'O
brāhmaṇa, before I answer your question, please answer a question of
mine. What is the result which is obtained by one who misuses his
tongue by telling a lie?' "Sudhanva replied, 'O king of the Daityas, a person who gives false
evidence has to suffer just like a neglected wife who sees her husband
sleeping in the arms of her co-wife, or like a person who loses everything
by playing dice, or like one who is weighed down by considerable
anxieties. Such a person will be forced to remain starving outside of the
city gates, having been barred from entering within, and he will always
find himself beset with numerous enemies. The severity of the reaction
for lying increases in consideration of whether one has done so for the
sake of an animal, a human being, gold or land.'
"After hearing this, Prahlāda said, 'My dear son, Sudhanva is superior to you, just as his father and mother are superior to myself and your mother. Therefore, you must now become the brāhmaṇa's slave.'
"Prahlāda then turned to Sudhanva and pleaded, 'O brāhmaṇa, please exhibit your kindness and spare the life of my only son.'
"Sudhanva replied, 'My dear Prahlāda, I shall give Virocanā his freedom as a reward for your unflinching truthfulness. The only condition will be that your son will have to wash my feet in front of Keśinī.'"
Vidura then urged Dhātarāṣṭra, "O King, do not forsake truth, either for gaining a kingdom or for benefiting your son. Otherwise, your lies will surely cause the destruction of the Kuru dynasty. My dear brother, the degree of one's success in life ultimately depends on how virtuously he has acted. If one tries to overcome a miserable condition of life by unrighteous means, then he will attain an opposite result because his sinful actions will produce only suffering as a reaction. Therefore, each and every day, one should act in such a way that he shall be able to sleep peacefully at night, just as one should work throughout eight months so that he will be able to happily pass through the four months of the rainy season. Similarly, one should pass his youth in such a way that he will live happily in his old age, and one should live throughout his whole life in such a way that will insure that his next life will be auspicious.
"My dear king, you should not waste your time dwelling upon how your son Duryodhana went bad. Just as the greatness of mahātmās cannot be ascertained by ordinary men, one can never figure out the cause of a woman's inherent wickedness. And, it is the same with your son. Even if you cannot understand why it is so, you should conclude that there will be no hope for prosperity if you allow the kingdom to fall into the hands of Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, Karna, and Śakuni. You had better give the Kuru kingdom to the Pāṇḍavas, for it is actually they who are dependent upon you, as if they were your real sons."
"Now, my dear brother, please hear what Atri Ṛṣi once had to say when he was questioned by the Sādhyas about wisdom: 'O Celestials, one should always practice tolerance and forgiveness and abstain from the use of harsh speech. When pierced by the arrows of another's sharp words, a wise person should patiently tolerate them, even if he feels
deeply wounded, knowing that if he does so, then he will take away all of his tormentor's merit.'

"O Sādhyas, a first-class man is the well-wisher of all and thus he never desires misery for anyone. His speech is always truthful, his behavior is very humble, and he keeps his passions under full control. The worst of men, however, are those who can never be disciplined; those who are disturbed by even small reverses and thus are easily angered; those who are ungrateful; and those who never exhibit the qualities of true friendship. Such wicked persons may be able to earn wealth by dint of their cleverness and hard work, but they never win honest fame or possess the good behavior which is found in genuinely cultured families."

Dhṛtarāśtra then requested, "My dear Vidura, please describe the characteristics of such aristocratic families."

Vidura replied, "O King, the members of highly cultured families practice austerity and self-control, they cultivate Vedic knowledge and they perform sacrifices, give away food in charity and marry their children in a purified way. Such aristocratic families can fall down, however, especially if they become proud and thus begin to disregard the brāhmaṇas. One who has little money is not actually a poor man. It is one who lacks good manners who is really impoverished. One who inspires confidence in others is a real friend, and not one who creates fear. The sincerity of a friend is actually tested when service is requested of him. When one falls down from proper behavior then he becomes victimized by grief. Such sorrow is very destructive, for it takes away one's natural beauty, it diminishes one's strength and energy, it clouds one's understanding, and it causes disease. My dear Dhṛtarāśtra, I hope that your illustrious family does not become degraded by its members' sinful behavior."

After hearing this, Dhṛtarāśtra admitted, "My dear Vidura, I am now fully convinced that my sons will be exterminated if they fight with the Pāṇḍavas. I allowed the pious Yudhiṣṭhira to be cheated by my wicked sons, and as a result of the great danger which is at hand, my mind is filled with anxiety. My dear Vidura, please speak in such a way as to dispel all of my fears."

Vidura replied, "My dear brother, if you actually desire your own welfare,
then your only refuge is knowledge of self-realization and peace can be attained by the renunciation of all desires for sense-gratification. My dear king, you must remember how, at the time when Draupadī was won by Śakuni, I had warned you to restrain your son. You completely disregarded my advice, however, and it is because of this negligence that you are now suffering. The only remedy is to control your wicked son and make peace with Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra. Otherwise, how can you expect to be peaceful and happy if you create enmity with the Pāṇḍavas, thereby bringing destruction so close at hand?"

"My dear king, you may be interested to know that there are seventeen classes of foolish human beings who were created by Svāyambhuva Manu. The efforts of such fools always ends in nothing, just like one who strikes his fist against the air, or one who tries to bend a rainbow, or one who attempts to catch the sun rays. Among these fools there are: those who are born in high families but become addicted to sinful activities, those who always boast of their own abilities and accomplishments, those who are hostile toward persons more powerful than themselves, and those who always try for things which are unattainable."

In this way, Vidura expertly pointed out Dhātarāṣṭra's own foolishness. The blind king then inquired, "My dear brother, even though human beings are supposedly allotted 100 years to live, why is it generally seen that they do not do so?"

Vidura replied, "O King, excessive pride, over-eating, anger, too much lust for sense gratification, talkativeness, and family dissension; these are six sharp swords which cut short one's duration of life. My dear brother, there are plenty of flatterers available, but rare is the person who will speak medicinal words, even if they happen to be unpleasant. You already knew very well the inherent evil of gambling, and I gave you sufficient warning of what would happen before the game of dice commenced. And yet, even though your own sons are just like crows, you wanted them to vanquish the Pāṇḍavas, who are just like peacocks. You are forsaking mighty lions and instead protecting envious jackals. "O King, these are the qualities of a person in whom you should place your trust: he who is truthful, grateful, peaceful in mind, and a staunch controller of the senses; he who is devoid of deceitful tendencies and
whose speech is always pleasing. On the other hand, one should never place his trust in women, children, and deceitful persons. O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you have forsaken the pious Yudhiṣṭhira and given over the rule of the kingdom to Duryodhana, thus guaranteeing that all of your prosperity will be lost!"

At this point, Dhṛtarāṣṭra objected by saying, "O Vidura, it is my opinion that man is not the architect of his own prosperity or adversity. We are all being controlled by Destiny, which acts under the supervision of the almighty Creator. Therefore, we are simply like puppets, dancing according to the will of the Supreme."

Vidura replied, "My dear brother, you may remember how, at the time of Duryodhana's birth, I had advised you to abandon him for the welfare of the greater family. When rejection of something brings about a great gain, then it is not at all a loss. Similarly, that gain which, in the long run, brings about a great loss, is not gain at all."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra interrupted by saying, "I could never abandon my own son, no matter what my intelligence may dictate!"

Vidura replied, "O King, you do not understand what a great evil it is to associate with wicked persons. One is supposed to enjoy life peacefully along with his relatives. Why then should you allow yourself to be dragged into a family quarrel? Give the Pāṇḍavas at least some villages and in this way avoid fighting with them."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "My dear Vidura, I am actually very inclined to favor the Pāṇḍavas, as you are suggesting. However, as soon as I meet my son, Duryodhana, then my mind turns in the other direction. Therefore, I feel that it is useless for me to exert myself. I can actually see how my life is being directed by all-powerful Destiny! O Vidura, do not think that I have not appreciated your good advice. Your discourses are highly enlightening and interesting as well, and so I request you to go on speaking for awhile longer."

Vidura then said, "O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, even though I speak at great length, your convictions never change. Therefore, in order that your doubts may be dispelled, I suggest that you hear from Sanat-kumāra, for he is the foremost authority on transcendental knowledge."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra inquired, "My dear Vidura, do you not consider yourself to be capable of explaining the subject of virtue just as well as Sanat-
Vidura replied, "I am just a śūdra whereas Sanat-kumāra is a great ṛṣi who is respected for his great knowledge even within the society of the demigods."

After hearing this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra became very anxious to meet Sanat-kumāra, and so he asked Vidura how this might be possible even in his present mortal body. Vidura then began to meditate upon Sanat-kumāra, and when the ṛṣi understood that he was being thought of, he instantly appeared. Vidura worshipped Sanat-kumāra with great respect, and after they were seated together at ease, he said, "O direct son of Brahmā, there are grave doubts within the mind of Dhṛtarāṣṭra which I am unfortunately unable to remove. Therefore, I humbly beg you to instruct the king so that he may become freed from all of his fears."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra was happy to have received this chance of gaining knowledge of the Absolute. Thus, without further ado, he inquired, "O foremost of those who know the truth, is there any end to life, or is death just a transitory occurrence on the eternal path of existence?"

Sanat-kumāra replied, "My dear king, the self is eternal and unchanging. However, due to ignorance, when one's mind becomes conditioned with material desires, he is then subjected to changes of body as the result of fructive activities."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then inquired, "O great ṛṣi, since the attainment of transcendental knowledge can give one liberation from ignorance and the bondage of karma, why do learned persons perform religious rituals?"

Sanat-kumāra replied, "O King, it is a fact that the path of karma-yoga culminates in the attainment of transcendental knowledge. When one has thus come to the platform of jñāna-yoga, there is no longer any need to perform ritualistic activities which are mentioned in the Vedas. Still, there are transcendental activities which are in relationship with the Supreme Soul, and these are called bhakti-yoga. Therefore, it is seen that those who are truly complete in knowledge engage themselves in the devotional service (bhakti-yoga) of the Supreme Lord, knowing Him to be the Supreme Absolute Truth."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then questioned, "Does the Supreme Soul become conditioned and thus appear in this world in various species of life? Because it is said that the Supreme is all pervading, can we therefore
conclude that the universe, full of living beings, is a manifestation of His līlā (pastimes)?"
Sanat-kumāra answered, "My dear king, the conditioned living entities which we see in this material world are the fragmental parts and parcels of the Supreme and as such, they are simultaneously one and different from Him. They share His transcendental quality, but He is the unlimited controller whereas they are tiny manifestations of His superior energy. As long as the conditioned soul covets the four material aspirations: dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa, even the severest austerities cannot award him real liberation. As long as one is covered by material desire, he must return to the field of fruitive activities, even after elevating himself to Brahmā-loka. Therefore, human life is meant for controlling the material urges, and the lack of such control is called madness."
The whole night passed while Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura conversed with Sanat-kumāra.

The next morning, all of the Kurus assembled in the royal court in order to hear Sañjaya relay the messages of the Pāṇḍavas. The royal assembly hall was spotlessly white, and its golden floor was sprinkled over with sandalwood scented water. The royal seats, which were made of marble, wood, ivory, and gold, were covered with the most valuable embroidered cloths. As all of the great kings, headed by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, came there, bearing their weapons, the hall soon appeared like a great mountain cave filled with ferocious lions. The house officer then announced the arrival of Sañjaya, who then came and offered his respects unto all of the elderly Kurus on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was very anxious to hear what Arjuna had said, and so he immediately urged Sañjaya to relate his words. Sañjaya then replied, "O King, Arjuna's message received the sanction of both Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and Lord Kṛṣṇa, and after hearing it you will understand just how anxious he is to fight. Arjuna instructed me to relay this message to Duryodhana in the presence of all the Kurus, including the wicked Karna. The message is as follows:
'If Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son does not surrender to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira his rightful share of the kingdom, then it must be understood that in the
past he performed some horrible sin for which he has not yet reaped the results. If Duryodhana desires to fight, then the uncomfortable bed which we had to lay upon during our exile will become even more painful for him when he is forced to lie down upon the ground, fatally wounded."

Sañjaya continued, "O assembled kings, after giving this message, Arjuna resumed speaking as follows: 'You can assure Duryodhana that when he finally meets our long held wrath he will repent for his deceitful behavior. One morning, after I had finished my bath and prayers, a brähmaṇa approached me and said, "O son of Kunté, you will have to perform a very difficult task when the time comes for you to fight with your enemies. Therefore, it is being arranged that either Indra will invisibly ride in front of you, thunderbolt in hand, or else Lord Kṛṣṇa will protect you from behind while riding upon his chariot."

'I then told the brähmaṇa, "O great sage, I prefer to have Lord Kṛṣṇa as my ally, for He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and thus the possessor of all potencies. He has already displayed His unlimited prowess by killing numerous demons such as Pūtanā, Tṛṇāvarta, Bakāsura and the evil King Kaṁsa."

"After hearing my words, the brähmaṇa mysteriously disappeared from my sight. Is it actually possible that the demoniac Duryodhana can imagine that he can vanquish the imperishable Lord Viṣṇu in battle? Only if the wicked son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra comes to his senses and accepts a peaceful settlement will the Kauravas be spared. Otherwise, if Duryodhana insists upon war, then I am prepared to single-handedly vanquish all of the Kurus in order to deliver the entire kingdom to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. I am confident of this because Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who is the perfect knower of past, present and future, has assured me of victory. In addition, I had received the mystic power known as pratismṛti, and by dint of this unerring foresight, I am able to perceive my future victory. Indeed, my Gāṇḍiva bow has been yawning without even being touched and my arrows are eagerly coming out of their quivers of their own accord. My sword is restlessly coming forth from its sheath, and the ferocious creatures upon my flagstaff are urging me to yoke up my chariot without further delay."

Thus, Sañjaya repeated Arjuna's words and Bhīma then turned to
Duryodhana and said, "O King, please listen to what I have to say. Once, upon a time, Indra and Brhaspati went to see Lord Brahmä along with all of the demigods and great rśis. After offering their obeisances unto Lord Brahmä, as the demigods and rśis sat surrounding him, it was noticed by them that Nara and Nārāyaṇa Rśis got up and left the assembly without having shown any special respect to the grandsire. Being very curious, the demigods questioned Lord Brahmä about this, and so he explained, 'My dear celestials, Nārāyaṇa Rśi is directly Lord Viṣṇu Himself, and He has descended from the spiritual world along with His eternal associate, Nara, for the welfare of the entire universe.' "The demigods had become very fearful due to being engaged in a prolonged war with the demons. After hearing Lord Brahmä's words, Indra took Brhaspati and all of the demigods to where Nara and Nārāyaṇa were engaged in performing austerities. Indra then asked Nara and Nārāyaṇa Rśi for a benediction, and as a result, these incarnations of God agreed to lend their assistance to the side of the demigods. "O Duryodhana, it is for this reason that Nara has appeared as Arjuna, and for the benefit of Indra he has already killed innumerable Daityas and Dānavas. Nārāyaṇa Rśi has appeared as Lord Krṣṇa, and the two together are incapable of being defeated by all of the demigods and demons combined. Indeed, Nara and Nārāyaṇa incarnate upon the earth again and again for the destruction of the demons. O descendent of Bhārata, I can assure you that if you do not heed Lord Krṣṇa's advice, then you and all of your brothers will be annihilated. You should make peace with the Pāṇḍavas, for, except Duḥśāsana, Śakuni, and the low-born Karṇa, no one shares your hostile attitude toward them." Upon hearing this, Karṇa became highly offended and thus he angrily responded, "O Grandsire, I have always acted as a perfect kṣatriya. Therefore, why are you so inclined to criticize me? Why should Duryodhana beg for peace? What wise king would try to make peace with those whom he had previously injured? There is no need for Duryodhana to fear a war with the Pāṇḍavas, for I am prepared to kill them all single-handedly!" Bhīṣma then turned to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and said, "O King, even though Karṇa often boasts in this way, he is not even equal to one-sixteenth of the Pāṇḍavas. Was not Karṇa present when Arjuna defeated all of the
Kurus and took away their clothes? O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, if you rely upon the strength of Karna, then you will surely be doomed!"

Drona then added, "O King, you should accept the words of Bhīṣma for he is speaking without any motive. Do not take the advice of those who are greedy for undeserved wealth and fame."

And yet, even though Bhīṣma and Drona implored him to work toward peace, Dhṛtarāṣṭra did not seem to pay any attention to them. Turning to Sañjaya, Dhṛtarāṣṭra then requested, "Please tell me what arrangements the Pāṇḍavas are making for war. In their camp, who is advocating peace and who is in favor of fighting?"

When those who wished for peace saw how Dhṛtarāṣṭra did not even bother to reply to Bhīṣma or Drona, they gave up all of their hopes. Sañjaya also became very aggrieved upon seeing Dhṛtarāṣṭra's indifference, and so, without immediately replying, he just sat there, sighing heavily. Indeed, all of a sudden, Sañjaya fainted to the floor for no apparent reason. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then commented, "He must have lost his sense while thinking about the Pāṇḍavas' prowess and the consequences that will result when it is finally unleashed."

At last, after he regained consciousness and had been comforted by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Sañjaya replied by listing all of the Pāṇḍavas' allies. Then, after hearing from Sañjaya, Dhṛtarāṣṭra lamented as follows:

"Alas! All of these combined warriors seem just about equal to Bhīma in prowess. It is he that I am especially afraid of, and thus I pass my nights sleeplessly. I am convinced that if there is a war, Bhīma will not allow even one of my sons to remain alive. It is as if I can see his terrible uplifted mace before me! I remember how, even as a child, Bhīma used to torment my sons. I can visualize him impetuously hurling his club, and so I wonder, 'Oh, how will my sons' heads possibly bear the impact?' Since Bhīma was not even under my control as a child, how can I expect that he will become pacified now, after having been offended by us in so many ways? My sons are such fools for disregarding my advice and daring to fight with Bhīma! They simply see the material opulence and fame which they hope to enjoy without considering the terrible destruction that is at hand! Vidura had pointed out this great danger to me from the very beginning. Unfortunately, however, because my destiny is fully under the control of Eternal Time, I am helpless to do anything. It is as
if I am tied up to the wheel of time and cannot escape its inevitable course leading to the destruction of all the Kauravas."

"Aside from Bhīma, I am terribly afraid of Arjuna. Indeed, I seem to visualize him severing the heads of the Kauravas from their bodies with his sharp arrows. Long ago, Arjuna enabled Agni to devour the Khāṇḍava forest, and now the same two Kṛṣṇas and Gāṇḍiva bow are once again ready to fight, and they are unmatched by any warrior on our side. I know that I have done a great injustice to the pious King Yudhiṣṭhira. And, because the Pāṇḍavas are being guided by the Creator Himself, Lord Kṛṣṇa, I can only conclude that a war will end in disaster. Therefore, I urge all of you who are assembled here to share my attitude so that we can make peace with the Pāṇḍavas. This is the only way that I shall ever be able to achieve peace of mind."

Sañjaya then said, "O King, all of your lamentations are useless! In the end you always give in to your crooked son, in spite of sufficient knowledge of right and wrong. Now you are lamenting, but it is too late. Before, when Śakuni had deceitfully taken away Yudhiṣṭhira's kingdom, you laughed with glee and declared again and again, 'Just see! This has been won by my son!' It was the Pāṇḍavas who actually conquered over the earth. Any yet, when Duryodhana had deceitfully acquired their kingdom, you were proud of him, thinking, 'My son has now become the unrivaled emperor of the world.'"

Duryodhana then said, "My dear father, there is no need for you to lament, because we are quite capable of vanquishing our enemies. At the beginning of their exile, Lord Kṛṣṇa and numerous other kings had visited the Pāṇḍavas in the forest. They had all urged Yudhiṣṭhira to allow them to attack Hastināpura and take the kingdom back by force after killing me and my brothers. When I heard of this, I became very afraid. At that time, almost all of the kings of the earth, as well as the citizens of Hastināpura, were speaking ill of you for having sanctioned the gambling match and for remaining silent while Draupadī was insulted. I then went to Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Kṛpa and expressed my great fears, suggesting that I simply surrender to the Pāṇḍavas since fighting with them seemed hopeless. However, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Kṛpa all assured me that each of them was powerful enough to defeat all of the kings on earth."
"My dear father, at that time, the Pāṇḍavas were in a very powerful position, whereas now they are practically destitute of allies. If there was no real need to fear them before, then why should we be afraid now? O Father, I am not so concerned about my own self. However, I could never bear to make you suffer on account of my defeat. Practically all the kings of the world are now supporting me and they simply laugh to see how you are lamenting like this. They know that I have become the foremost wielder of the club after having satisfied my teacher, Balarāma. Thus, they see that your fear of Bhīma is unfounded. You can also rest assured that Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Kṛṣṇa will easily subdue Arjuna, either singly or combined together. We have a much larger army than the Pāṇḍavas, and a greater number of leading warriors as well. Therefore, I am fully confident of victory."

Then, turning to Sañjaya, Duryodhana inquired, "Tell me more about the preparations which the Pāṇḍavas have made for battle."

Sañjaya began by praising Arjuna very highly, and upon hearing this, Duryodhana angrily cut him short by criticizing his eagerness to glorify the enemy. Then, in order to ease the tension, Dhṛtarāśtra inquired, "O Sañjaya, please tell me about Arjuna's chariot, banner, and horses."

Sañjaya replied, "O King, Arjuna's banner is of celestial origin and thus it is composed of subtle matter. As such, it cannot be affected by anything grossly material. Arjuna's chariot is pulled by the 100 white horses which were given to him by the Gandharva, Citrasena. Along with these horses came the benediction that no matter how many of them are killed in battle, the number will remain constant at 100."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then requested, "O Sañjaya, please describe the great warriors on the Pāṇḍavas' side, and who they have been assigned to fight with."

Sañjaya replied, "O King, Dhṛṣṭadyumna has been made the commander-in-chief of the Pāṇḍava army, and along with the sons of Draupadī, he will fight against Droṇa. Śikhaṇḍī has been allotted Bhīṣma as his share and Yudhiṣṭhira's quota is Śalya. Bhīma will fight against all of your sons, and Karna, Jayadratha, and the Samsaptakas have been set aside for Arjuna. The five Kekaya kings will fight against the other Kekaya princes, as well as the Mālavas and Salwakas, and Abhimanyu will combat the sons of Duryodhana and Duḥṣāsana, as well
as Bṛhadbala. Cekitāna desired to fight with Somadatta, and so he has been allotted that great warrior. Sātyaki will fight with Kṛtavarmā, Sahadeva has been assigned to slay Śakuni, and Nakula will encounter the deceitful Uluka as well as the Sārasvatā tribes."

After hearing this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra once again began to piteously lament, for he hopelessly felt that the destruction of his dynasty was inevitable. With great anguish, he then concluded, "'Alas! Even though I am crying myself hoarse, my wicked son still disregards me!'" Duryodhana replied, "'My dear father, I can assure you that the Kuru heroes and our superior army will easily be able to vanquish the Pāṇḍavas.'"

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then turned to Sañjaya and said, "'My son is speaking like a madman! Now, please tell me more about the attitudes of the Pāṇḍavas and their allies, as well as any words which they may have spoken.'" Sañjaya replied, "'O King, Yudhiṣṭhira has placed his faith in Duryodhana for arranging the Pāṇḍavas' army. This son of Drupada gave me the following message to be spoken in front of all the Kurus: 'Duryodhana had better send an envoy to Yudhiṣṭhira, returning to him his rightful share of the kingdom. Otherwise, the wicked Kaurava ruler will meet with defeat by the onslaught of Arjuna's inexhaustible arrows!'"

Dhṛtarāṣṭra's despair deepened more and more as he continued to hear about the impending war. Finally, in desperation, he turned to his son and implored, "'O Duryodhana, please give up the idea of fighting with the Pāṇḍavas, and instead, make an alliance of peace with them. Is not half of the earth a sufficient kingdom for you to rule over? None of the great Kuru warriors want to fight and neither do I. I can only imagine that you have become so stubbornly determined due to being urged on by the evil-minded Duḥṣāsana, Karna, and Śakuni.'"

At this, Duryodhana arrogantly replied, "'O Father, who cares for the other Kurus? If they do not want to fight, then Karna, Duḥṣāsana, and I will challenge the Pāṇḍavas! We do not need to depend upon you or any of the Kuru warriors. Either I shall slay all of the Pāṇḍavas and rule the entire earth, or, having killed me, they will reign unrivaled. I am willing to sacrifice my life or whatever else I possess, but I shall never live side by side with the Pāṇḍavas. It is for this reason alone that I am unwilling to give them even that much land which is pierced by the sharp point of
a needle!"
Upon hearing this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra declared, "Duryodhana, you fool! I hereby abandon you forever! Just remember my words when you see all of your elephants, chariots, and warriors smashed, and yourself lying down upon the ground, fatally wounded. I feel sorry for all of these heroic kings, for they will have to follow you to the abode of Yamarāja!"
A brief but most intense silence followed. Then, Dhṛtarāṣṭra once again turned to Sañjaya and requested, "Please relate to me now the words of Lord Kṛṣṇa."

Sañjaya replied, "My dear king, I was fortunate enough to be admitted into the inner apartments where Lord Kṛṣṇa was residing along with Satyabhāmā, and Arjuna was staying with Draupādi. Even Abhimanyu was not allowed to go there, and when I entered, I saw Lord Kṛṣṇa resting His feet upon Arjuna's lap, while the son of Kunti's feet rested upon the lap of Draupādi. I entered the room very meekly, with folded hands, and then I was offered a nice seat by Arjuna. However, after simply touching the seat out of respect, I sat down on the floor. Then, when I had gathered enough courage to gaze upon Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, I suddenly became filled with a terrible awe and fear, for it appeared as if Lord Viṣṇu and Indra were present before me. At that moment, I became fully convinced that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira will come out victorious. Thereafter, I was respectfully given nice food and drink, and after I had finished eating, I related to Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna Duryodhana's message. Arjuna then carefully took Lord Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet from his lap and encouraged Him to give a reply. Being so requested, Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke the following message, which He asked to be heard by the entire assembly of Kurus:

"Do you find yourselves happily engaged in your activities, knowing that Yudhiṣṭhira is determined to regain his lost kingdom? I am highly obligated to the Pāṇḍavas on account of their unalloyed devotion, and I have not even begun to repay that debt. Because I have pledged My help, even Indra would not foolishly dare to fight with Arjuna unless he was anxious to give up his life."

After hearing everything from Sañjaya, Dhṛtarāṣṭra began to carefully weigh the relative strengths of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, and in
conclusion he became convinced of the Pāṇḍavas superiority. With this conviction, the old blind king once again said to his son, "My dear Duryodhana, you should keep in mind the celestial origin of the Pāṇḍavas and consider how the demigods will surely come to their aid due to feelings of family affection. Agni will certainly help Arjuna out of a sense of gratitude for having been enabled to devour the Khāṇḍava forest. Indeed, when I think of such things, I become filled with anxiety, for our doom seems to be near at hand. Therefore, my dear son, please make peace with the Pāṇḍavas."

This only made Duryodhana angry, however, and he replied, "O Father, the demigods have attained their exalted positions due to having renounced all worldly desire. Therefore, why should they bother to meddle in the affairs of human beings? If the demigods are actually looking after the Pāṇḍavas' welfare, then how could they have become beset by such misfortune in the first place? And, even if the demigods were to come to the Pāṇḍavas' aid, what does it matter, for my strength is greater than theirs. Even if the earth were to split in two, I could reunite it, and if I so desired, I could stop the universal dissolution which takes place at the end of Brahmā's day! I am not saying all this out of pride, for never before have I praised myself. I am just telling you this for your information so that your unwarranted fears may be dispelled."

Karna then said, "O King, there is no need for you to rely upon your own prowess, for I alone can vanquish all of the Pāṇḍavas!"

Bhīṣma then angrily interrupted Karna by saying, "O Sūta's son, you may be boasting, for anyone can talk like a hero. I can assure you, however, that with the help of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna will not only cut down your excessive pride, but your very life as well!"

Karna replied, "O Grandsire, I admit the superiority of Lord Kṛṣṇa, but since He has vowed not to take up weapons, there is nothing He can do to harm us. O Bhīṣma, because you have addressed me so harshly, I hereby vow not to fight in the upcoming war until after I have witnessed your death!"

After saying this, Karna stormed out of the assembly while Bhīṣma laughingly said, "My dear Duryodhana, Karna will never be able to fulfill his boasting words. He already spoiled the power of his virtue and
austerity by misrepresenting himself as a brāhmaṇa in order to beg for Paraśurāma's brahmāstra. When the son of Jamadagni realized that he had been deceived by Karna, he cursed him to forget the mantra at the time when he would desperately attempt to employ that weapon."

Duryodhana then challenged, "O Grand sire, why are you so sure of the Pāṇḍavas' victory? After all, they are mortals just like everyone else. Anyway, I do not care for your opinion or for that of any of the other Kūrus, for I simply depend upon my own strength. I am confident that along with Karna and Duḥśāsana I can defeat the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa also, if need be!"

There was a brief pause and then Vidura said, "My dear assembled kings, the wise have explained that self-restraint is the basic principle underlying all good qualities. Persons who lack self-restraint are to be condemned, for they are causes of fear, just like Rākṣasas. In this connection, I shall narrate to you a short story: Once, a hunter spread his net upon the ground, and soon thereafter, two birds that lived together became entangled in it. By flying upwards, however, the powerful birds were able to carry the net away and thus it appeared that they had escaped the imminent danger. The hunter was undaunted, however, and he began to follow the birds, hoping to retrieve his net and capture his prey as well. A ṛṣi who lived in the forest nearby saw this, and so he exclaimed, "How astonishing it is that you, an inhabitant of the earth, are swiftly running in the hopes of catching those who are inhabitants of the air!" "The hunter replied, 'O brāhmaṇa, at the time when these two birds quarrel, they shall come under my control.' "It so happened that soon thereafter, the birds did begin to fight, and while quarreling they fell down to the earth. And, because they were ensnared in the net, the birds were very easily seized by the patient hunter."

Vidura then advised, "O Kings, the Kūrus should not fight among each other, thus causing their own destruction. Rather, the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas should live happily together. I shall now relate to you another small story:

Once, I had accompanied a party of hunters and brāhmaṇas to the North, until we at last reached the Gandhamadana mountain, which is the abode of Siddhas and Gandharvas. There, we were very surprised to
see a jar of bright golden honey placed upon a mountain precipice and carefully guarded by ferocious poisonous snakes. The brāhmaṇas then informed us that this was not ordinary honey, but the favorite drink of Kuvera, and if any mortal would drink it, he would become immortal. Indeed, the brāhmaṇas explained that a blind man would have his vision restored by drinking this honey and an old man would regain his youth. After hearing this, the hunters became very anxious to get the honey. However, when they attempted to forcibly take it away from that desolate place, the poisonous snakes killed them all. My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, your greedy son can see the honey, but he fails to perceive the great danger that awaits him. Therefore, you should take Yudhiṣṭhira upon your lap and make peace with him instead of catering to Duryodhana's whims."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then told Duryodhana, "My dear son, you are just like an ignorant traveler who thinks that the wrong path is the correct one. Your attempt to fight with Bhīma will be just like a tree that tries to combat a hurricane. O Duryodhana, please listen to the good advice which Bhīṣma, Drona, and myself are trying to give you. Don't you remember how you and the other Kurus were routed single-handedly by Arjuna when you attacked the kingdom of Virāṭa? Now, how can you expect to vanquish the Pāṇḍavas when they are united together on the battlefield? Please give up your enmity toward your cousins. Treat the Pāṇḍavas as brothers by sharing the kingdom with them."

Then, turning to Sahajāya, Dhṛtarāṣṭra inquired, "Did Arjuna say anything after Lord Kṛṣṇa had delivered His message?"

Sahajāya replied, "Yes, my dear king, when Lord Kṛṣṇa had finished speaking, Arjuna requested me to relay his message as well. Arjuna first of all offered his obeisances unto all the distinguished kings who have assembled here. He then said, 'My dear rulers of the earth, you should know for certain that Duryodhana had brought you to his military camp so that you can all give up your lives.'

"Arjuna then said, 'Please relate this message to that wicked and envious fool, Duryodhana, while he is seated in the midst of the assembled kings: You must give back Yudhiṣṭhira his share of the kingdom or else I shall send you and your brothers to the abode of Yamarāja.' After hearing these words, I took leave of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna and then returned here
Duryodhana hardly paid attention to Sañjaya's words, however, and because a silence then fell over the hall, the assembled kings got up from their seats and departed. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then called for Sañjaya, and in private he inquired, "Please tell me honestly what you feel. After appraising the strength of both the Pāṇḍavas' army and that of my son, which side do you really think will perish if there is a war?"
Sañjaya replied, "My dear king, I shall not answer this question in private, for, if I did so you would surely bear a grudge against me. If you call Gāndhārī and Vyāsadeva, then I shall disclose everything, for I am confident that they will confirm my statements."
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then ordered Vidura to summon Vyāsadeva and Gāndhārī, and thus they soon arrived there along with Duryodhana. Then, at Vyāsadeva's urging, Sañjaya spoke the real truth about Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as follows:
"Lord Kṛṣṇa and His eternal associate, Arjuna, have appeared upon the earth by their own will in order to execute their mission. My dear king, you should know that if the entire universe were placed upon one side of a scale and Lord Kṛṣṇa on the other, then Kṛṣṇa would prove to be heavier. Indeed, if He so desires, Kṛṣṇa can reduce the entire universe to mere ashes in but a moment. Similarly, if all of the living beings within the universe were to attack Kṛṣṇa simultaneously, they could never vanquish Him. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the supreme controller of even the sun and the moon. Making the Pāṇḍavas His instruments, the Lord desires to kill your wicked sons, for by doing so, He will accomplish His mission of relieving the earth of its burden."
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then asked, "O Sañjaya, how is it that you know so confidently that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Lord of the universe, whereas I do not have such firm conviction?"
Sañjaya replied, "O King, due to the influence of gross ignorance, you lack faith, and because of this you cannot understand Kṛṣṇa as He is."
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then asked, "What is the nature of this faith which is required for understanding the supreme position of Lord Kṛṣṇa?"
Sañjaya replied, "Because I have given up all attachment to the illusory happiness of material existence, my heart has become purified. It is for
this reason that I can understand the position of Lord Kṛṣṇa when I see through the eyes of the śāstra."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then turned to his son and said, "My dear Duryodhana, you should take shelter of Lord Kṛṣṇa, for He is not the ordinary human being which you consider Him to be."

Duryodhana replied, "My dear father, even if Kṛṣṇa were to destroy the entire universe along with all of its inhabitants, I would still never surrender unto Him."

Upon hearing this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra turned to Gāndhārī and exclaimed, "My wicked son is bent upon destruction for he always disregards the words of his superiors!"

Gāndhārī then addressed her son in a voice laden with disgust, "O Duryodhana, you are such a rascal for ignoring the advice of your elders and thus you will certainly bite the dust after being smashed by Bhīma's club! Now I can understand that you were born just to give me grief."

Vyāsadeva then said to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, "My dear son, please be assured that you are dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa. If you follow Sañjaya's advice, you will be saved from this dangerous situation. There are always two paths in life. You should not follow the way of greedy men who fall helplessly into the jaws of death. Instead, follow the path of wisdom which enables one to cross over the ocean of material miseries and ultimately go back home, back to Godhead."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "My dear Sañjaya, please describe to me the fearless path whereby one can gain liberation from the miseries of material existence and go back to the eternal kingdom of God."

Sañjaya replied, "My dear king, one who desires to obtain the perfection of life must withdraw his mind and senses from the temptations of material enjoyment in order to absorb himself in meditation upon Lord Kṛṣṇa in the trance of mystic yoga. In this way, when one becomes completely purified by such detachment and meditation, he becomes eligible to return to the spiritual world."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra was becoming a little enlivened by these talks of Kṛṣṇa and indeed, by the association of great devotees, a little shadow attachment to the Lord became aroused in his heart. As a result, Dhṛtarāṣṭra lamented, "O Sañjaya, I envy those who have vision, for they are able to see the incomparably beautiful and effulgent form of Lord Kṛṣṇa. I
would also like to surrender myself completely unto Kṛṣṇa. By becoming His unalloyed devotee, I would transcend all the miseries of material life. I am so tired of being perplexed by the material circumstances which result from trying to live independently of Kṛṣṇa. Instead of having to follow the dictates of māyā, I wish I could engage in the transcendental loving service of the Lord as His menial order-carrier. It is Lord Kṛṣṇa who is actually glorious and I know that He is my eternal well-wisher. Therefore, I wish that I was engaged in His loving service rather than the illusory bodily service which never satisfies oneself nor the person whom one serves."

In this way, Dhṛtarāṣṭra glorified Kṛṣṇa with genuine feeling and he sincerely expressed the beginnings of his surrender and submission unto the Lord.

Meanwhile, after Sañjaya's departure from Upaplavya, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had approached Kṛṣṇa and said, "My dear Lord, my brothers and I are completely dependent upon You. Indeed, it is only on account of that reliance that we fearlessly dare to demand our kingdom back from Duryodhana."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear king, I am ready to accomplish anything upon receiving your order."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Kṛṣṇa, I am very aggrieved that Dhṛtarāṣṭra follows the dictates of his evil-minded son and is thus unwilling to give us back our rightful share of the kingdom. How pitiful it is that Dhṛtarāṣṭra ardently wants to avoid war, and yet, at the same time, he cannot muster enough courage to control his wicked son. As a compromise, we had requested only five villages: Vāraṇāsvata, Avishthala, Mākandi, Vṛkasthala and any other one as the fifth, but even this proposal was rejected by Duryodhana. As a result, we have been put into a very awkward position because as kṣatriyas our virtue lies in protecting others and giving in charity. Without ruling some kind of kingdom and thus acquiring the necessary wealth, it is impossible for a kṣatriya to perform his religious duties. Alas! What a misfortune it is that I was born in a kṣatriya family, for I shall have to slaughter my relatives in order to fulfill my occupational duty!

"O Kṛṣṇa, war is such a great evil that not only does the defeated side
lose, but the victor also suffers because many of his relatives and dear ones are inevitably killed in the fighting. In addition, when one comes out victorious, all of the survivors in the enemy camp will maintain their bitter enmity. Then, later on, when some weakness is detected, they will once again strike with a vengeance. Only one who has given up all thoughts of victory can actually become happy and thus sleep peacefully at night. On the other hand, one who provokes hostilities will be in constant anxiety and thus he will sleep restlessly, as if he knew that there was a dangerous snake in his room. Enmity can never be neutralized by more enmity. Instead, it just becomes inflamed, more and more. Of course, if one's enemies were to be completely exterminated, then there might be some peace of mind, but such an act is most cruel and sinful.

"My dear Kṛṣṇa, I am perplexed by this dilemma! As a kṣatriya, I do not want to give up my kingdom, for this would be as good as death. On the other hand, I do not want to cause the extermination of the Kuru dynasty. Therefore, I feel that peace should be strived for at all costs, even if we have to humble ourselves before the Kauravas. O Kṛṣṇa, kindly prescribe the best course of action so that both of our interests and our virtue may be preserved. My dear Lord, except for You, we have no other refuge."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear king, I shall personally go to Hastināpura in order to try for a peaceful settlement that does not sacrifice your interests. By doing so, I will perform a highly meritorious act and at the same time I may be able to save the Kurus from mass annihilation."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Kṛṣṇa, I do not like this idea, for I know that Duryodhana will never listen to You respectfully. If the Kauravas created some mischief, causing You pain, then I would feel myself responsible and thus life would be unbearable."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you can rest assured that all of the kings of the earth combined together cannot stand before Me in battle. I know that Duryodhana will never listen to My proposal for peace. Still, by making this effort, I shall free Myself from the possibility of being called a war monger in the future."

Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Lord, if it is Your desire to go to Hastināpura, then You will surely do so. My only request is that You try to bring about
a peaceful settlement at all costs."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear king, to beg like a brahmacārī and to exhibit cowardice are not the proper behavior for a kṣatriya. It is the duty of a king to gain victory on the battlefield or else die while fighting. Therefore, instead of hoping to back out of your dilemma, you should display your prowess and vanquish your enemies! In My opinion, there is absolutely no chance for peace, because Duryodhana is quite confident of his position, being aided by Bhīṣma, Drona, and Karna. He will never be persuaded to return your kingdom by appeals requesting him to exhibit compassion, virtue, or mildness. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, the fact is that Duryodhana deserves to die for the deceitful behavior and harsh speech that he exhibited during the game of dice. A noble person considers it worse than death to be condemned by others. On the other hand, Duryodhana felt no shame, in spite of being censored by the entire assembly of Kurus.
"I shall now go to Hastināpura, and in front of the assembled kings, I will expound your virtues and decry the wickedness of Duryodhana. In this way, anyone who might still be undecided will clearly understand the truth. I will advocate the cause of peace, but only on terms that will not sacrifice your interests. By endeavoring in this way, I will leave no room for people to accuse you of having acted sinfully out of greed to rule over the earth. However, war with the Kauravas appears to be inevitable. Therefore, you must be prepared to kill the evil-minded Duryodhana, for just like an envious serpent, he deserves to die."
Bhima then said, "O Kṛṣṇa, please do not make the Kauravas feel that we are threatening them. Duryodhana has the heart of a thief and he is intoxicated with pride on account of his wealth and influence. He has always been hostile toward us and he enjoys speaking harshly and criticizing others. Duryodhana lacks foresight, he is difficult to appease, and because he is wicked and deceitful by nature, he is incapable of being taught anything. Indeed, Duryodhana is so stubborn that he would rather give up his life than change his opinions. I share the feelings of Yudhiṣṭhira, that it would be better to rule some insignificant kingdom as Duryodhana's subordinates, rather than annihilate the entire Kuru dynasty."
These mild words were highly out of character, and thus they were as
unexpected as cold fire or weightless mountains. In response, Lord Kṛṣṇa laughed out loud quite heartily for some time. Seeing Bhéma in such a forgiving mood, Lord Kṛṣṇa wanted to stimulate his anger, and so He said, "O great hero, do you not remember how you could hardly sleep at night, and would suddenly wake up while remembering the insults which your brothers and Draupadī had tolerated? Being unable to sleep because of pent-up rage, you would sit up all night with your head between your knees, and sometimes, like a madman, you would utter wrathful exclamations while breathing hotly. Being always absorbed in waiting for the chance to take revenge against the Kauravas, you have mostly kept to yourself all of these years. From time to time you were seen to sit with contracted brows, biting your lip in anger, and while doing so you would periodically laugh aloud. Once, while seated along with your brothers, you suddenly picked up your mace and vowed, 'As sure as the sun rises and sets, I will immediately kill Duryodhana!' How is it that this same Bhēma is now speaking so mildly about peace? My dear cousin, acting like a eunuch who is afraid of the Kauravas does not suit one who is supposed to be a great hero!"

Bhima was incapable of tolerating any insult. Being thus prodded by Lord Kṛṣṇa, his real nature immediately reawakened and thus he responded, "O Kṛṣṇa, do not doubt my immeasurable prowess! Even Indra could not extricate himself after coming within my grips! My dear Lord, Your sharp words have given me great pain! I am ready to exhibit my full prowess in battle whenever you give the order! It was only due to compassion that I spoke in such a way as to show concern for our wicked enemy."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Bhēma, it was only out of affection that I criticized you so severely. I know very well of your prowess, and it was just to understand your real mind that I prodded you like this. Rest assured that when the time comes you will perform heroic deeds in battle that are 1,000 times greater than even what you can imagine. My dear Bhēma, since the results of our actions depend upon both Destiny and exertion, when one's enthusiasm for action slackens, success becomes hampered. It is for this reason that I spoke as I did, just to drive away any doubt or depression from your mind. Tomorrow, I will set out for Hastināpura. If I am able to bring about a peaceful settlement, then it
will bring Me great fame, it will serve your purposes, and it will benefit
the Kauravas as well. However, if the wicked Duryodhana does not
relent, then war must be waged, and the burden of fighting will rest
squarely upon yours and Arjuna's shoulders."
Arjuna then pleaded, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, You must give peace a chance! It
appears to me that You have already made up Your mind that war is
inevitable. My dear Lord, You are all powerful. Therefore, if You wish to
do so, then surely You can convince the Kauravas to make a peaceful
settlement. Of course, if You desire to fight, then I am ready to follow
You in all respects. There is no doubt that the evil-minded Duryodhana
deserves to be killed by us on the battlefield."
Playing the part of an ordinary human being, Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My
dear Arjuna, I can assure you that I shall sincerely try My best to achieve
what is beneficial both for yourselves and the Kauravas. However, you
must remember that human endeavor can only affect things to a limited
degree. Ultimately, the results of our actions depend upon Destiny.
Therefore, although I will do whatever is humanly possible for achieving
peace, I cannot control Providence. It is My firm belief that Duryodhana
will never agree to return Yudhiṣṭhira's kingdom. However, I do not
lament for this, because I feel that he deserves to die for having acted so
inimically toward you and your brothers. Do you not remember how,
while residing at Indraloka, you were informed that you would become
instrumental in the destruction of the Kurus? My dear Arjuna,
truthfully speaking, it is My wish that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira be
reinstated as the emperor of the entire earth. Therefore, what is the use
in maintaining strong hopes for peace?"
Nakula then said, "My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, perhaps You can address
Duryodhana mildly at first. Then, if needed, You can speak very strongly
in order to make him fearful. Our period of exile has now ended and our
army has been assembled. Naturally, the desire to regain our kingdom
has increased. By impressing this upon the Kauravas, perhaps You can
influence them to relent. Of course, we are all Your surrendered
servants, and thus we are prepared to execute Your will
unconditionally."
Sahadeva then declared, "My dear Lord, even if the Kauravas are willing
to accept a peaceful settlement, I think that they should be incited to fight! The anger which we feel on account of the way in which Draupadī was insulted can only be appeased by witnessing the death of Duryodhana and his cohorts!" Sātyaki applauded Sahadeva's words and then said, "My dear Krṣṇa, when I first saw the Pāṇḍavas dressed in rags and deerskin at the beginning of their exile, I had urged that we immediately attack the Kauravas and take back Yudhiṣṭhira's kingdom by force. At that time, You had advised us to be patient and wait. Now that our long-cherished opportunity has arrived, we should give up this useless talk of peace!" Upon hearing this, all of the assembled warriors let out loud roars of approval. Draupadī had felt very distressed upon hearing the mild words of Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma. Then, when she heard the response of Sahadeva and Sātyaki, her wrath became aroused and with great agitation she addressed Lord Krṣṇa as follows:

"O my lord, even though Yudhiṣṭhira had begged for a meager five villages, the wretched Duryodhana gave no reply. I do not want to accept such a deprecating peace, however! We should fight for our rightful kingdom because it is just as sinful to spare someone who deserves to die as to kill an innocent person. Oh, how is it that I have become so unfortunate? Not only did I have to suffer so many insults at the hands of rogues and rascals, but I now find that no one cares for my plight. Instead, everyone wants to forgive the wrongdoers. My dear Krṣṇa, I implore You to vent Your wrath upon the Kauravas and thus avenge all of the wrongs which were done to me."

Draupadī was bathed in her own tears. While holding her single braid of hair in her left hand, she then approached Krṣṇa and implored, "O Lord, please remember how this sanctified hair was grabbed by the wicked Duḥśāsana! If Bhīma and Arjuna are now eager for peace, then my father, my sons and Abhimanyu will take revenge for the insults which I have suffered! While living wretchedly for thirteen long years, the only solace that sustained me was the thought of better times ahead. I can only become pacified by seeing Duḥśāsana's arm cut off and his body smashed into atoms! Because of this, Bhīma's compassionate words have pierced my heart just like so many darts!"

After saying this, Draupadī began to sob convulsively. Krṣṇa then comforted her by saying, "My dear princess of Paṇcāla, you can rest
assured that very soon the wives of the Kauravas will weep just like this after seeing how their husbands and friends have been slain by your husbands. My dear Draupadī, those whom you are angry with are already as good as dead. You should have faith in what I say, for My words have never proven futile."

Arjuna then once again addressed Kṛṣṇa, "My dear Lord, You have already assured us that You will first of all make every endeavor to bring about a peaceful settlement with the Kauravas. Therefore, please let this promise be remembered by You."

It was the autumn season of Kārtika, and thus the agricultural fields were full of crops. After once again giving Arjuna assurances, Lord Kṛṣṇa retired for the night.

Upon rising early the next morning, Kṛṣṇa first of all offered His obeisances unto the brāhmaṇas. Then, He performed His religious duties and also cast His glance upon auspicious articles which had been purposely placed within His view. Lord Kṛṣṇa then ordered Sātyaki, "O grandson of Śiṅhi, bring My chariot after stocking it with all kinds of weapons, for I may have to defend Myself against the wicked Kauravas."

Sātyaki had his attendants bathe Kṛṣṇa’s four white horses: Śaivya, Sugrīva, Meghapuṁpa and Balāhaka. Then, after he harnessed the horses onto the chariot, Garuḍa came and perched upon the flagstaff Kṛṣṇa then got up onto the chariot along with Sātyaki, and as the Lord prepared to depart, the sky became perfectly clear and auspicious breezes began to blow. The sacrificial fire blazed forth cheerfully, while great ṛṣis such as Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadeva stood reverently at Lord Kṛṣṇa’s right side. Then, when Kṛṣṇa finally set out, the Pāṇḍavas and all of the other great warriors followed Him for some distance, as did auspicious animals and birds, such as the peacocks and swans. Mahārāja Yudhishṭhira then embraced Lord Kṛṣṇa and requested, "O Lord, please meet our mother, Kuntī, for she has had to suffer so much on our behalf inquire about her welfare and try to comfort her as far as possible. Our poor mother had to undergo so much trouble while bringing us up. Then, when we were exiled to the forest, she followed us a great distance while weeping bitterly. Please offer our obeisances unto all of the elderly Kurus as well, especially Vidura, whom I wish that You would embrace on my behalf."

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At last, Kṛṣṇa requested Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira to turn back and so the king circumambulated the Lord and then began to depart. At this time, Arjuna spoke the following parting words to Kṛṣṇa, "My dear Lord, if Duryodhana gives You all respect and returns half of the kingdom to Yudhiṣṭhira, then I shall be happy to forgo fighting with the Kurus. However, if the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra acts otherwise, then I hereby vow to exterminate all of the kṣatriyas who oppose us on the battlefield."

Upon hearing this, Bhīma let out a ferocious shout that embodied his great delight at Arjuna's heroic words as well as the quivering rage which he felt at the mention of Duryodhana's name. Indeed, when all of the assembled warriors heard this terrifying sound, they trembled with fright and their horses and elephants passed stool and urine simultaneously. Arjuna then embraced Kṛṣṇa with great affection, bidding Him farewell, and after taking the Lord's permission, he also turned back. Dāruka then urged on the horses and thus Kṛṣṇa's chariot soon left behind all of those who had followed Him.

While en route to Hastināpura, Lord Kṛṣṇa came upon some celestial rṣis who were standing by the side of the road. Stopping His chariot, Lord Kṛṣṇa got down in order to offer His respects unto the rṣis, and after worshipping them, He inquired about their welfare and the purpose for their descending upon the earth. Paraśurāma then stepped forward and explained, "O Lord, we have come here because we are very anxious to hear what You will say in the assembly of Kurus. We are also very curious to find out how Bhīṣma, Vidura and the others will reply."

The rṣis then took their leave and so Lord Kṛṣṇa continued His journey, accompanied by ten mighty chariot warriors, 1,000 cavalry, 1,000 infantry, and hundreds of servants. When Lord Kṛṣṇa had set out, numerous omens became manifest in Hastināpura. Thunder roared in the cloudless sky, accompanied by flashes of lightning, and the entire earth seemed to tremble. Fires were seen to be blazing in all directions. Wells and water-vessels overflowed without reason, and loud roars could be heard coming from the sky, although no one was seen to be present. Thereafter, a violent storm began brewing, so that the dust which was raised soon covered all directions, making everything dark. A torrential rainfall and violent winds then ensued, uprooting hundreds of trees as the storm lashed the city of Hastināpura. On the other hand, as Lord
Kṛṣṇa passed along the road, He experienced gentle and fragrant breezes while heavenly flowers fell from the sky, so that everything appeared to be very auspicious. Wherever Kṛṣṇa stopped along the way, thousands of brāhmaṇas came out to greet Him, and they worshipped Him with numerous presentations. Indeed, all of the villagers would crowd around the Lord, just to have a look at His incomparable transcendental beauty. At nightfall, when Lord Kṛṣṇa stopped at Vṛkasthala, all of the brāhmaṇas immediately came to Him and placed their houses and possessions at His disposal. Lord Kṛṣṇa magnanimously accepted the invitations of the brāhmaṇas, and after visiting their houses, He returned to His camp in order to spend the night. The Lord then arranged to feed the brāhmaṇas very sumptuously, especially with sweets, and after doing so, He took His own meal, and at last retired for the night.

When Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard from spies that Kṛṣṇa had departed for Hastināpura on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas, his hair stood up on end due to wonder and delight. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then ordered Duryodhana and his friends to make all possible arrangements for Kṛṣṇa’s reception, and while doing so, he described the son of Vasudeva as the Supreme Master of all the demigods, and the creator, maintainer and destroyer of the cosmic manifestation. Dhṛtarāṣṭra knew that if Lord Kṛṣṇa were pleased, then all of his aims would be accomplished. Similarly, the old blind king knew that if Kṛṣṇa were displeased, then he would certainly have to suffer the consequences.

Duryodhana had great pavilions erected and he stocked them with an abundance of every conceivable enjoyable object. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said to Vidura, "Tomorrow, Lord Kṛṣṇa will arrive at Hastināpura and I am going to present to Him a vast amount of wealth, including sixteen golden chariots. I shall send all of my sons out of the city to greet Him, with the exception of Duryodhana, and I will provide Duḥśāsana's palace for His residence, because it is superior even to Duryodhana's." Vidura then replied, "O King, it is very encouraging to see how you are endeavoring to please Lord Kṛṣṇa. However, you should know that even if you were able to present the entire earth to Him, it would still be insufficient. My dear brother, don't you see that you are not serving Kṛṣṇa because of a virtuous motive? This whole reception is just an act
of deception on your part in the hopes of gaining His favor. I know that you are not willing to give the Pāṇḍavas even the five villages which they had requested. Therefore, I can understand that this royal welcome is being arranged in the hopes of alienating Kṛṣṇa from the Pāṇḍavas. O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, this is a very foolish idea! Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are absolutely inseparable. It is my prediction that Kṛṣṇa will not even accept any of your gifts, except the customary water for washing His feet, and your inquiries about His welfare. It would be better for you to give Kṛṣṇa what He has actually come for: the establishment of peace between the Pāṇḍavas and your sons."

Duryodhana then said, "My dear father, I also believe that Kṛṣṇa is inseparable from the Pāṇḍavas. Therefore, since there is no hope of winning His sympathy, what is the use of worshipping Kṛṣṇa with such a lavish reception? Indeed, He will only think that we are respecting Him out of fear. I must admit that Kṛṣṇa deserves the highest worship, but in consideration of the present circumstances, I suggest that we play down His arrival at Hastināpura."

Bhīṣma then argued, "O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you should receive Kṛṣṇa with the greatest respect and then be ready to execute whatever instructions He may give you. Because Lord Kṛṣṇa’s will is infallible, it behooves you to follow it voluntarily. If you disobey Kṛṣṇa, however, then you shall have to suffer the consequences and thus end up lamenting for the rest of your life."

Duryodhana then said, "O Grandsire, we cannot follow Kṛṣṇa’s advice, for I am unwilling to go through life sharing my kingdom with the Pāṇḍavas. Now, please listen as I disclose to you the plan which I have devised. When Kṛṣṇa arrives here tomorrow, we will take Him captive and hold Him as our prisoner. Then, when the Pāṇḍavas and the Vṛṣṇis hear of this, they will have no alternative but to surrender to us."

This crazy idea was very painful for Dhṛtarāṣṭra to hear. Becoming very agitated, he implored, "O my foolish son! Never dare mention such a thing again! Kṛṣṇa is coming here as an ambassador and He is our relative. Kṛṣṇa has never done you, nor any of us, harm, and therefore, He does not deserve such ill-treatment."

Bhīṣma became inflamed with rage while listening to Duryodhana’s demoniac scheme. With great anger, he then chastised Dhṛtarāṣṭra by
saying, "O King, your son's hour of doom has surely arrived, and yet, you are such a fool that you refuse to restrain him. Don't you know that Lord Kṛśṇa can destroy all of us in a moment if He so desired? I am not going to remain here for one minute longer and hear what your wretched son has to say!"

Having said this, Bhīṣma got up from his seat and stormed out of the assembly.

Meanwhile, after rising early in the morning and performing His religious duties, Lord Kṛśṇa set out for Hastināpura. Thereafter, when Lord Kṛśṇa came to the precincts of the Kuru capital, all of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, except Duryodhana, came out to welcome Him, along with Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, and many thousands of citizens. Then, surrounded by the multitudes, Lord Kṛśṇa majestically entered Hastināpura, which had been gorgeously decorated in His honor. Without exception, every man, woman, and child came out from their houses to see Kṛśṇa and thus the streets were lined with people. As Kṛśṇa proceeded very slowly through the crowded streets, everyone reverently stood with folded hands and bowed heads while chanting the Lord's glories.

At last, Kṛśṇa came to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's palace, and when He entered the royal assembly, everyone stood up in respect. Lord Kṛśṇa first of all approached Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Bhīṣma in order to offer them worship. Lord Kṛśṇa then greeted other kings, in order of their seniority, and finally, at Dhṛtarāṣṭra's request, He sat down upon a special throne of beautiful workmanship which was made of gold and bedecked with jewels. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's priests then came forward and ceremoniously presented a cow, honey, and many other auspicious articles to Him. When the formal reception was concluded, Lord Kṛśṇa began to joke and converse with the Kurus according to His relationship with them. Then, after some time, Lord Kṛśṇa took permission from Dhṛtarāṣṭra and proceeded to the home of Vidura.

When Vidura understood that Kṛśṇa had arrived, he quickly came out of his house and presented many auspicious articles to the Lord while glorifying Him with nice prayers. Vidura then inquired about the Pāṇḍavas, and so Lord Kṛśṇa described their activities in great detail, for He knew that Vidura had always been their protector and well-wisher.
Finally, after conversing for some time, Lord Kṛṣṇa took leave of Vidura and next went to meet Kuntīdevī. When Queen Kuntī saw Lord Kṛṣṇa, she got up and embraced her nephew with great joy while tears flowed from her eyes in torrents. Kuntīdevī was seeing Lord Kṛṣṇa after a very long time, and thus she gave vent to her long-held grief by speaking as follows:

"My dear Lord, please tell me all about my sons. How could my boys, who were accustomed to the comforts of royal luxury, pass such a long time in the forest? How is Draupadī? She is even more dear to me than my sons. "My dear Kṛṣṇa, I am so happy to see You, and yet at the same time, I feel overwhelmed with grief just thinking of my poor children. It is now just about one year since Arjuna vanquished all of the Kurus when they attacked Virāṭa's kingdom. Still, I am confident that if my sons stick to the path of virtue, they will soon regain their rightful kingdom.

"I remember how, at the time of Arjuna's birth, a voice from the sky announced that he would one day conquer over the entire earth and then, after slaying all of the Kurus in battle, would perform three great sacrifices along with his brothers. My dear Kṛṣṇa, the pangs of separation which I feel on account of the absence of my children is more painful than the grief which I had experienced upon the death of Pāṇḍu. You should now encourage the Pāṇḍavas to fulfill their duty and fight for their paternal kingdom. I am not so aggrieved that my sons lost their kingdom after being cheated at dice by Śakuni. However, the way in which Draupadī was insulted by being dragged into the assembly of Kurus, while dressed in but a single piece of cloth, will never be forgotten by me!"

Kuntī then inquired about her sons, one after another, and she continued to vent her grief for quite some time. Lord Kṛṣṇa then tried to console her by saying, "My dear aunt, even though you take your life to be very miserable, it is actually very glorious because you are the wife and mother of such great heroes. You must be patient and try to tolerate the dualities of material existence. Only mediocre persons aspire to an easy-going life of uneventfulness which is devoid of challenge and struggle. Indeed, superior persons prefer the extremes of intense happiness or utter misery, but abhor the dull middle ground. Your sons and Draupadī have inquired after your welfare and they send their
messages to you that they are all fine and well."
Queen Kunti felt relieved after having poured out her unbearable grief and hearing Krsna's words. She then said, "My dear Krsna, I know that You are the Supreme Lord and the shelter of everyone and everything. I am therefore confident that You will arrange for the best welfare of my sons, without sacrificing the cause of virtue."
Lord Krsna then took His leave from Kuntidevi, and after circumambulating her, He next went to Duryodhana's palace. Not even bothering to announce His arrival, Lord Krsna went right inside, without being impeded by the guards. There, He saw Duryodhana seated upon his throne, surrounded by the Kurus and thousands of other kings. By Duryodhana's side was Duhasana, Karna, and Sakuni, and when Lord Krsna entered, everyone stood up in order to honor Him. Lord Krsna was then offered a golden throne, and after seating Himself, He received the worship of all of the Kauravas. After these formalities concluded, Duryodhana respectfully invited Krsna to dine with him, but in response, the Lord tactfully refused. Using sweet words to cover up his deceitfulness, Duryodhana then asked, "My dear Krsna, why have You refused my invitation? Previously, You had promised to help both sides in the impending war. Why are You now acting so inimically?"
Lord Krsna replied, "My dear king, envoys accept food and honor only after the success of their mission. If My visit here proves successful, then I shall accept your invitation with great pleasure."
Duryodhana responded, "My dear Krsna, You should not treat me like this. There has never been any enmity between us and we are connected by family ties. Therefore, You should accept my friendly dealings, irrespective of whether Your mission comes out successful or not. O son of Devaki, Your refusal does not befit Your magnificent reputation."
Lord Krsna then frankly explained, "O Duryodhana, you have never inspired any love in Me. Truthfully speaking, I despise the fact that you have envied the PANDAVAS ever since your very childhood. One who hates the PANDAVAS, hates Me; and one who loves the PANDAVAS, loves Me. One who desires to harm a virtuous person due to greed and envy is the vilest of men, and he does not deserve to prosper for long. All the food which you intend to offer Me is contaminated by your wickedness and thus it is unfit for Me to accept. I find only the food of Vidura to be
After saying this to Duryodhana, who was incapable of tolerating the fact that he could not get his own way, Lord Kṛṣṇa left the assembly for the house of Vidura. Many of the Kurus, headed by Bhīṣma, Drona, and Kṛpa then came to Vidura's residence in order to offer Kṛṣṇa the use of their palaces and possessions. Lord Kṛṣṇa expressed His gratitude for these offerings and then He dismissed those who had come to see Him. Vidura then entertained Lord Kṛṣṇa very nicely with all that was at his disposal, and Kuntīdevi provided Him with sumptuous food. Lord Kṛṣṇa first of all fed the brāhmaṇas, and then only after giving food to His attendants, did He accept His meal.

That evening, as he sat alone with Kṛṣṇa conversing, Vidura said, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, I think that it was not wise for You to personally come to Hastināpura. Because of Duryodhana's nasty behavior, I am sure that he will offend You. Duryodhana is the kind of person who insults all others while expecting great honor for himself. He disobeys his elders; he is always suspicious, ungrateful, uncontrolled, and he is by nature attracted to sinful life. Therefore, I am sure that even though You may speak for Duryodhana's benefit, he will never accept a peaceful settlement, for he has great faith in his own prowess and that of his Kuru warriors. I know that he has already decided not to give the Pāṇḍavas their kingdom back. Therefore, You should not waste Your time trying to talk with him. My dear Lord, it is not even proper for You to enter an assembly of such puffed-up fools who think that they are capable of defeating Indra and all of the demigods. Duryodhana is confident of victory because he thinks that the Pāṇḍavas are not even capable of looking at Bhīṣma, Drona, and Kṛpa, and so what to speak of fighting with them. Indeed, Duryodhana thinks that Karna alone is competent to vanquish the entire Pāṇḍavas army. Duryodhana now rules over practically the entire earth, and thus he feels secure and unrivaled. As a result, he will not be willing to make even the slightest concession."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Vidura, your truthful words are just befitting a sincere friend. I also know fully well about Duryodhana's wicked intentions, and yet, I feel that it is My duty to make an attempt to bring about peace. If a person sincerely endeavors to perform some virtuous act to the best of his ability, then even if he fails, he still earns
great merit. On the other hand, if someone only contemplates an impious act but does not actually perform it, then he will not receive any sinful reaction. The impending calamity of war is entirely due to the wickedness of Duryodhana. Still, a person who does not try by all means to rescue a friend from performing a disastrous act, even to the extent of grabbing him by the hair, is also a wretch. On the other hand, one who makes all endeavors to save a misguided person is glorious. Therefore, even if Duryodhana does not listen to My advice, My conscience will be clear and no one shall be able to accuse Me of not having tried to settle the dispute peacefully."

Most of the night passed as Kṛṣṇa and Vidura conversed in this manner. Then, at last, Lord Kṛṣṇa lay down upon His bed in order to take some rest, and it was with great reluctance that Vidura bid Him good-night, since he had become so enthralled by the talks. The next morning, as dawn broke, professional singers came to awaken Lord Kṛṣṇa and so He got up and took His bath. Kṛṣṇa then sat down to recite the Vedic mantras and pour offerings of ghee and grains into the sacrificial fire. After this, the Lord dressed Himself, and as the sun became visible above the horizon, He engaged in the worship of Śūrya. Just at this time, Duryodhana and Śakuni came to Kṛṣṇa and said, "O best of the Yādava, Dhṛtarāśtra is seated in the royal assembly, surrounded by all the kings of the earth, and he is soliciting Your presence as well."

Lord Kṛṣṇa politely replied, "I shall come there very shortly." Kṛṣṇa then called for the brāhmaṇas, and after giving them charity, He circumambulated them and the sacred fire. Kṛṣṇa then ordered Dāruka to bring His chariot, and after mounting upon it, He set off in a grand procession, accompanied by thousands of soldiers.

Indeed, 500 elephants proceeded Lord Kṛṣṇa, and Vidura, Duryodhana, Śakuni and others followed His chariot from behind. Then, in order to see Lord Kṛṣṇa, all of the citizens came out into the streets, and the balconies and terraces of the houses became so crowded with ladies that it appeared as if they would collapse from the weight. While slowly proceeding, Lord Kṛṣṇa magnanimously glanced at everyone, and in turn, the people glorified Him with their heartfelt praises.

Thereafter, when Lord Kṛṣṇa came to the royal court, His attendants
blew upon their conchshells and trumpets in order to herald His arrival. Upon hearing this sound, all of the Kurus trembled with delight at the expectation of seeing the Supreme Lord of the universe. Indeed, the hairs of the assembled kings stood up on end as Lord Kṛṣṇa entered the assembly hall, arm-in-arm with Vidura and Śātṛyaki. The splendor and effulgence of Lord Kṛṣṇa eclipsed the glory of all others present, and when Dhṛtarāṣṭra rose up from his seat in order to honor Him, the other thousands of kings followed his example. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then had Lord Kṛṣṇa seated upon a magnificent throne which had been especially built for Him. After sitting down, the Lord greeted all of the assembled kings according to their seniority, and in turn, they respectfully worshipped Him.

Lord Kṛṣṇa then saw that the celestial ṛṣis, headed by Nārada, whom He had met en route to Hastināpura, were assembled in the sky in order to witness this historic event. Kṛṣṇa then ordered Bhīma to invite the ṛṣis into the assembly so that they could be worshipped. Understanding Kṛṣṇa’s intention, the ṛṣis arrived at the palace gate of their own accord and so Bhīma ordered that nice seats be brought for them. Finally, after the celestial ṛṣis had been seated, presentations of arghya were made to them, and then, everyone else took their seats. Vidura sat just next to Kṛṣṇa, and close by, Karna and Duryodhana shared the same couch. Without uttering a word, the entire assembly looked toward Kṛṣṇa with insatiable eyes, and the air became thick with their anxious expectation. Lord Kṛṣṇa then addressed Dhṛtarāṣṭra as follows in a voice that was loud enough for everyone to hear:

"My dear king of the Kurus, I have come to Hastināpura for the purpose of establishing peace between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, and for absolutely no other reason. The Kuru dynasty has a history of spotless glory, and all of its descendants have been great saintly kings who are worthy of its legendary fame. Now, it would be a shame if you were to perform some act which is not at all befitting your great lineage.

"My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you should restrain your wicked son, for he is acting most abominably toward his cousins. The blame for the present danger rests entirely upon the shoulders of you and your sons, and a great slaughter will ensue if you do not accept a peaceful settlement. However, we can still rectify everything, for if you bring your sons into
line, then I will pacify the Pāṇḍavas.
"O King, don't you see what a glorious position you would be in if you had both the Pāṇḍavas and your sons at your side? You would securely control the kingdom of the entire earth, and thus you would live very peacefully and happily, without any anxiety. On the other band, how can you expect to become happy by allowing either your sons or the Pāṇḍavas to be killed in battle? You should avert mass destruction by establishing peaceful relations with the sons of Pāṇḍu. Now, I shall repeat the message which the Pāṇḍavas send to you:
'O venerable uncle, we have successfully completed our term of exile which we underwent at your command. Now, you should keep your part of the agreement by giving us back our kingdom. We assure you that if you do so, then we shall always remain very obedient toward you."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then appealed to the entire assembly by saying, "My dear respected kings, I urge all of you to follow the virtuous path after considering what is justly deserved by the Pāṇḍavas."
Turning once again to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Lord Kṛṣṇa then concluded, "O descendent of Bhārata, you must remember how, after you had tried to burn the Pāṇḍavas to death, they had still returned to Hastināpura and placed their full trust in you as if nothing had ever happened. O King, I desire the welfare of both your sons and those of your brother, Pāṇḍu. The Pāṇḍavas are prepared to either serve you or else fight against your sons, and so it is now up to you to adopt whichever path you feel to be in your best interests."

All of the assembled kings applauded Lord Kṛṣṇa’s reasonable words, but still, no one dared to speak out against Duryodhana in his presence. When he saw how everyone was too timid to reply, Paraśurāma said to Duryodhana, "My dear king, please listen as I relate to you the following story which is meant for your benefit:
There was once a king named Dambhodbhava, who was the emperor of the entire earth. Every morning, upon awakening, after summoning numerous brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas, he would inquire, 'Is there anyone in this world who is equal to me in battle, be he a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiṣya, or śūdra?
"One day, some fearless brāhmaṇas gave this good advice to the puffed-
up king: 'O Dambodbhava, you should curb your false pride and thus refrain from boasting so much, if you actually desire your own welfare.' "And yet, in spite of this warning, Dambodbhava stubbornly continued to brag by asking the same question each and every morning, just as before. Being disregarded like this, the brāhmaṇas became very angry, and so they once again went to the king and said, 'O ruler of men, there are two heroes who are not only your equal, but they are superior to you in every respect.' "Being thus goaded, Dambodbhava inquired about these two personalities, and so the brāhmaṇas explained, 'O King, at the Gandhamadana mountain there are two rṣis named Nara and Nārāyaṇa who are engaged in executing very severe austerities. If you consider yourself to be such a great hero, then we suggest that you go and fight with them.' "After hearing this, the proud king quickly assembled his army and set out. Then, upon arriving at Gandhamadana, Dambodbhava searched through all of the forests there until he at last came upon the two rṣis, who were emaciated due to the hardships of their austerities. The king went and touched the lotus feet of Nara and Nārāyaṇa and then inquired about their welfare. In turn, Nara and Nārāyaṇa Rṣis received the king very respectfully and then offered him some food and water. Thereafter, when the rṣis inquired about the reason for his visit, Dambodbhava explained, 'O best of the great sages, I am interested in finding out if there is anyone in the world who is equal to me in battle, be he a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiṣya, or śūdra. I have already conquered over the entire earth, and so I have come to this celestial region with the desire to fight, for I have heard of Your superior prowess.' "Nara and Nārāyaṇa Rṣis replied, 'O King, there is no place in our āśrama for anger or greed, and thus it is not possible for a battle to occur here. You can see that we are not keeping any weapons, and so you should seek battle elsewhere.' "In spite of this, Dambodbhava repeatedly demanded that the rṣis fight with him. In response, Nara and Nārāyaṇa Rṣis again and again forgave the king's impudence and attempted to dissuade him from his hostility. Finally, however, when he saw, that Dambodbhava was too stubborn and proud to relent, Nara took up a handful of grass and declared, 'O
King, you can bring your army now, for we are ready to begin fighting.

"Accepting this challenge, Dambhodhbhava and his soldiers began to shower their arrows upon the ṛṣīs. However, simply by utilizing those blades of grass, Nara quickly foiled all of the arrows. Then, when he released his grass weapon, all of the enemy soldiers' noses, ears and eyes were instantly cut off. Upon seeing this, Dambhodhbhava fearfully surrendered himself at Nara's lotus feet begging him for protection. Nara then commanded, 'O King, from this day onward, you must show due respect to the brāhmaṇas, and never again try to ascertain the prowess of others. Instead, you must practice self-restraint and thus rule over your kingdom virtuously. Never again insult others out of pride, but instead practice tolerance and forgiveness.'

"Dambhodhbhava then worshipped Nara and Nārāyaṇa ṛṣis and, after taking his leave, he returned to his capital to begin a life dedicated to righteousness."

Paraśurāma then advised, "My dear Duryodhana, in the same way, you should give up your false pride and make peace with Arjuna. Arjuna is none other than Nara, and Lord Kṛṣṇa is Nārāyaṇa Himself. I can assure you that they are unconquerable in battle, and thus, like Dambhodhbhava, you will be defeated if you dare to fight with them."

Kanva Ṛṣi next said, "O Duryodhana, among all the Ādityas, only Lord Viśnu is eternal and unconquerable. All of the others, such as the sun and the moon, are destroyed at the time when the universe is annihilated. However, even in comparison with the lives of these demigods, human life is extremely flickering. O King, since our future life depends upon the acts which we perform during this brief span of human existence, I advise you to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas. You should not be so proud of your own strength, for you will always find that there is someone more powerful, like Arjuna, who is equal in prowess to the demigods. Now, in this connection, please listen as I relate to you the following story:

"Mātali had a daughter named Guṇākeśī, and she was exceptionally beautiful. When Guṇākeśī reached the age of puberty, Mātali and his wife Sudharmā became very anxious to find her a suitable bridegroom. Indeed, Mātali considered, 'The birth of a daughter endangers the
reputation of the noble family in which she had appeared. If her husband turns out bad, then the family's good name becomes spoiled.' "However, Mātali could not see anyone among the demigods or human beings who were eligible to marry his daughter. Then, finally, after consulting with his wife, Mātali decided to visit the kingdom of the Nāgas in hopes of finding a suitable boy. Thereafter, when Mātali entered the nether regions, he happened to meet the great sage Nārada who was on his way to pay a visit to Varuṇa. When Nārada thus learned of Mātali's mission, he offered to accompany the celestial charioteer in his search for a suitable bridegroom. First of all, Nārada and Mātali went to the royal court of Varuṇa, and after being respectfully received by the lord of the waters, they informed him of their mission. Then, after conversing for some time, Nārada and Mātali took permission and departed.

"Thereafter, while going along, Nārada Muni described to Mātali some of the eligible Nāgas, and he also mentioned how Varuṇa's son Puṣkara had been chosen by the daughter of Soma named Jyotsnakali. Nārada then pointed out the abode of Varuṇa, which was full of wine and which was made entirely out of gold. Nārada also showed Mātali numerous weapons which had formerly belonged to the demons but were taken away as booty by the victorious demigods. These weapons would return to the hands of the user after being discharged, and they required great mental energy to employ. Among these was the original Gäëòéva bow, which was being used by the sons of Varuṇa, and after which Arjuna's bow had been named. Nārada then said, 'O Mātali, there are many other wonders to be pointed out here in the abode of Varuṇa. However, we should move on now in order to fulfill our mission.' "Thereafter, Nārada Muni took Mātali on a tour of Pātālaloka, and he pointed out the interesting sights there, such as the egg-shaped subterranean fire within the water which had been existing unchanged since the time of creation. It is this fire which blazes forth at the time of annihilation in order to destroy the entire universe. Still, Mātali saw no one suitable for his daughter Guṇākeṣī in those regions, and so Nārada Muni next took him to Hiraṇya-pura. This city had been constructed by Maya Dānava, and it was inhabited by the Nivāta-kavacas, Kalakhanjas, and other Dānavas, all of whom were immune to death at the hands of
Indra. When Närada Muni asked Mätali to look for an eligible boy there, the celestial charioteer responded, 'O Devarṣi, since the Dānavas and Daityas are the enemies of the demigods, I cannot select a son-in-law from among them. O Närada, I know that you are always very eager to start quarrels, and so please do not suggest such a thing again!'

"Närada Muni then took Mätali on a tour of the abode of birds, who were descendent from the six sons of Garuḍa. Thereafter, they went to Rasātala, where resides Surabhi, the mother of the cows. Once when Lord Brahmā drank nectar, he vomited it, and, as a result, the best of many things were created, including Surabhi, a single spray of whose milk formed the milk-ocean. Närada Muni then took Mätali to Bhogavatē, where the king Vāsuki, Śeṣa, who helps support the earth, Takṣaka and many other Nāgas, live. There, Mätali saw someone whom he felt might be a suitable match for his daughter, and so he inquired about him. Närada Muni then explained, 'This is Sumukha, the son of the Nāga Cikura, who was recently killed by Garuḍa.'

"Mätali then said, 'O Devarṣi, I would like this boy to become my son-in-law. Therefore, please go and solicit him on my behalf.'

"For this purpose, Närada Muni first of all introduced Mätali to Sumukha's grandfather, Āryakā, and then began to praise him very highly. At last, Närada Muni explained, 'O venerable Nāga, Mätali has been searching the three worlds over for a suitable boy to marry his highly qualified and beautiful daughter, Guṇākeśī. Finally, he has come to choose Sumukha, and so I urge you to accept his daughter on behalf of your favorite grandson.'

"Āryakā replied, 'O foremost of ṛṣis, I have certainly become very pleased by this proposal, and yet at the same time, I must explain to you how it has only aggravated my sorrow. After Garuḍa had eaten my son Cikura and was departing through the skies, he announced that he would return after one month in order to eat Sumukha.'

"Upon hearing this, Mätali suggested, 'My dear Āryakā, Nārada, Sumukha, and myself can approach Indra and solicit him to dissuade Garuḍa from devouring your grandson.'

"Āryakā was happy to hear this proposal and so, without delay, the four of them departed for Indraloka. Then, when they came before the king of heaven, it so happened that Lord Viṣṇu was also present there.
Nārada Muni first of all related the entire story behind why they had come, and upon hearing it, Lord Viṣṇu said, 'O Indra, you should give Sumukha some amṛtā (nectar) so that he may become immortal.'

"However, being afraid of Garuḍa's unlimited prowess, the king of heaven replied, 'My dear Lord, I think that You should be the one who gives the Nāga prince the nectar.'

"And yet, Lord Viṣṇu adamantly insisted that Indra should be the one to administer the amṛtā, and so it came to pass as a compromise that the heavenly ruler awarded Sumukha a long duration of life rather than the nectar. Thereafter, Sumukha married Mātali's daughter Guṇākeśi, and then Nārada and Āryakā departed after having worshipped Indra, feeling confident that their object had been accomplished.

"Meanwhile, when Garuḍa found out that Indra had awarded Sumukha a long duration of life, he became highly enraged. Coming before the king of heaven in an angry mood, Garuḍa demanded, 'O Indra, why did you disregard me by giving Sumukha a benediction that will obstruct me from obtaining the ordained food which I require for feeding my family?'

"Garuḍa was not only very irritated, but excessively proud of his strength as well. Therefore, even in the presence of Lord Viṣṇu, he exclaimed, 'Alas! My misfortune has been caused by my own fault, for even though I am the most powerful being in the universe, I voluntarily became the servant of another! O Indra, I can understand that you are neglecting me because I sometimes have to act as the carrier of your younger brother, Lord Viṣṇu, and His associates as well.'

"Then turning to Lord Viṣṇu, Garuḍa said, 'My dear brother, (both were sons of Kaśyapa and the two daughters of Dakṣa) You are certainly more powerful than Indra. However, since I am able to effortlessly carry You with just one of my feathers, You should truthfully judge which of us is actually superior in prowess.'

"In order to provoke Garuḍa even more, Lord Viṣṇu replied, 'You are very weak, so why do you unnecessarily consider yourself to be so strong? It is actually I alone who carries both your weight as well as My own. Now, let us find out if your boasting is at all justified or not! See if you can bear the weight of just My right arm!'

"After saying this, Lord Viṣṇu rested His right arm upon Garuḍa's shoulder, and the giant bird immediately fell to the ground, almost
bereft of consciousness. Gasping for breath, his feathers falling off, and all of his limbs bereft of strength, Garuḍa helplessly bowed down before Lord Viśṇu. In a feeble voice, he prayed, 'O Supreme Personality of Godhead, it is You alone Who is the unlimitedly powerful Lord of all creatures. How foolish I was for ignorantly misunderstanding Your supreme position! Now, please forgive me for my impudence and let me once again engage in Your devotional service without false pride.'

"Actually, it was only by the mercy of Lord Viśṇu that Garuḍa had not been killed. The Lord then became very pleased by Garuḍa's sincere surrender, and while smiling magnanimously, He warned the son of Vināṭā to never again act with such pride. Lord Viśṇu then gave Sumukha a kick so that he landed right upon Garuḍa's chest. From that time onward, the serpent and bird have lived together as friends."

Kanva Rṣi then told Duryodhana, "O King, you should also give up your false pride, knowing that you are able to live for only as long as you do not approach the Pāṇḍavas in battle. You should accept the words of Kṛṣṇa, for He is Lord Viśṇu Himself, and thus make a peaceful settlement with your cousins."

Unfortunately, the envious Duryodhana became highly annoyed upon hearing Kanva Rṣi's words. While breathing heavily and frowning, he glanced at Karna and then suddenly burst out laughing with great disdain. Duryodhana then slapped his thigh and replied, "O Rṣi, I am whatever God has made me, and thus I shall never change. For this reason, all of your advice is useless."

Nārada Muni then said, "O Duryodhana, you should give up your obstinacy and listen to the good advice of your well-wishers. One who is so stubborn puts himself in a precarious position, and to illustrate this, I shall tell you a story."

"Once upon a time, Dharma (Yamarāja) desired to test Viśvāmitra, as he was engaged in executing severe austerities. Taking the form of Vasiṣṭha, Dharma came before the son of Gādhi, claiming to be very hungry. Viśvāmitra was very impressed that such an illustrious guest had come to his hermitage, and he quickly began to cook a preparation called caru which is something like kṣīra (sweet-rice). However, while Viśvāmitra engaged himself in cooking with great care and attention, Vasiṣṭha ate
the food that was offered to him by the other rṣis who were residing there. Thus, when Viśvāmitra finally presented the caru to him, Vasiṣṭha said, ‘O son of Gādhi, I have already eaten enough for now. Please wait for me, however, for I shall return after some time.’ 

"Vasiṣṭha then departed, and because he desired to obey the great brahmarsī implicitly, Viśvāmitra remained standing at that spot just like a wooden post, sometimes carrying the pot of caru in his hands, and sometimes resting it on his head. One hundred years passed in this way, and Viśvāmitra fasted the whole time while a disciple named Gālava tended to his other needs. Dharma then once again appeared to Viśvāmitra in the guise of Vasiṣṭha. When he saw how Viśvāmitra was still standing there, awaiting his return, and that the caru was still warm and fresh, the astonished Dharma ate the offering and then departed after expressing his great satisfaction.

"It was actually due to the grace of Dharma that Viśvāmitra was able to elevate himself from the status of a kṣatriya to that of a brāhmaṇa. Viśvāmitra was also very pleased with Gālava for his selfless service, and so he gave his disciple leave to go wherever he desired. Gālava was happy that he had pleased his guru, but in order to further satisfy him, he begged, ‘O Preceptor, please order me to do something so that I can properly reward you for your teachings.’

"Viśvāmitra already felt very obligated to Gālava for his unflinching service, however, and so he did not want to ask for anything more. And yet, in spite of being repeatedly requested by Viśvāmitra to depart without further ado, Gālava obstinately continued to insist that he offer his guru some further reward. This stubbornness finally made Viśvāmitra a little angry and so, in order to finish the matter and teach Gālava a lesson, he ordered, ‘O Disciple, if you are actually anxious to reward me further, then bring 800 spotlessly white horses, each having one black ear, and make sure that you hurry!’

"Gālava departed, but he soon became filled with great anxiety while wondering how he could procure the required horses. Indeed, due to being overwhelmed with fear and regret, Gālava gradually grew pale, and his body became reduced to a mere skeleton. Because of his inability to reward his guru, Gālava considered himself to be most ungrateful, and thus he found life to be no longer worth living. However, Gālava
decided to make a determined effort to procure the horses before committing suicide, and for that purpose he took shelter of Lord Viṣṇu, knowing Him to be the reservoir of all opulence.
"It so happened that Garuḍa was Gālava's good friend, and he came to where he was engaged in worshiping Lord Viṣṇu. Garuḍa then explained to him, 'My dear Gālava, I have come here hoping to be of service to you. Previously, I had spoken very highly of you to Lord Viṣṇu, and now, He has ordered me to carry you on my back to any part of the universe which you may like to visit. Please come now, and tell me where you would like to go first.'
"Garuḍa could then see that Gālava was a little bewildered, being unable to make up his mind. Therefore, Garuḍa began to describe at length the four directions; north, south, east, and west, which were presided over by Kuvera, Yamarāja, Sūrya, and Varuṇa, respectively. After hearing the glories of innumerable regions which are found throughout the universe, Gālava requested, 'My dear Garuḍa, please take me to where the sun first rises in the east, for I wish to meet the demigods residing there.'
"Garuḍa had Gālava get up onto his back, and he then set off at a breathtaking speed. At first, Gālava praised Garuḍa highly upon seeing how great trees were being knocked down by the force of the wind created by his wings. Soon, however, Gālava had to inform his carrier, 'O Garuḍa, due to the roaring sound of your wings, I have become stunned so that I can no longer see or hear properly. My mind has become so bewildered that I am forgetting the very purpose of my journey. Therefore, please slow down!'
"Indeed, the next moment, Gālava became so overwhelmed with fear that he pleaded, 'Please stop! I do not want to continue my journey any longer!'
"Because of his inability to ride on Garuḍa, Gālava became exceedingly despondent. At last, he decided to disclose everything to his friend, and so he spoke as follows: 'My dear Garuḍa, my guru has ordered me to bring him 800 white horses with one black ear each, and it is for this reason that I have requested you to carry me. Now, however, I can see that all of my hopes are being frustrated and so my only remaining recourse is suicide.'
"And yet, in spite of Gālava's entreaties and lamentations, Garuḍa
simply laughed and continued along without any reduction in speed. Garuḍa then said, 'My dear Gālava, your desire to commit suicide is foolish. Because death is a representation of the Supreme Lord, no one can die simply by his own endeavor. You did not tell me of your purpose before, but now that I know of it, I shall help you to get the horses you require. Let us first of all rest for some time on the Rṣabha mountain, which is located by the seashore. Then, after refreshing ourselves, we can begin our search.'

"After alighting upon the Rṣabha mountain, Garuḍa and Gālava happened to meet a brāhmaṇa lady named Sandili who was engaged in performing austerities. Garuḍa and Gālava worshipped the female rṣī, and in return, she offered them seats and inquired about their welfare. Sandili then fed her guests nicely cooked food, and after eating, Garuḍa and Gālava lay down and soon became overpowered by a deep sleep. Then, upon awakening some time later on, when Garuḍa desired to depart, he was shocked to find that his wings had disappeared. Gālava then sorrowfully asked, 'My dear friend, what gravely sinful act did you commit in order to reap such lamentable consequences?'

"Garuḍa replied, 'O rṣī, I had desired to carry away Sandili and bring her to the abode of Lord Viṣṇu, for I felt that she deserved to reside there. In this way, I think that I have actually insulted Sandili, considering myself to be superior and thus capable of benefiting her. Now, I had better go and beg for her forgiveness.'

"Garuḍa then went to Sandili and admitted, 'O pious lady, whether rightly or wrongly, I had desired to carry you to the abode of Lord Viṣṇu, thinking that this would be a great favor on my part. However, I can now understand that this was an offense. Therefore, kindly forgive me for having proudly desired to display my superiority in this way.'

"Sandili was very pleased with Garuḍa's repentant attitude. She then informed him, 'O son of Vinatā, you will get back your wings so that you may depart as you desire. My great prowess has been achieved as a result of good conduct, for this alone is the cause of all prosperity and the means of driving away all inauspiciousness. My dear Garuḍa, you should be very careful to never again disrespect me or any other virtuous woman, for, as you can see, the consequences are very grave.'

"As soon as Sandili finished speaking, Garuḍa's wings once again
appeared on his body and indeed, he found that they were even stronger than before. Finally, after taking Sandili's permission, Gālava and Garuḍa departed, and yet, in spite of looking extensively, they could not find the necessary horses. Viśvāmitra then came one day and informed Gālava, 'My dear disciple, your time is up! You should already have delivered the horses to me, thus fulfilling your promise. However, in consideration of your past service, I shall give you a little more time.'

"After saying this, Viśvāmitra departed, and when he saw how depressed Gālava was, Garuḍa tried to cheer him up by saying, 'My dear friend, do not give way to grief and lethargy, for I shall help you find the horses. Let us now approach King Yayāti, the son of Nāhuṣa, for he is my good friend, and he is fabulously wealthy.'

"Going to Pratiṣṭhāna, Yayāti's capital city, Garuḍa and Gālava came before the king and were received by him with great hospitality. When Mahārāja Yayāti asked about the purpose of their visit, Garuḍa explained, 'O King, my friend Gālava had insisted upon rewarding his guru, in spite of being exempted from doing so in consideration of his meager wealth. Now that Viśvāmitra has given him the extremely difficult task of procuring 800 all-white horses having just one black ear, Gālava finds himself to be merged in an ocean of grief. It is for this reason that we have now come to your shelter. My dear Yayāti, if you will kindly donate these horses, then I promise that after rewarding his preceptor, Gālava will once again engage in severe austerities and then give you a portion of his acquired merit out of gratitude.'

"Mahārāja Yayāti replied, 'O Garuḍa, I will gladly give Gālava charity, for I consider him to be a worthy recipient. Unfortunately, however, my wealth has diminished so much that I am incapable of giving what you have asked for. Still, I am determined that the ṛṣi's visit may not go in vain. When a worthy person requests, "Please give me," and one replies, "I have nothing," that is the greatest sin. Therefore, I have decided to give you my own daughter, Mādhavī. She is greatly sought after by both men and demigods, and they are willing to give much more than a mere 800 horses. Therefore, I am sure that by this gift, I am enabling your purpose to be easily fulfilled.'

"Gālava accepted Yayāti's daughter and then departed along with Garuḍa after promising the king that he would return later on. Garuḍa
then said, 'My dear ṛṣi, since you have now acquired the means of obtaining that which you require, I shall take your leave and return home.'

"After Garuḍa's departure, Gālava began to think about the person to whom he should give away Mādhavī in exchange for the 800 horses. Finally, Gālava decided to approach Haryaśva, for he knew that this Ikṣvāku king was desirous of obtaining offspring. Going to Ayodhyā, Gālava met with King Haryaśva and asked him to accept Mādhavī in exchange for a dowry. Upon examination, the king saw that the girl possessed great beauty and as all auspicious bodily features. Being very desirous of obtaining a good son, he then inquired, 'O ṛṣi, what is it that you wish to have in exchange for this lovely princess?'

"Indeed, Haryaśva was already captivated by Mādhavī's beauty and thus overpowered by the desire to enjoy her. When Gālava informed him that he wanted 800 all-white horses each having only one black ear, however, the King regretfully replied, 'O brāhmaṇa, I have only 200 such horses in my possession. Still, I beg you to accept that many, and let me beget just one son upon this girl.'

"Mādhavī then explained to Gālava, 'O ṛṣi, I once received a benediction so that even after conceiving and giving birth to a child, my virginity will once again be restored. Therefore, you should fulfill the king's request and take his 200 horses. Thereafter, we can approach three other kings in the same way so that at last your purpose will be fulfilled.'

"Gālava agreed and then departed. Thereafter, when the proper time arrived, Haryaśva united with Mādhavī, and in due course she gave birth to a son who was named Vasumanaś. When Gālava came to learn that Mādhavī had begotten a son, he returned to Ayodhyā in order to take her back so that he could approach another king in the same way. Being a man of his word, Haryaśva returned Mādhavī, and as soon as this was done, she regained her virginity. Gālava kept his 200 horses in the custody of Haryaśva and then next went to see the king of Kāśi named Divodāsa. Gālava was very respectfully received by the king and in turn, he urged him to accept Mādhavī for begetting a nice son. Divodāsa then explained, 'My dear brāhmaṇa, I already know what you intend to propose, and I can assure you that I am quite agreeable. However, since
my wealth is equal to Haryaśva's I can only give you 200 horses in exchange for begetting one son just as he did.'

"Thereafter, Divodāsa united with Mādhavī, and in due course of time, a son named Pratardana was born. Gālava then returned to Kāśi and the truthful king kept his promise by delivering Mādhavī along with the 200 horses. Gālava kept the horses in the king's custody and then next went to the king of the Bhojas named Uśīnara. Knowing him to be childless, Gālava implored, 'O King, please beget two excellent sons upon Mādhavī in exchange for 400 all-white horses, each having only one black ear, for I need them in order to satisfy my guru.'

"Uśīnara replied, 'O brāhmaṇa, I am very willing to accept Mādhavī, but unfortunately, I have only 200 horses befitting your description. Therefore, I wish to beget one son, just as Haryaśva and Divodāsa did before me.'

"Gālava agreed, and after receiving Mādhavī, the king retired to the forest in order to enjoy life in her company. In due course of time, an excellent son named Śibi was born, and so once again Gālava came before the king. The truthful Uśīnara returned Mādhavī and Gālava next went to see Garuḍa. As Gālava began to explain how he had acquired the horses, Garuḍa heartily congratulated him for his success. However, Gālava cut him short by saying, 'O Garuḍa, I have only received 600 horses, and thus one-fourth of my endeavor remains unfulfilled.'

"Garuḍa replied, 'O Gālava, you should not even attempt to obtain the remaining horses, for you shall never succeed. You see, long ago, the great sage Ricika wanted to marry Satyavatī, the daughter of King Gādhi. Gādhi agreed to the marriage, but only on the condition that Ricika could bring him 1,000 horses that were spotlessly white, except for possessing one black ear. Ricika then approached Varuṇa for this purpose, and he was able to receive the required horses. Thus, he presented them to King Gādhi, and in return he received the beautiful princess as his wife. Some time thereafter, King Gādhi performed a great sacrifice, and at the conclusion, he gave away these horses in charity to the brāhmaṇas as remuneration. Then, later on, five kings purchased 200 horses each from those brāhmaṇas. Unfortunately, however, while the horses were being transported across the Vitastā river, two of the
boats capsized and thus 400 horses drowned. Therefore, my dear Gālava, I suggest that you present Mādhavī to Viśvāmitra along with the 600 horses which you have acquired, and in this way, I am sure that he will be satisfied.'

"Garuḍa then took Gālava, Mādhavī, and the 600 horses to Viśvāmitra's āśrama. The ṛṣi came before his preceptor and begged, 'Please accept Mādhavī for begetting a good son instead of the balance of the 200 horses. In this way, kindly enable me to become relieved from the great burden of my obligation.'

"Viśvāmitra smilingly replied, 'O Gālava, why didn't you offer me the girl in the first place for begetting four sons?'

"After saying this, Viśvāmitra happily agreed to beget a son upon Mādhavī, and he told Gālava, 'Just remain here until I return. Make sure that you look after my 600 horses very carefully.'

"Viśvāmitra then went to the forest and began to pass his time very happily along with Mādhavī. In due course of time, a son named Aṣṭaka was born, and later on, Viśvāmitra gave him the 600 horses. After begetting Aṣṭaka, Viśvāmitra returned Mādhavī to Gālava. The ṛṣi was very pleased at having satisfied his preceptor, and so he praised Mādhavī very highly for the great service which she had rendered to him. Gālava then returned Mādhavī to her father, Yayāti, and thereafter, Garuḍa took his leave. Being thus freed of all obligations, Gālava happily retired to the forest in order to perform austerities, as did Viśvāmitra.

"King Yayāti then arranged for Mādhavī's svayaṁvara, and he decided that it should take place at the confluence of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā rivers. After arriving at this abode of great ṛṣis, along with her father and two brothers, Yadu and Pūru, when Mādhavī entered the sacrificial arena, she saw that many Gandharvas, Yakṣas, and Nāgas, as well as numerous human beings had assembled in the hopes of gaining her hand in marriage. Passing by all of them, however, Mādhavī chose the forest as her husband. In other words, after getting down from her chariot, she went off alone in order to execute austerities. Thus entering the forest, Mādhavī adopted the life of a deer, and while eating only grass and drinking water, she wandered with the herd.

"After some time, Yayāti passed away and went to live in heaven. Then, one day, after he had spent thousands of years there in great happiness,
while Yayāti was seated along with other former great rājarṣis, he began to think disrespectfully of the demigods and celestial sages. Indra could understand the foolish pride that had entered Yayāti’s heart and so, by his mystic power, he clouded the minds of the heavenly residents so that no one could recognize the son of Nāhuṣa any longer. Thus everyone began to question. ‘Who is this unknown upstart who has somehow or other come here without our knowledge?’

"The residents of heaven then began to angrily push Yayāti headlong down toward the earth. While the Apsarās, Siddhas, and rājarṣis laughed at him, Yayāti’s crown and ornaments fell off and he became filled with a terrible fear and despair. Because his mind had also become clouded, Yayāti wondered, ‘What horrible thing was I thinking of, causing me to reap these terrible consequences?’

"There is a particular person whose job it is to hurl down from heaven all of those whose pious credits are just about exhausted. Under the order of Indra, he came to Yayāti and explained, ‘O King, because of your pride, and the resultant disrespect for others, you do not deserve to live in heaven.’

"Yayāti then begged, ‘O agent of Indra, if I must fall down, then please still allow me to reside among those who are righteous.’

"Thereafter, Yayāti was forcibly hurled downwards, and while falling, he began to consider where he would like to land. Yayāti then saw the Naimiṣa forest, where four pious kings were engaged in performing a vājapeya sacrifice. These kings were Pratardana, Vasumanaś, Śibi and Aṣṭaka, and the smoke from their sacrificial fire reached all the way up to heaven. Yayāti could smell that sacred smoke, and while guiding his course by it, he fell to that very place. When the four kings saw before them a person whose feet did not touch the ground and who possessed great splendor and celestial beauty, they inquired, ‘My dear sir, who are you? Why have you come here?’

"Yayāti introduced himself and then explained how he had fallen from heaven due to the exhaustion of his pious merit. These pious and compassionate kings then said, ‘O son of Nāhuṣa, you can take the results of our virtuous acts and sacrificial performances, and in this way, regain your heavenly abode.’

"However, Yayāti replied, ‘O Kings, I am not a brāhmaṇa, I am a kṣatriya.'
Thus, it is not suitable for me to accept charity. Nor am I inclined to elevate myself at the expense of others.'

"Just at this time, Mādhavī happened to come there in the course of her wanderings. When the kings saw the saintly lady, who had become emaciated because of her austerities, they welcomed her very respectfully and then inquired about her purpose in coming to the Naimiṣa forest. Mādhavī first of all approached Yayāti and offered her obeisances, and then patted the heads of the other four kings. After doing so, she disclosed, 'O saintly rulers of the earth, Yayāti is my father, and you four are my sons. I have adopted the life of a deer and thus have been living in the forest for a long time. In consideration of our family relationship, it is proper for us to help Yayāti to regain his heavenly residence. After all, for what other purpose does one beget children, and they beget grandchildren?"

"After hearing this, Pratardana, Vasumanaś, Śibi and Āṣṭaka offered their obeisances unto their mother and grandfather. At this time, Gālava also came there to give Yayāti one-eighth of his acquired ascetic merit as previously promised by Garuḍa. Because of this, Yayāti immediately began to rise upwards, and then, when his four grandsons loudly declared that they were also giving him the results of their pious acts, truthful vows, and sacrificial performances, he rose even higher and higher until he finally reached heaven. Yayāti was welcomed back by all of the demigods, who then offered him arghya while the Gandharvas sang and the Apsarās danced. Lord Brahmā then personally came before Yayāti and said, 'O King, in spite of your previous glorious achievements, you had to fall down from heaven as a result of your false pride. Now, however, you have been rescued by your descendants, and thus you are very fortunate.'

"Yayāti then said, "O Lord, there is one doubt which I have and would be very grateful if you would dispel it. How is it that my accumulated merit was destroyed so quickly, even though I had performed so many sacrifices and ruled over my kingdom piously for thousands of years, thus earning for myself practically an eternal residence in heaven?"

"Lord Brahmā replied, 'O King, it is only due to the one fault of vanity that your merit was destroyed. It is for this reason alone that you became an object of contempt for the other residents of heaven and were thus
thrown down to earth. A person who is vain, deceitful, or malicious can never reside in heaven, and thus I warn you to never again neglect others due to pride. Now, as a benediction, I grant that whoever in the future hears the narration of your fall from heaven and subsequent reinstatement, will be saved from all dangers that may befall him."

Nārāda Muni then informed Duryodhana, "O descendent of Bhārata, the difficulties which were experienced by Gālava and Yayāti, were due to obstinacy and pride. Therefore, you should be intelligent enough to avoid unnecessary suffering by discarding these two faults and giving up all enmity toward the Pāṇḍavas."

Duryodhana replied, "O Nārada, I fully appreciate the value of your words, which are full of deep meaning. But unfortunately, it is not within my power to follow such good instructions."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said to Kṛṣṇa, "My dear Lord, O best in the dynasty of Yadu, You have come here to offer us advice which is fraught with wisdom and virtue, and Your intention is certainly to benefit both my sons and the sons of Pāṇḍu. Still, because my son Duryodhana is not cooperative, I am not free to implement Your proposals. Therefore, please try to persuade my wicked son that he should obey my commands and listen to the advice of his elders such as Vidura, Bhīṣma, and Gāndhārī."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then turned to Duryodhana and, addressing him in a very sweet voice, He said, "O King, you should avail yourself of the opportunity to take the virtuous path by making peace with the Pāṇḍavas. I am sure that even you will admit that there is a distinction between noble and abominable behavior. It is My duty to warn you that all of your inclinations are perverse and thus are leading you toward destruction. Can't you see how you are foolishly discarding the advice of wise and elderly persons and instead, taking the council of wicked and inferior men? Those who actually know their self-interest, strive for dharma, artha and kāma harmoniously, although it is sometimes seen that exceptional men will endeavor for dharma (religion) alone. On the other hand, mediocre persons work simply for artha (economic development), whereas the lowest of all men have no other interest but kāma (sense-gratification). Being overwhelmed by sensual desires, if a
person tries to fulfill his lust by unrighteous means, then he soon meets with destruction at the hands of his own senses.

"My dear Duryodhana, it is actually dharma which is the cause of artha and kāma, and thus you should avoid unrighteousness by understanding its ultimate futility. Just remember what happened to all of the Kurus when they attempted to attack Virāṭa's kingdom. I can assure you that Arjuna is capable of killing all of the Kauravas, and thus you are simply hoping against hope for victory. Only by making peace with the Pāṇḍavas will you be able to enjoy the prosperity which you will highly cherish. On the other hand, if you fight with the Pāṇḍavas, then you will reap the infamous reputation of being the destroyer of the Kuru dynasty."

Bhīṣma then said, "O Duryodhana, you should follow Lord Kṛṣṇa's advice and cast off your anger and malice. Only by doing so can you avoid causing the extermination of your race and thus plunging your poor father into fathomless grief."

Droṇa then added, "O King, you can rest assured that what Lord Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma are saying is for your benefit. Therefore, please give up your stubbornness and follow their good advice."

Vidura then commented, "O Duryodhana, I do not grieve for you as much as I do for your elderly parents, for, after the annihilation of all their sons, they will be without protectors."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "My dear son, you should accept Lord Kṛṣṇa's advice and make friends with the Pāṇḍavas. Otherwise, if you fight with them, neither victory or happiness shall ever be yours."

Bhīṣma and Droṇa then once again spoke, urging Duryodhana to go and embrace Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira while there was still time. However, all of these words were very disagreeable to the wicked son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who then replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, You are unnecessarily finding fault with me alone. I do not see that I have ever done anything wrong. Did not the Pāṇḍavas willingly gamble at dice? Now, they have become very weak, and they are practically devoid of allies. Therefore, I shall never bow down to Yudhiṣṭhira simply on the basis of threats or strong words. I am confident that even the great demigods cannot defeat Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, and Karna. And, besides, even if all of the Kurus are killed in battle, that is also glorious, for such a heroic death on the battlefield
awards one eternal residence in heaven. It is the duty of a kṣatriya to lay down his life on the battlefield rather than bow down to his enemies. The half of the Kuru kingdom that was formerly given to the Pāṇḍavas by my father will never be returned by me for as long as I live! Indeed, I am not even willing to give the Pāṇḍavas the amount of land which can be pierced by the sharp point of a needle!"

After this arrogant statement, there was a tense silence in the royal assembly. Lord Kṛṣṇa, His eyes distinctly red with anger, then replied, "Duryodhana, I can positively assure you that all of the Kurus will very soon lay down their lives in battle. You claim that you are faultless, but it was due to enviousness of the Pāṇḍavas' superior prosperity that you conspired with Śakuni to cheat them out of their kingdom. Don't you remember how you had Draupadī dragged out into the assembly of Kurus so that she could be abused with such vile and cruel language? The words which you spoke at that time were only capable of being uttered by a person who is totally despicable and heartless. Don't you remember how you repeatedly tried to murder the Pāṇḍavas in your youth? You may not be willing to voluntarily give the sons of Pāṇḍu back their rightful share of the kingdom, but you will be forced to do so anyway when you lie down dead on the battlefield!"

At this point, Duḥṣāsana spoke up, saying, "My dear elder brother, if you do not voluntarily make peace with the Pāṇḍavas, then all of the elderly Kurus will surely bind you up and hand you over for necessary action!"

Duryodhana was already breathing very heavily due to his repressed anger. Then, after hearing Duḥṣāsana's remark, he suddenly got up from his seat and stormed out of the assembly. Duḥṣāsana and many others ran after him, causing a mass exodus, and at this time, Bhīṣma told Kṛṣṇa, "My dear Lord, I predict that all of these misguided persons will soon meet with their doom!"

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said to all of those who remained, "My dear kings, if you do not restrain Duryodhana, then it will be the second grievous transgression on your part. Indeed, you should capture the Kaurava king and bind him up for the good of all concerned. Kaṁsa was killed by Me for the benefit of the entire dynasty, after he had disregarded his own father, Ugrasena. Therefore, similar action should be taken in this case as well. You should arrest Duryodhana and then hand him over to the
Pāṇḍavas."

After hearing this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra called for Gāndhārī in the hopes that she might be able to pacify her wicked son. Thereafter, when she entered the assembly, escorted by Vidura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra said, "My dear Gāndhārī, our son has disregarded my commands. Out of greed and envy, he is ready to sacrifice the lives of all the Kuru warriors and their allies. Even though his superiors gave him very good advice, Duryodhana responded by storming out of the assembly in an angry mood."

Gāndhārī then said, "My dear husband, call for our wicked son! You have always conceded to the demands of our deluded son. Now, you are reaping the bitter results of foolishly handing over the kingdom to one who is not only unqualified, but who is guided by evil-minded ministers as well."

Soon thereafter, Duryodhana entered the royal assembly with Vidura, and due to anger, his eyes were red and his breathing was very rapid. When Gāndhārī understood that Duryodhana had come before her, she rebuked him with harsh words and then implored, "O my foolish son, you should obey the commands of your superiors and thus make peace with the Pāṇḍavas. First of all, conquer over your lust and wrath, and then think about conquering the earth. Why can't you give up your insatiable greed and remain satisfied with ruling half of the earth?"

However, Duryodhana did not care for his mother's words, and without even replying, he left the assembly along with Karṇa, Duḥśāsana and Śakuni.

Consulting among themselves, these four then decided that since Kṛṣṇa, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Bhiśma had advocated capturing Duryodhana, they should preempt this move by seizing Kṛṣṇa first. As a result, they reasoned, the Pāṇḍavas would lose all heart and thus be easily defeated in battle.

Sātyaki soon came to know about this wicked plan, for he had the ability to read the hearts of others by certain external signs. Thus, he came out of the assembly and then ordered the Yadu army to assemble at the entrance to the assembly hall. Thereafter, Sātyaki reentered the royal assembly hall, and as he informed Lord Kṛṣṇa and Vidura of the plot, he laughed heartily at the thought of how Duryodhana foolishly hoped to
capture the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Vidura then warned, "O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, if your sons attempt this rash act, then they will all perish like flies entering a blazing fire."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O King, you may go ahead and allow your sons to try and seize me, for in this way the Pāṇḍavas' goal will be easily attained. After capturing all of the Kauravas, I will hand them over to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira so that he can do with them as he likes."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "O Vidura, please call for Duryodhana as well as all of his brothers and advisors, for I shall make one last attempt to rectify the situation."

Soon thereafter, Duryodhana once again re-entered the royal court, followed by all his brothers and numerous kings. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was very angry at Duryodhana, and so he chastised him with strong words as follows:

"My son, you are a most sinful wretch, and you are surrounded by the most despicable and evil-minded councilors. How can you dare to even think of harming Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who is unconquerable even by the greatest demigods? You are Infamy personified, having appeared in our dynasty, for only you would stoop so low as to attempt such a dastardly act. Indeed, you are not only wicked, but you are also the greatest fool, for you are trying to accomplish the impossible, like a child attempting to catch the moon."

Vidura then said, "O Duryodhana, you should consider how Lord Kṛṣṇa has already killed so many demons. Kṛṣṇa also defeated all of the combined demigods at the time when He forcibly took away the pārijāta flower from heaven for the satisfaction of Satyabhāmā. Are you actually so stupid that you cannot see how you will also be vanquished if you go ahead and try to capture Him?"

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Duryodhana, due to gross ignorance, you think that I am alone, and for this reason you dare to contemplate taking Me captive."

Then, with an outburst of laughter, Lord Kṛṣṇa declared, "It is I Who am the complete whole, and all of the demigods, demons, rṣis, the Pāṇḍavas, and even yourselves are My separated parts and parcels!"

While Lord Kṛṣṇa was thus speaking, innumerable manifestations of demigods suddenly streamed forth from His body with blazing splendor.
Indeed, Brahmā came out from Lord Kṛṣṇa’s forehead, and Rudra appeared from His chest. Agni blazed forth from His mouth as did limitless Vasus, Ādityas, Sādhyas, Maruts, Aśvins, Yakṣas, Gandharvas, and Rākṣasas. Balarāma appeared from Lord Kṛṣṇa’s left arm, bearing His plow weapon, and Arjuna came out from His right arm, holding the Gāṇḍīva bow. The other Pāṇḍavas were situated behind Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Yadus, headed by Pradyumna, were in front.

All of these myriad forms were splendid and multicolored, and they were beautifully dressed and decorated with ornaments and garlands. Then, while expanding Himself greatly, Lord Kṛṣṇa exhibited numberless arms, each of which held a different weapon; and from His eyes, ears, and other bodily parts, issued forth sparks and smoke. Indeed, from every pore of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s body, flames and sparks emanated like brilliant sun rays, and when the assembled kings saw this most wondrous manifestation, they closed their eyes out of fear. Only Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Vidura, Saṅjaya, and the rṣis could bear to behold this dazzlingly effulgent form because Lord Kṛṣṇa had blessed them with divine vision for the occasion. Drums were then heard beating in heaven, and flowers showered down from above as the entire earth trembled and the seas became highly agitated.

Thereafter, Lord Kṛṣṇa withdrew His universal form while all of the assembled kings remained standing like statues, being struck with wonder. Lord Kṛṣṇa then took permission from the rṣis and left the hall, arm-in-arm with Sātyaki and Kṛtvārmā. All the Kauravas hurriedly followed Lord Kṛṣṇa out of the royal assembly, and taking advantage of the commotion, the rṣis, headed by Nārada, suddenly vanished from sight. Lord Kṛṣṇa did not care for all those who followed Him, and when He saw that Dāruka was waiting with his chariot, He quickly prepared to depart. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then approached Kṛṣṇa and pleaded, "My dear Lord, do not think badly of me. I sincerely tried to convince my wicked son to accept Your words, but I failed to do so. Let me assure You that I personally have no illfeelings toward the Pāṇḍavas. It is only because Duryodhana pressures me that I reluctantly sanction his misbehavior."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then took permission from Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Vidura, Bāhlīka, and Kṛpa before setting out on His chariot. All these
great Kuru warriors, along with Aśvatthāmā, Vikarna, Yuyutsu, and others then followed Lord Kṛṣṇa as He proceeded toward the residence of His aunt, Queen Kuntī. After entering Kuntidevi's house, Lord Kṛṣṇa offered obeisances at her feet and then briefly recounted to her all that had transpired in the royal assembly. Then, before taking His leave, Kṛṣṇa asked Queen Kuntī if she had any message for her sons. In reply, Kuntidevi took the opportunity to give lengthy instructions to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira as follows:

"My dear son, your accumulated stock of pious credit will steadily decrease for as long as you allow yourself to remain like a mendicant. Your excessive compassion, weakness of heart, and overall mildness are not befitting for a kṣatriya. It is your duty to fight for regaining your parental kingdom.

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, the impotence which you are now exhibiting was never desired by Pāṇḍu, Bhīma or myself, and thus you should desist from bringing infamy upon our dynasty in this way. Instead, you should rescue your poor mother from the humiliating life of having to subsist upon the mercy of others. You are meant to rule over the Kuru kingdom and if you do so, then you will receive great benefit, as will those whom you govern. A king who executes his royal duties perfectly verily ushers in the Satya-yuga, for it is actually the ruler who creates the age and not the age which causes the conditions within a kingdom. The king who establishes the conditions of Satya-yuga will be rewarded with excessive heavenly enjoyment in his next life. The king who creates the conditions of Tretā-yuga also enjoys in heaven in his next life, but not excessively. The king who brings in the conditions of Dvāpara-yuga enjoys heaven to a lesser extent, and the ruler who allows the conditions of Kali-yuga to predominate within his kingdom has to suffer in hell almost perpetually. My dear son, please listen as I relate to you the following story:

"There was once a very intelligent woman named Vidula, who was highly devoted to kṣatriya-dharma, and thus she was somewhat prone to pride and anger. Her son, Sañjaya, was once defeated by the king of Sindhu, and after leaving the battlefield, he simply lay down as if lifeless, overwhelmed by despair. At this time, Vidula came and rebuked him with very harsh words as follows: 'O Sañjaya, you are such a eunuch that
I am ashamed to call you my son. Don't be such a coward! Go out and fight with your enemy! It is better to die like a hero than to admit defeat like a weak person. It is better to blaze up like a flaming piece of wood rather than smolder for a long time like burnt rice chaff. In other words, it is better to burn out than to simply fade away. How can you even bear to live after having avoided your duty as a kṣatriya? Having taken a human birth, if one does not perform some praise-worthy act which is worth becoming a conversation piece for the people in general, then he has served no other purpose than to increase the population. Indeed, one who has not earned any fame; either for his charity, austerity, learning, wealth or honesty, is no better than his mother's stool!

"Being prodded like this, Sañjaya questioned, 'O Mother, if I were to do as you advise and then die on the battlefield, how could you bear to go on living?' "Vidula responded, 'My dear son, to live by depending upon others is a most wretched condition of life! A kṣatriya who gives up his manliness in order to subsist upon others should no longer be considered as living! A kṣatriya only deserves the title when he is able to maintain all others and never refuses to give away charity unto the brāhmaṇas. Indeed, the prosperity that is attained by ruling over a kingdom is life itself for a kṣatriya.'

"Sañjaya then exclaimed, 'O Mother, because of your obsession for kṣatriya heroes, you have become so ruthless and stone-hearted that you no longer even care about the death of your own son!'

"Vidula replied, 'My dear Sañjaya, I am urging you on in this way because I know that to see you earn infamy as a coward would be more painful for me than your death. If, in the name of affection, a mother allows her son to fall into disrepute, then that sort of maternal love is no better than that which is felt by the she-ass for her offspring.'

"And yet, in spite of these strong arguments, Sañjaya pleaded, 'My dear mother, you should not encourage me to die in battle. Instead, why don't you comfort me in my griefstricken condition?'

"Vidula was adamant, however, and at last she declared, 'Sañjaya, I will only urge you more and more to go and fight, for that is my duty!'

"Sañjaya then said, 'My dear mother, being bereft of all means for obtaining victory, I have lost all desire to achieve it, just as a sinful person gives up all aspirations for going to heaven. If you can give me
some practical way of achieving victory, then I shall certainly cast aside my despondency.'

"Vidula replied, 'Victory and defeat are always uncertain, and thus no warrior should ever lose heart. However, if you want some practical advice, then it is this: You should gather together the following persons: those who are angry with your enemy, those who are greedy, those who are envious of the enemy, and those who always like a challenge due to their great pride. All of these persons can be inspired to fight along with you if you deal with them properly. A heroic king is able to instill confidence in his subjects. On the other hand, the citizens lose all faith in a king who shows himself to be fearful and cowardly. When the king displays his weaknesses, the subjects either abandon him, go on strike, or else defect to the side of the enemy. My dear son, I am speaking like this because I want to rouse you to action and bravery."

"Having at last become influenced by his mother's words, Sañjaya gave up his fear and grief, and thus he prepared to encounter the enemy in battle. Kuntidevi then concluded, 'My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I have related this conversation between Vidula and Sañjaya just for your benefit.'"

Queen Kuntī then said, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, please remind Arjuna of how a voice from the sky had announced at the time of his birth that he would become equal to Indra in prowess. The voice went on to say that after defeating all of the Kurus and regaining his paternal kingdom, Arjuna would perform three great sacrifices along with his brothers. O Kṛṣṇa, You should also prod Bhīma by saying, 'Now is the time for you to exhibit your prowess!' Also, please encourage the twins in the same way. Remind all of my sons of the insults which they had to tolerate, especially Duḥśāsana's cruel words to Bhīma. Finally, assure the Pāṇḍavas that I am well, and that I am living quite comfortably under the care of Vidura."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then offered His obeisances unto Kuntidevi and, after circumambulating her, He departed. The Kuru warriors still followed Kṛṣṇa, but the Lord at last dismissed them all, except Karṇa, whom He took up onto His chariot. Lord Kṛṣṇa then rode out of the city, and after talking with Karṇa for some time, he made him turn back as well. Thereafter, as Lord Kṛṣṇa quickly proceeded toward Upaplavya along
with Sātyaki, all of the Kurus exclaimed, "Now we are surely doomed because Duryodhana has foolishly ignored Lord Kṛṣṇa’s advice!"

Bhīṣma and Droṇa then approached Duryodhana and informed him of Queen Kunti’s messages to her sons. In this way, they assured him that the Pāṇḍavas would soon give up their forgiving attitude, as well as all attempts for peace. At the same time, Bhīṣma and Droṇa reminded Duryodhana of how Arjuna had defeated the Gandharvas, killed the Nivāta-kavacas, and routed the Kurus when they had attacked Virāṭa's kingdom. By explicitly describing Arjuna’s superiority, they urged Duryodhana to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas before it would be too late. Bhīṣma and Drona also informed the Kaurava king about the inauspicious omens which had been observed around Hastināpura and at last, they concluded by saying, "O King, you should embrace the Pāṇḍavas with brotherly affection unless you desire to lie down dead upon the battlefield."

However, Duryodhana simply remained silent while gloomily hanging his head downward. Bhīṣma then said, "O Duryodhana, the greatest sorrow for us is that we will have to fight against the faultlessly pious Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira."

Droṇa added, "O King, I have more affection for Arjuna than I do for my own son, Aśvatthāmā. I therefore curse the kṣatriya profession for being forced to fight against him. Even though a sinful person may temporarily be dissuaded from committing a sinful act, the sinful desire will still remain within his mind. On the other hand, even if a pious person is sometimes tempted by sin, he is never willing to abandon his dedication to the cause of righteousness. My dear Duryodhana, even though you had acted deceitfully toward Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, the Pāṇḍavas are still willing to make peace so that you can also live prosperously. Therefore, you should appreciate the Pāṇḍavas' piety and give up your enmity toward them."

Meanwhile, being very curious to find out what had happened when Lord Kṛṣṇa took Karṇa onto His chariot, Dhṛtarāṣṭra inquired about this from Sañjaya. Sañjaya then replied, "O King, after taking Karṇa up on His chariot, Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke to him in the following words: 'My dear Karṇa, according to the version of the śāstra, when a son is born to a girl before her marriage, he is considered to be the son of the man whom she
marries later on. Because of this, you are really the son of Pandu, and thus you should join the Pāṇḍavas. My dear Kṛṣṇa, if you do so, then I assure you that the Pāṇḍavas will worship you as their eldest brother and so will all of their allies. In this way, it will be you, and not Yudhiṣṭhīra, who will become the emperor of the entire earth. Yudhiṣṭhīra shall ride behind, fanning you with a cāmara, and Bhīma will hold the royal umbrella over your head. Arjuna will take up the reins of your chariot, and thus you shall enjoy more prestige than any other king in the history of the world!

"After contemplating the verbal picture, which was painted by the supreme artist, Kṛṣṇa replied, 'My dear Kṛṣṇa, I know that you are speaking to me as my genuine friend and wellwisher. I also know that Kuntidevi is my real mother, but she heartlessly abandoned me at birth, thus disregarding my welfare. On the other hand, Adhiratha and Rādhā have raised me very affectionately, just as if I was their own begotten son. How can I now forsake them, denying their piṇḍa (offerings made during the śraddhā ceremony)? Adhiratha performed all of the purificatory rites for me, he had the brāhmaṇas give me the name Vasusena, and it was the girl whom he chose that I married. Throughout my life, I have fixed my love upon Adhiratha and Rādhā, and so how can You expect me to neglect them now? Besides this, I have already vowed to help Duryodhana. He has honored me highly for many years and so how can You expect me to suddenly break that friendly relationship?

"'My dear Kṛṣṇa, although I consider my obligation to Duryodhana to be binding, I freely admit that the Pāṇḍavas are actually on the side of virtue. Therefore, I request You to please keep it a secret that Kunti is my real mother. If Yudhiṣṭhīra was to find this out, then he would never take back the kingdom. Instead, he would insist that I rule over the earth, and in turn, I would have to give the sovereignty to Duryodhana. Only the pious Yudhiṣṭhīra is qualified to rule over the earth however, so please keep this a secret between You and me.

"'My dear lord, this upcoming war seems to be just like a sacrifice to be performed by Duryodhana, with You acting as the officiating priest. The warriors' blood will be the offerings of ghee, and Bhīma's drinking of Duḥśāsana's blood will represent the partaking of the soma-rasa. The
death of Duryodhana will mark the conclusion of this great sacrifice, and the lamentations of the wives who surround the dead warriors along with numerous dogs and vultures, will constitute the avabhṛtha bath. My dear Kṛṣṇa, I repent very bitterly for my harsh words and wicked behavior at the time of the dice match, and I know that I will surely be killed by Arjuna as a consequence. My dear Lord, please insure that all of the kṣatriyas who take part in this great war will meet with a glorious death. Let the battle be fought at the holy place of pilgrimage, Kurukṣetra, so that all of the great heroes on both sides may attain to a heavenly destination.'

"Lord Kṛṣṇa then inquired. 'O Karna, does not the thought of becoming the emperor of the entire world appeal to you at all?'

"Karna was adamant, however, and when he remained silent, Lord Kṛṣṇa realized that his determination was fixed, and so He ceased from any further attempt at persuading him to join the Pāṇḍavas. Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, 'My dear Karna, you should return to the city now, and give this message to Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Kṛṣṇa:

"O leaders of the Kuru army, the present month is very pleasant. The weather is not so hot nor so cold, the roads are dry, there are practically no flies, and the trees are filled with abundant fruit. Therefore, after seven days, upon the appearance of the new moon, let the battle between yourselves and the Pāṇḍavas begin.'"

"Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, 'O Karna, you should assure all of the assembled kings that I shall fulfill their cherished desire to attain the higher regions after death.'

"Karna then worshipped Kṛṣṇa, and after doing so he said, 'My dear Lord, I am certain that Duryodhana will be vanquished by the Pāṇḍavas in battle. Indeed, I have seen many frightening omens in the Kaurava camp which indicate an impending slaughter. The elephants and horses are shedding tears and they no longer take pleasure in eating or drinking. The Kaurava soldiers are passing large quantities of stool, in spite of eating very little. Their drums make practically no sound when beaten, whereas the Pāṇḍavas' drums resound without even being struck. The wells in our camp are making loud booming sounds, and the demigods are showering down flesh and blood upon our soldiers. I have heard the terrifying cries of fierce birds which only have one eye, one
wing, and one leg, and the Kaurava warriors are frequently showing
disrespect towards the brāhmaṇas. Indeed, wherever I cast my glance, it
appears as if all directions are ablaze, and thus a great annihilation
appears to be at hand.
"One night, while sleeping, I had a mystical vision wherein I saw
Yudhiṣṭhira enter a great palace along with his brothers, and they were
all dressed in white robes. Then, the scene changed and I saw that You
were covering the entire earth with weapons while Yudhiṣṭhira got up
onto a pile of bones and ate sweet rice from a golden cup. After that,
You handed over the entire earth to Yudhiṣṭhira, and he swallowed it.
Then, I saw Bhīma, mace in hand, standing on top of the world as if
indicating that he would kill all of the Kauravas in battle. Next, I saw all
of the warriors on the Kaurava side wearing blood-red crowns, with the
exception of Aśvatthāmā, Kṛpa, and Kṛtavarmā, who wore white ones. I
saw Bhīṣma and Droṇa get up onto a chariot drawn by camels and then
proceed toward the abode of Yakṣa, as did myself and Duryodhana
on a similar chariot. O Kṛṣṇa, I know that victory lies with the
righteous, and thus I am certain that we shall all lay down our lives in
the impending war.'
"Lord Kṛṣṇa then replied, 'O Karṇa, a mass annihilation is certainly at
hand, for you have been unwilling to accept my truthful words.'
"Karṇa then said, 'My dear Lord, I hope that I am able to meet You again
after the battle is over, either as a survivor, or more likely, in heaven.'
"After saying this, Karṇa very tightly embraced Lord Kṛṣṇa and then,
upon receiving the Lord's permission, got down from the chariot. Then,
after mounting upon his own, he returned to Hastināpura."

In this way, Sañjaya described everything to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Meanwhile,
after Kṛṣṇa’s departure, Vidura went to visit Kuntīdevī. Vidura then said
to her, "My dear sister-in-law, I am very unhappy that Lord Kṛṣṇa’s
peace mission has turned out to be a failure. Indeed, I am in so much
anxiety over the upcoming war that I cannot even sleep at night."
Queen Kuntī replied, "O Vidura, I condemn the wealth and prestige
over which this bloody battle will be fought! In spite of being so
abominable, however, this war is absolutely necessary so that my sons
and I can avoid the humiliation of living impoverished lives. Actually,
my greatest fear is because of Karṇa. I am sure that, due to affection, Bhīṣma and Drona will be lenient with my sons, but, on the other hand, Karṇa truly hates them. My dear Vidura, please try and pacify Karṇa by disclosing to him that I am his real mother. Indeed, I shall personally go and speak to Karṇa, for then he will surely obey my commands."

Thinking like this, Kuntīdevī went to the banks of the Gaṅgā at noon where Karṇa was standing with upraised arms, reciting the Vedic hymns in glorification of the sun-god. Kunti stood behind Karṇa waiting for him to finish his prayers, but she soon became so afflicted by the heat that she felt as if she would faint. Kunti thus moved into Karṇa's shadow and then continued to wait with folded hands. Then, when Karṇa finished reciting his prayers, he said, "O Queen, know me to be the son of Adhiratha and Rādhā. Now, please tell me why you have come here." Kuntīdevī replied, "My dear Karṇa, you are not the son of Rādhā. The truth is that Sūrya had impregnated you into my womb before my marriage to Pāṇḍu. Therefore, it is only due to ignorance that you are residing with the wicked and envious Duryodhana. My dear son, one's highest religious duty is to satisfy his mother and father in all respects. I want you to join now with the Pāṇḍavas and help them snatch back the kingdom which has been usurped by Duryodhana."

When Kunti had finished speaking, a voice laden with affection was heard coming from the direction of the sun. This was Sūrya himself, who announced, "My dear Karṇa, all that Kunti has said is true. Therefore, you should follow her advice and side with the Pāṇḍavas for your own welfare."

Yet, in spite of being persuaded by his real mother and father, Karṇa's heart did not waver. He then replied, "My dear Kuntī, I do not agree that obedience to you is my highest duty, because you abandoned me after my birth. By thus depriving me of the honor that accompanied a kṣatriya birth, you have actually acted as my enemy. Never before have you shown me any motherly affection, and so how is it that you are appealing to me now? For this reason, I can understand that you have simply approached me out of self-interest. Why then should I join the side of the Pāṇḍavas? Besides, since I have already vowed to aid Duryodhana, everyone would think that I had deserted him out of fear. After being practically worshipped by the Kaurava king for so many
years, how can I betray his friendship and thus frustrate his cherished hope of defeating the Pāṇḍavas in battle with my help?

"O Kuntī, I do not want to pacify you with false assurances, and so I am telling you the truth in a straightforward manner. I shall not desert Duryodhana, and I will fight against the enemy to the best of my ability. However, so that your visit shall not go in vain, I hereby make the following promise: I will not kill Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Nakula or Sahadeva. It is only Arjuna that I shall fight with to one of our deaths. In that way, you can rest assured that five of your sons will survive the battle, for either I shall kill Arjuna, or he shall kill me."

Being very pleased to hear this, Kuntī embraced Karṇa and then urged, "My dear son, make sure that you remember this promise during the heat of the battle."

Karṇa assured Kuntī that he would do so, and he then departed for home.

Meanwhile, upon His return to Upaplava, Lord Kṛṣṇa described to the Pāṇḍavas all that had transpired at Hastināpura, and then He went to take some rest. Then, in the evening, after the Pāṇḍavas had dismissed all of the other kings and were saying their prayers with their minds absorbed in Him, Kṛṣṇa came and sat down in their midst. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira first of all requested Kṛṣṇa to relate in greater detail all that had happened at the Kuru's royal court. The Lord thus replied, "O King, after I had addressed the assembled kings, making an earnest plea for a peaceful settlement, Duryodhana responded by laughing out loud. Bhīṣma became very angry at this display of arrogance, and so he began to chastise Duryodhana. The grandsire then narrated the entire history of how the Kuru dynasty had almost become extinct upon the death of Vicitravrīya, and he described everything that had happened, right up to the birth of Duryodhana. Bhīṣma then concluded by saying, "O king of the Kauravas, you should now make peace with the sons of Pāṇḍu so that the dynasty which has been so carefully fostered will not be extinguished."

"Droṇa next said, 'O Duryodhana, when Pāṇḍu left for the forest along with his two wives, he gave over the charge of the kingdom to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura. Vidura then served his elder brother just like a
menial servant, and it was he who took care of all the domestic affairs. Bhīṣma handled all matters pertaining to defense as well as diplomatic relations with other kings. My dear Duryodhana, by appreciating how there was so much cooperation before, you should now accept the Pāṇḍavas as brothers and work together with them. I make no distinction between my own son and the sons of Pāṇḍu, and you should also become a little broad-minded.'

Vidura then implored, 'O Bhīṣma, you should not remain indifferent to the great slaughter which is at hand! Indeed, you should either retire to the forest along with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and myself, or else bind up Duryodhana by force and turn over the kingdom to the Pāṇḍavas.'

"After saying this, Vidura sighed very heavily, as if overwhelmed by sorrow. Being very fearful for her sons' lives, Gändhārī, the daughter of the Gändhāra king Subala, and thus the sister of Śakuni, next said, 'O Duryodhana, you usurped the kingdom from my husband and Vidura. Because they were caretakers of the kingdom which was originally ruled over by Pāṇḍu, it now rightfully belongs to the Pāṇḍavas.' Then, addressing the assembly, Gändhārī said, 'O rulers of the earth, the kingdom should be given back to Yudhiṣṭhira so that he can rule under the direction of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Bhīṣma.'

"Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, 'My dear son, please listen as I relate to you the glorious history of my family:

The Kuru dynasty originally descended from Soma, the god of the moon. Sixth in line from Soma was King Yayāti, the son of Nāhuṣa. Yayāti had five sons, of which Yadu, born from Devayānī, was the eldest. That progenitor of the Yadu dynasty became very proud, and so, later on, he disobeyed the order of his father. Thus, even though Yadu had conquered over the entire earth and had made his capital at Hastināpura, Yayāti cursed him, and then, after removing him from the royal throne, installed his youngest son Pūru, as a reward for his obedience.'

"In this way, Dhṛtarāṣṭra wanted to show Duryodhana that even an eldest son can be dethroned for the sin of disobedience. He then continued, 'My great-grandfather was Pratīpa, and he had three sons: Devāpi, Bāhilika, and Śantanu. The eldest son, Devāpi, was very obedient to his father, and he was loved by his brothers and all of the
subjects as well. Thus, when Pratīpa became old, he decided to install Devāpi upon the throne so that he could retire peacefully to the forest. And yet, even though all of the preparations were made, at the last minute the brāhmaṇas forbade Pratīpa from installing Devāpi because of his having white leprosy. At this, Pratīpa lamented bitterly, but he had to accept the śāstric injunction that no one with a bodily defect could become king. Pratīpa then departed for the forest after installing Bāhlika upon the royal throne. However, soon thereafter, Bāhlika also abandoned his kingdom in order to go live with his maternal uncle and thus, with his sanction, the youngest son of Pratīpa, Ṣantanu, became the ruler of the Kurus.

"My dear Duryodhana, in a similar way, even though I am the eldest son of Vyāsadeva, I am disqualified because of blindness, and so Pāṇḍu was made the king. Because of this, after the death of Pāṇḍu, it is natural that the kingdom should be handed over to his sons. My dear son, you should not covet the kingdom when your own father was denied it. You have no right to claim possession of the royal throne, and thus you are unrighteously attempting to usurp it from Yudhiṣṭhira, who is its lawful owner, and who is also qualified in all respects. My dear Duryodhana, at least you should give back half of the kingdom to the Pāṇḍavas, and in this way you can go on living very happily and prosperously."

Lord Kṛṣṇa continued, "In spite of such strong words from his father, mother, and other elders, Duryodhana could not be budged from his obstinate determination to become the unrivaled ruler of the entire earth. On the contrary, while hearing all of this good advice, Duryodhana became very angry. At last, with eyes that were red with rage, he got up from his seat and stormed out of the assembly, followed by his brothers and allies. Now, Duryodhana has ordered his army to march toward Kurukṣetra, with Bhīṣma at the helm. As an expert diplomat, I had first of all tried to apply the art of conciliation by stressing to Duryodhana the advantages of allying himself with you. When that attempt failed, I tried to create dissension among the Kurus by speaking in various ways. Then, when that also proved unsuccessful, I proposed that peace could be concluded if you were given just a paltry five villages to rule. Now, because even this was not acceptable to Duryodhana, the only recourse is chastisement."
After hearing from Lord Kṛṣṇa about the failure of the Hastināpura peace talks, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira appointed Drupada, Virāṭa, Dhṛṣṭādyumna, Śīkhaṇḍi, Sātyaki, Cekitāna, and Bhima as the commanders of his seven akṣauhinī divisions of soldiers. Then, beginning with Sahadeva, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira asked for advice as to who should be installed as the commander-in-chief. Sahadeva favored Virāṭa, and then Nakula suggested Drupada. Arjuna recommended Dhṛṣṭādyumna, and Bhima nominated Śīkhaṇḍi. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear brothers, let us allow Lord Kṛṣṇa to make this most important decision, for He is our only shelter and He gives the ultimate sanction of all affairs within the universe as well."

Being so invited, Lord Kṛṣṇa then declared, "My dear sons of Pāṇḍu, all of the great warriors whom you have nominated are certainly qualified to command our forces. Still, as far as My personal preference is concerned, I choose Dhṛṣṭādyumna."

All of the assembled kings happily accepted Lord Kṛṣṇa’s choice, and they responded by letting out a resounding cheer. All of the leading warriors then began to arrange their armies with great enthusiasm and, after passing the night, they departed for Kurukṣetra after giving away profuse charity to the brāhmaṇas. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was kept in the center, and accompanying the Pāṇḍava army were numerous transport vehicles which carried the animal food, tents, cattle, physicians, servants, and wealth. While going along, this huge procession made a roaring sound just like the great ocean. Draupādi and the other ladies remained at Upaplavya, surrounded by many guards.

Thereafter, as the Pāṇḍava army approached Kurukṣetra, all of the warriors blew upon their conchshells, and the tumultuous sound increased their joy. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then ordered the army to set up camp on a grassy plain by the side of the Hiranvati river, and upon their arrival there, the outpost guards belonging to Duryodhana fled in fear. Sātyaki then measured off the ground and assigned plots for setting up the tents while Lord Kṛṣṇa personally engineered a moat to surround the camp. Thus, thousands of pavilions, appearing more like great palaces, were soon erected by hundreds of engineers and then filled with all sorts of food, drink, and other enjoyable articles.
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then approached Kṛṣṇa and requested, "My dear Lord, please give me further directions about how to prepare for the upcoming war. Also, I am very eager to hear more of what was said by the Kurus in the royal assembly at Hastināpura."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "O King, when Duryodhana had rejected My good advice and when I saw that Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and the rest were determined to follow him no matter what, I could understand that there was nothing more to be said. I concluded that war was inevitable, for I was unwilling to settle for peace at the expense of your prosperity. Now, please go about arranging the army and abandon all of your doubts about the necessity of this battle."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira obediently began to ready his army, but while doing so he became very distressed at the thought of the impending slaughter, and thus he sighed heavily again and again. At last, in the presence of his brothers, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira exclaimed, "Alas! All of the trouble which I underwent to fulfill my vow of exile has now proved utterly useless! Indeed, instead of getting back my kingdom and being able to live happily, I now face an even more miserable situation wherein I will have to fight with all of my relatives and superiors!"

Arjuna replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should have faith that since this war has been sanctioned by both our mother and Lord Kṛṣṇa, it cannot be sinful. Therefore, please stop lamenting and give up your foolish hopes for withdrawing from the fight."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then confirmed this by saying, "O King, there is no turning back now from the battle, for our minds have been made up!"

Meanwhile, back in Hastināpura, after Lord Kṛṣṇa’s departure, Duryodhana had consulted with Duḥśāsana, Karṇa, and Śakuni. Knowing that Lord Kṛṣṇa was bent upon fighting, the Kaurava king ordered his associates to prepare the army so that they could begin marching for Kurukṣetra without delay. The next morning, Duryodhana made the final arrangements by assigning ten elephant warriors to each chariot, ten horse soldiers to each elephant, and ten infantry to each horse. Krpa, Droṇa, Śalya, Jayadratha, Sudakṣiṇa, Kṛtavarmā, Aśvatthāmā, Karṇa, Bhūrīśravas, Śakuni, and Bāhlīka were made the commanders of his eleven akṣauhinī divisions of soldiers. Duryodhana then took these great warriors to Bhīṣma and requested, "O Grandsire,
because the intelligence of two persons is never in agreement, I now request you to please become the commander-in-chief of my combined forces. There is absolute necessity for one supreme leader because different commanders will always be jealous of each other due to their great pride of prowess. In this regard, I have heard the following story: "Once, long ago, the brāhmaṇas took help from the vaiśyās and śūdrās and then attacked the kṣatriyas of the Haihaya dynasty. Thereafter, when their army was routed on the battlefield, the brāhmaṇas came and inquired from the kṣatriyas about the cause of their defeat. These virtuous kings then replied, 'O brāhmaṇas, we came out victorious for the simple reason that we were obedient to a single commander who is possessed of great intelligence. On the other hand, you were disunited because each of your warriors had acted according to his own understanding.' After hearing this, the brāhmaṇas also appointed a commander-in-chief, and after doing so, they proceeded to vanquish the Haihayas in battle."

Bhīṣma then said, "O King, I shall accept your proposal, but at the same time I must warn you that since the Pāṇḍavas are very dear to me, I will never disregard their welfare. In this world, I can see only one warrior who is equal to me, and that is Arjuna. However, I know that, out of respect, he will never fight with me very fiercely. Similarly, even though I am capable of easily vanquishing all of the demigods, demons, human beings, and Rākṣasas combined, I shall never kill the Pāṇḍavas. My dear Duryodhana, I hereby vow to slay at least 10,000 warriors each day, but I must insist upon one condition before accepting the post of commander-in-chief. Either Karṇa or myself will fight first, but not both of us together, for he has always insulted me while vainly boasting of his own prowess."

At this, Karṇa assented by saying, "O King, I agree to fight only after Bhīṣma has been killed, for that was the vow which I had already made earlier."

Bhīṣma was then duly installed as the Kauravas' commander-in-chief, and at the conclusion of the ceremony, musicians played, conchshells blared, and all of the warriors roared like lions. And yet, in spite of all this fanfare, and although it was a cloudless day, a bloody rain began to fall and fierce winds suddenly blew. The earth began to quake and
blazing meteors were seen streaking across the sky. Unembodied voices could be heard in all directions, and jackals howled ominously, foreboding a great calamity and thus depressing the hearts of the Kaurava warriors. At the completion of Bhīṣma's installation, the brāhmaṇas were given abundant charity, and in turn, they pronounced benedictions upon the new commander. Thereafter, the vast Kaurava army departed for Kurukṣetra, and after arriving there, they set up their camp on a grassy plain.

When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira understood that the Kaurava army had arrived after having installed Bhīṣma as their commander-in-chief, he called together his brothers and Lord Kṛṣṇa. Just then, Lord Balarāma arrived at the Pāṇḍava camp along with many of the Yadu heroes, such as Akrūra, Gada, Sāmba, Uddhava, Pradyumna, and Cārudeṣṇa. Lord Balarāma looked like the Kailāsa mountain dressed in blue silk, and upon seeing Him, all of the assembled kings quickly rose up from their seats in order to worship Him. Thereafter, Balarāma sat down on the same couch with Yudhiṣṭhira, and after all of the others were seated, He began to address the assembly as follows:

"My dear kings, although I am not happy to see these preparations for war, I must admit that fighting is unavoidable. I repeatedly solicited My younger brother, Kṛṣṇa, to give equal aid to both the Kauravas and yourselves. However, since He has disregarded My words and dedicated Himself unto you, I can understand that you shall come out victorious. As for Myself, I have equal affection for both of my disciples, Bhīma and Duryodhana, and so I shall set out on an extensive tour of the holy places in order to avoid this fratricidal war. If I were to stay here and witness this great battle, I could never remain indifferent, and thus I would certainly break My vow of nonparticipation. Let Me offer My blessings unto all of you, and I hope that after the war, I shall be able to see you once again, healthy and happy."

After conversing with the assembled kings for some time, Lord Balarāma took permission from the Pāṇḍavas and then departed on His pilgrim's journey. Soon thereafter, Rukmī, the son of Bhīṣmaka, arrived at the Pāṇḍava's camp. Rukmī had become very accomplished in the use of weapons, and he had received the celestial Vijaya bow from Indra, which was equal to Arjuna's Gāṇḍīva bow and Lord Kṛṣṇa's Śārṅga bow. When
Lord Kṛṣṇa had kidnapped his sister, Rukmī chased after Him, vowing to either kill Him or else never return to his capital. Rukmī was then defeated by Lord Kṛṣṇa and put to shame, and so he did not return to Kuṇḍina but instead, founded the city of Bhojakatā.

Rukmī entered the Pāṇḍava camp along with his army, consisting of one akṣauhinī, in the hopes of getting the chance to display his prowess in such a way that even Lord Kṛṣṇa would be impressed. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra immediately got up to welcome his guest, and after an exchange of mutual greetings, Rukmī rested for awhile. Then, as all of the kings were seated together, Rukmī confidently approached Arjuna and declared, "O son of Kuntī, if you and your brothers are at all fearful about fighting with the Kurus, then please give up your anxiety, for I have come here to assist you. I have now become the most powerful warrior on the earth. Therefore, if you like, everyone else can stand aside as spectators while I singlehandedly vanquish the enemy and then hand over the kingdom to Yudhiṣṭhīra."

Upon hearing these boasting words, Arjuna first of all smilingly looked at Yudhiṣṭhīra and Kṛṣṇa. Then, he replied with a friendly tone of voice, "My dear Rukmī, I am not at all afraid, for I have my Gāṇḍīva bow, and Lord Kṛṣṇa has become my ally. You must have heard of how I had formerly defeated the Gandharvas, how I had exterminated millions of Dānavas, and then how I had vanquished the Kurus at Virāṭa's kingdom. Considering all this, why should I be afraid? O Rukmī, we do not really need your assistance, and so it is up to you whether you want to stay here or go."

Being slighted in this way, Rukmī angrily departed, and next, he went to the camp of the Kauravas. There, he boasted in a similar way before Duryodhana and the assembled kings, and in the same way, he was neglected. Therefore, Rukmī left Kurukṣetra and did not take part in the battle at all.

Meanwhile, back in Hastināpura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra called for Sañjaya and requested, "Please tell me just what is taking place in the two military camps. I knew all along that this calamity would come upon me. And yet, because of the inevitable course of Destiny, I could not avert this terrible war by endeavoring to control my deceitful son. Indeed
whenever I tried to confront Duryodhana, my understanding would turn away from the path of righteousness by his influence."
Sañjaya replied, "O King, you should not place the entire blame for this impending war upon Duryodhana, nor should you attribute the cause simply to Destiny. Anyway, please listen as I tell you what happened when your son and his allies reached Kurukṣetra. First of all, Duryodhana called for Uluka and had him carry the following message to the Pāṇḍavas: 'O Yudhiṣṭhira, how can you follow such an unrighteous path knowing well that you will become the destroyer of the earth's population? Aren't you reputed to be the protector of all living entities? In this regard, I will repeat the following story which I had heard Nārada tell to Dhṛtarāṣṭra: Once there was a wicked cat who lived on the banks of the Gaṅgā. In order to fool all of the other animals around him, this cat one day announced, "My dear friends, I am going to renounce all work, and by practicing piety and austerities, I shall purify my heart!"
"Then, in order to make a show of being a great devotee, the cat stood on the banks of the river with folded hands, as if absorbed in meditation upon the Supreme Lord. As a result, in due course of time, the cat managed to gain the trust and confidence of all the birds who lived there. When the birds came and congratulated him for his change of heart, the wicked cat felt as if his purpose was already accomplished. After seeing how the birds were worshipping the cat, the mice also came there and admired his saintly behavior. Indeed, all of the mice decided that the virtuous cat should become their protector so that they could roam about free from fear of their enemies. Addressing him as "uncle," the mice came before the cat and begged him to become their king and refuge. The cat then replied, "My dear mice, to engage oneself in performing austerities while at the same time giving protection to others seems to be contradictory. However, because you have requested me in this way, I must agree, provided that you promise to obey my commands. Now, I want you all to carry me to the riverside each day, for I have become very weak on account of my penances."
"The mice agreed, and then they assigned their elderly and youthful members to carry the cat. Thereafter, the wicked cat began to eat those who were carrying him, and thus, as he became more and more fat and
strong, the number of mice became reduced. Upon seeing that their 
population was dwindling, the mice then met together in order to 
ascertain the cause. One wise mouse named Dindaka then advised, "My 
dear brothers, you all go to the banks of the river and wait for me while I 
accompany the cat to see if he does anything mischievous."

"The mice agreed to this plan, but then it so happened that while going 
to the riverside, the cat ate up Dindaka. Once again, the mice called for 
a meeting, and this time a very elderly mouse named Kilika said, "My 
dear brothers, this cat is certainly a great hypocrite, for even though he 
is our enemy, he is pretending to be our virtuous friend. As evidence, I 
have brought some of the cat stool so that you can see how it contains 
animal hair. How could this be possible if the cat were subsisting only 
upon fruits and roots as he claims? Besides, Dindaka has been missing for 
eight days, and thus I am sure that it is the cat who is eating us all."
After hearing this, all of the mice panicked and began to fearfully 
scatter in all directions."
Sañjaya then said to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, "O King, your son continued by saying, 
'My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you are just like this cat for you pretend to be so 
virtuous, and yet you act in such a way as to destroy all of your kinsmen. 
Now, give up your hypocritically gentle behavior and fight, for we are 
not the mice that you may think we are.'
"Next, Duryodhana challenged, 'O Kṛṣṇa, let us see You exhibit one 
more time the form which You had displayed at our royal assembly hall. 
Such magical tricks will not help You to save Your life on the 
battlefield!'
"Duryodhana then said, 'O Bhīma, I think that it would have been better 
if you had remained a cook in the court of Virāṭa. However, since you 
have come here to fight, let us see if you can make good your vow to 
drink Duḥśāsana's blood.'"
Sañjaya continued, "My dear king, your son gave similar boasting 
messages to the other warriors on the Pāṇḍavas' side, and after doing so, 
he laughed out loud, being very proud of his cleverness in insulting 
others. Duryodhana then reminded the Pāṇḍavas of all the injustices 
and hardships which they had endured at his hands, and he tauntingly 
challenged them to take revenge if they were able to do so. Indeed, your 
foolish son became so intoxicated while continuing to brag on and on,
that at last he declared, 'Even if 1,000 Arjunas, aided by 1,000 Kṛṣṇas were to attack me on the battlefield, I could easily drive them away!'"

Uluka then took these messages and went to the Pāṇḍavas' camp. While approaching Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra, he begged, "O King, please do not become angry upon hearing the words which are my duty to repeat." Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra assured Uluka that he need not be afraid, and so the son of Śakuni read Duryodhana's messages which concluded, "O sons of Pāṇḍu, I urge you to remember vividly how you had lost your kingdom at the dice board. Please remember how your wife was insulted in front of all the elderly Kurus and how they could do nothing to stop it. Remember how you had to live a miserable life of exile in the forest, and how you had to act as menial servants for one full year while living incognito at the kingdom of Virāṭa. Now, if you are able to do so, then act like men and regain your kingdom by fighting! However, I am sure that when you behold the formidable Kuru army arrayed upon the battlefield, you will repent and thus give up all desire to regain your kingdom."

When the Pāṇḍavas heard these words of Duryodhana which were spoken by Uluka, they became exceedingly agitated. Still, Uluka arrogantly repeated Duryodhana's message just to provoke them further. Thus, the Pāṇḍavas became highly enraged, and after jumping up from their seats, they began to restlessly stretch their arms. The Pāṇḍavas looked toward Lord Kṛṣṇa with eyes which were red with rage, and all of them were breathing heavily. Lord Kṛṣṇa then smilingly told Uluka, "You should now return to Duryodhana and simply inform him that we shall no doubt answer all of his challenges."

And yet, in spite of this suggestion, Uluka began to repeat Duryodhana's message for a third time, and at this Arjuna became so agitated that he had to wipe away the perspiration from his forehead. Indeed, when the other kings saw how excited Arjuna had become, and because they once again had to hear Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna being insulted, they also began to burn with rage. As a result, Dhṛṣṭādyumna, Śikhaṇḍī, Śāyaki, Ghaṭotkaca, the sons of Draupādī, Abhimanyu, Dhṛṣṭaketu, Bhīma and Mādri's twins, all jumped up from their seats at once. Bhīma gnashed his teeth while licking the comers of his mouth, and as he squeezed his hands in anger, he vowed, "O foolish messenger, you can assure
Duryodhana that as sure as the sun shines I shall kill him and all his brothers in battle!"
Similarly, Sahadeva vowed to kill Uluka and his father, Śakuni. Then, after composing himself, Arjuna smilingly told Bhīma and Sahadeva, "My dear brothers, it is not proper for one to address envoys with harsh words. After all, they only speak what they are obliged to say."
Then, turning to Uluka, Arjuna said, "I have only this short message for Duryodhana: 'O King, I will give you my reply tomorrow on the battlefield with my Gāṇḍīva bow, for only eunuchs answer insults with words."
"All of the assembled kings appreciated the cleverness of Arjuna's reply, and so they applauded him heartily. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira corrected Arjuna, however, by saying, "My dear brother, no good king should tolerate an insult."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had also become extremely angry upon hearing Duryodhana's words, and he gave the following message: "O you who are wretched and sinful, I challenge you to personally fight with us. Do not just send onto the battlefield the other Kurus whom we respect very highly."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O Duryodhana, just because I have vowed not to take up weapons and have accepted the role of Arjuna's charioteer, that does not mean that you can rest easily. If I become enraged on the battlefield, then I shall surely consume the entire Kaurava army. I can also assure you that Bhīma's vow to drink Duḥśāsana's blood is as good as accomplished. O Duryodhana, although you have bragged at great length about your supposed prowess, you should know that none of the Pāṇḍavas consider you to be any more significant than a piece of straw!"
Arjuna then said, "O Duryodhana, you have bragged so much only because you are confident of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Karṇa. However, after they have all been slain, you will surely repent very bitterly for all of your misdeeds!"
Bhīma then put in the last word by saying, "O Duryodhana, I will not only drink Duḥśāsana's blood, but I will also break your thighs and kick the crown right off of your head!"
Thereafter, Uluka took Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's permission and departed, and when he reached the Kaurava camp, he related to Duryodhana all
that was said by the Pāṇḍavas and Lord Kṛṣṇa. After hearing the Pāṇḍavas' messages, Duryodhana ordered his army to get ready so that the battle could begin early the next morning. Similarly, on the other side, Dhṛṣṭadyumna arranged the Pāṇḍava forces.

Thereafter, Duryodhana approached Bhīṣma and asked him to estimate the relative strengths of the great warriors on both sides. Bhīṣma responded with a long list of warriors and their ratings. He then said, "O King, Kṛtavarmā, Śalya, Bāhlika, Droṇa, and Aśvatthāmā are all atirathas, whereas Satyavān, Alambuṣa, and the son of Karṇa, Vṛṣasena, are mahārathas. Karṇa is a foolish braggart who will surely be vanquished by Arjuna, and thus I consider him to be just half of a ratha." Droṇa then confirmed this by saying, "Karṇa frequently retreated from battle, and so I accept this as a truthful assessment of his worth." Having overheard these insulting words, Karṇa angrily replied, "O Grandsire, you are actually our enemy in disguise, and therefore you are trying to disunite us on the eve of the battle."

Then, turning to Duryodhana, Karṇa said, "O King, you should discard Bhīṣma, for if he implants any doubt of victory in the hearts of our warriors, it will be very difficult to make them enthusiastically united to fight with the enemy. Bhīṣma has become senile, and so there is no need for either him or his estimation of the warriors' prowess. My dear Duryodhana, do not hesitate to discard the grandsire, for I can single-handedly contend with the Pāṇḍava army." Bhīṣma replied, "O Karṇa, it is you who are speaking in such a way as to create dissension. Even though I have been selected as the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army, you are still trying to discredit me."

At this point, Duryodhana intervened, and he managed to pacify Bhīṣma and Karṇa by praising them both very highly. Then, getting back to the matter at hand, he requested, "My dear Bhīṣma, please tell me now about the warriors on the Pāṇḍava side."

Bhīṣma responded by categorizing the numerous warriors and then said, "O King, Virāṭa, Drupada, and Dhṛṣṭaketu (the son of Śiśupāla) are mahārathas. Bhīma, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Kuntibhoja, and Satyajit (the son of Drupada) are atirathas. Of course, Arjuna is the best of all the atirathas, and his son Abhimanyu is practically on an equal level."
Bhīṣma then proceeded to describe at length Arjuna's incomparable prowess, and he also narrated his wonderful conquests. Bhīṣma described Arjuna's unrivaled celestial weapons as well, and when the assembled kings heard all this and considered how Arjuna had Lord Kṛṣṇa as his ally, they became disheartened. Bhīṣma then concluded, "On the Kaurava side, only myself and Droṇa are capable of contending equally with Arjuna. However, since Arjuna is youthful and we are old and worn out in comparison, he must be considered superior. Still, I will mainly fight with Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, just to keep them engaged. However, even if Śiṅgana attacks me, I shall never fight against him, for it is my vow to never kill a woman, or one who was formerly a woman. My dear Duryodhana, I can assure you that I am capable of slaying all of the assembled kings, although I will never be able to kill the Pāṇḍavas."

Duryodhana then inquired, "O Grandsire, please tell me why it is that you are unwilling to fight with Śiṅgana, even if he attacks you in battle."

In reply, Bhīṣma then narrated the following history: After Śantanu's death, his eldest son Citrāṅgadā was installed as the king of the Kurus. Then, after Citrāṅgadā was killed in battle by the Gandharva king Citrāṅgadā, his younger brother Vicitravīrya was installed upon the royal throne, in spite of his still being very young. After some time, Bhīṣma wanted to obtain wives for his younger step-brother, and when he heard that the king of Kāśi's three daughters, Ambā, Ambikā, and Ambālikā, were holding a svayamvara, he went there. After challenging all the kings of the earth who had assembled there, Bhīṣma forcibly took the three girls onto his chariot and then swiftly departed from the arena. The outraged kings then mounted upon their chariots and hurriedly set out after Bhīṣma, and soon they surrounded him on all sides. However, Bhīṣma quickly cut down the flags from all of his adversaries' chariots and then killed their horses and drivers. Upon seeing this incomparable display of prowess, all of the kings desisted from fighting out of fear for their lives, and so Bhīṣma continued on to Hastināpura, unimpeded. Upon his arrival at the Kuru capital, Bhīṣma handed over Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā to Satyavatī. Being very pleased with her step-
son, Satyavatī smelled his head with great affection while tears of joy came to her eyes. Thereafter, when the marriage day approached, Ambā shyly came before Bhīṣma and said, "O descendent of Kuru, I have already been secretly proposed to by Śālva, without my father's knowledge. Because I have accepted him as my husband within my heart, I beg you to please let me go so that I can marry him."

Bhīṣma consulted with Satyavatī and his ministers and then agreed to release Ambā. Having been provided with some brāhmaṇas and a maidservant as escorts, Ambā went to the king of the Śālvas, confident that he would accept her hand in marriage. However, when Ambā presented herself before Śālva, the king laughed and replied, "O Princess, I could never marry a girl who had first been offered to another. Because you were forcibly kidnapped by Bhīṣma, I cannot accept you now, so you had better return to Hastināpura."

Being in love with Śālva, Ambā pleaded, "O King, you should marry me in spite of this, for I am innocent and pure. I promise that I have never thought of having any other husband than you."

Śālva was very afraid of Bhīṣma, however, and so in spite of Ambā's earnest appeal, he refused to relent. Finally, with tears in her eyes, Ambā angrily departed, saying, "Because I am pure, righteousness shall certainly become my protector!"

Then as she came out of the city of the Śālvas, Ambā condemned herself by thinking, “Alas! I was a fool for not leaping down from Bhīṣma’s chariot while he was engaged in fighting with his rivals. More condemned than myself, however, is Bhīṣma, for he has cruelly put me into this wretched condition! Therefore, I must somehow or other take revenge against the Kuru warrior for ruining my life like this!"

Ambā could not think of any king who was capable of chastising Bhīṣma, however, and so at last she decided to perform severe austerities for that purpose. Going to the āśrama of some ṛṣis, Ambā spent the night there. Then, in the morning, she described to them all that had happened. One of the sages, whose name was Saikhavatya, took compassion upon Ambā and so inquired, "My dear, what is it that we ṛṣis who are living in the forest can do to help you?"

Ambā replied, "O brāhmaṇa, now that I have been rejected by Śālva, I do not dare to return to my relatives. Therefore, I have decided to renounce
all worldly life and dedicate myself to the performance of austerities.
Now, please instruct me on how I can live the life of a ṛṣi."
Saikhavatya comforted Ambā by assuring her that the ṛṣis would help
her as she had requested. Then, later on, as these sages were engaged in
performing their duties, they debated among themselves about what
should be done with Ambā. Finally, after due consideration, Saikhavatya
went and informed her, "My dear princess, you should not attempt to
take up forest life. Instead, return to your father. He is competent to
decide that which should be done for your welfare, and at home you can
pass your time comfortably. For a woman, and especially a delicate girl of
royal birth like you, it is very difficult to adapt to the harshness of forest
life. Besides, when a woman is in difficulty, her father is her natural
protector."
In spite of this advice, however, Ambā's determination remained fixed,
and so she replied, "O ṛṣi, in my childhood I had to pass some time in
the forest along with my father. And besides, because I have realized the
miserable nature of material life, I want to perform austerities so that I
will not have to undergo more suffering in my future lives."
While Ambā was thus debating with the ṛṣis, a great king named
Hotravāhana happened to arrive there. The king was welcomed by the
sages and then, after taking his seat, be listened to the story of Ambā's
plight. It turned out that Hotravāhana was Ambā's maternal grandfather
and thus he became very compassionate toward her. Taking her upon his
lap, he began to comfort her and then he explained, "My dear, because I
am the father of your mother, I shall now advise you for your benefit.
The greatest warrior on earth is Paraśurāma. If you are able to win his
sympathy, then he will either force Bhīṣma to accept you, or else kill the
Kuru warrior."
Ambā replied, "O King, I shall certainly follow your advice. Now, please
tell me where I can find this Paraśurāma." Hotravāhana said, "O
Princess, the son of Jamadagni is now performing austerities at Mount
Mahendra. I am sure that if you approach him and mention my name, he
will help you, for we are good friends."
Just at that moment, Akṛṭavraṇa, an associate of Lord Paraśurāma,
arrived there and so everyone stood up to honor him. Then, after King
Hotravāhana and the ṛṣis had sat down surrounding him, Akṛṭavraṇa
began to converse with them. After awhile, Hotravāhana inquired, "O great sage, is it possible for someone to gain the audience of Paraśurāma at this time?"
Akṛṭavraṇa replied, "My dear king, I can assure you that Paraśurāma often thinks of you. Indeed, because he knows that you have come here, Paraśurāma will appear at this very spot tomorrow, just to see you. Now, please tell me, who is this girl present here?"
King Hotravāhana then related Ambā's whole story, explaining how Śālva had refused to accept her, being suspicious of her purity, and how she thus considered Bhīṣma to be the root-cause of all her miseries. Ambā herself then appealed to Akṛṭavraṇa, expressing her hope that Paraśurāma would personally take up her cause and help her.
Akṛṭavraṇa then asked, "O Princess, please tell me exactly what you want. Would you like that Śālva be forced to marry you, or would you prefer to see Bhīṣma defeated in battle?"
Ambā replied, "O great sage, in one sense Bhīṣma is innocent, for he kidnapped me without knowing my desire to marry Śālva. Therefore, I wish to leave it up to you to make the decision as to what should be done."
Akṛṭavraṇa then said, "In my opinion, Bhīṣma should be punished, for if he had not kidnapped you, then Śālva certainly would have married you. Beside, I know that Bhīṣma is very proud of his strength. Therefore, it would be good to have his false prestige cut down."
Ambā replied, "O Ṛṣi, I must admit that I would love to see Bhīṣma slain in battle. Still, because I myself am helpless, I shall leave the matter in your hands."
The next morning, Lord Paraśurāma appeared at the ṛṣi's āśrama. He was dressed in deerskin and his hair was matted. He carried an ax, a sword and a bow, and while surrounded by his disciples, he approached King Hotravāhana as all of the ṛṣis rose up from their seats out of respect.
Then, after being worshipped by everyone present, Lord Paraśurāma took his seat while Hotravāhana and the sages sat around him. Finally, after conversing with Paraśurāma for some time, Hotravāhana took the opportunity to introduce Ambā. When the king mentioned how Ambā was in need of assistance, Paraśurāma asked her to come forward and explain her difficulty. Thus Ambā came before Paraśurāma, and after
bowing down and touching his feet, she stood silently with folded hands. Then, exhibiting her womanly nature, Ambā began to cry, and in her grief, she took shelter of the son of Jamadagni. Being very compassionate, Paraśurāma assured Ambā that he would fulfill her desires, and then he urged her to speak, being very curious as to what was actually on her mind. Ambā then narrated her whole story, and after hearing it, Paraśurāma pondered over the matter for some time, wondering what he should do. Then, after having arrived at a conclusion, Paraśurāma inquired, "O Princess, what would you like me to do? Should it be Bhīṣma or Śālva whom I force to marry you?"
Ambā replied, "O Lord, you may decide what you think best." However, after a brief pause she added, "O best of all warriors, I must admit that my real desire is for you to slay Bhīṣma. Indeed, even while he was engaged in kidnapping me, I felt that Bhīṣma should be killed for his ignoble act!"
Paraśurāma replied, "O Princess, I have renounced the use of weapons, and thus never engage in fighting, except at the request of the brāhmaṇas. Therefore, please ask for something else."
However, Ambā insisted that Bhīṣma should be killed, and so next, Paraśurāma tried to pacify her by saying, "O Princess, if you order me to do so, then I can force Bhīṣma to place your feet upon his head." Ambā replied, "My dear lord, you have already promised to fulfill my desire. Therefore, you must slay Bhīṣma!"
Akṛṭavraṇa then intervened by saying, "O Lord, if you challenge Bhīṣma to fight, and if he admits defeat without taking up weapons, then your purpose will be served. Remember, you had vowed to give protection to all those who seek your shelter. Besides this, you had promised to kill any proud kṣatriya who would conquer over all other kings of the earth. Bhīṣma has done this, and therefore you should make good your word by confronting him on the battlefield."
Paraśurāma replied, "My dear Akṛṭavraṇa, what you say is true. However, since the situation is very grave, I shall first of all take Ambā to Hastināpura. If Bhīṣma does not voluntarily obey my command, then I will certainly slay him in battle!"

The next morning, Paraśurāma set out, accompanied by Ambā and all
the rṣis. Upon arriving at the banks of the river Sarasvatī, Paraśurāma set up his camp and then, after three days, he sent a message to Bhīṣma, announcing his arrival. Upon receiving this news, Bhīṣma immediately came out from the city in order to greet his illustrious guest, taking with him many brāhmaṇas as well as a cow to present in charity. Paraśurāma accepted Bhīṣma's worship and then explained, "O descendent of Kuru, because you abducted Ambā, she has been rejected by King Śālva, and thus she has been put into a very awkward situation. After being kidnapped and rejected, who do you think will marry Ambā now? O Bhīṣma, because no one else will accept her, you must do so, for she is an innocent girl who does not deserve such humiliation."

Bhīṣma replied, "O son of Jamadagni, Vicitrāvṛya will not accept Ambā because she declared that her heart had already been given to Śālva. Indeed, for the same reason, neither I nor any good kṣatriya would ever marry her. And besides, I have taken a vow of life-long celibacy, and thus, I shall not marry her under any circumstance."

Upon hearing this, Paraśurāma became inflamed with rage. He then declared, "O Bhīṣma, if you do not obey my command, then I will kill you and all of your ministers this very day!"

Bhīṣma tried to pacify Paraśurāma by saying, "My dear lord, please remember how you had taught me the science of weapons when I was a youth."

His eyes red with rage, Paraśurāma replied, "You wretch! If you claim to be my disciple, then it behooves you to follow my instructions! I shall only become pleased with you if you accept Ambā as your wife!"

Bhīṣma then adamantly replied, "O Paraśurāma, no wise man will take into his house a woman who has given her heart to another, any more than he would admit a poisonous snake! The great King Marutta has given the following instructions which you may now hear from me: 'One may reject a guru who has become too proud, who has lost proper discrimination of what is right and wrong, or who has fallen down from the path of good behavior.' O Paraśurāma, because you are unrighteously attempting to force me to marry Ambā, I do not consider it improper for me to accept your challenge. Let the battle take place at Kurukṣetra, where you had formerly propitiated your forefathers with the blood of the kṣatriyas whom you had slain. Now, I shall propitiate those kings by
slaying you! For so many years you have boasted about how you had killed all the *kṣatriyas* on earth, and now I shall curb your excessive pride. You will soon realize that only because there was no Bhīṣma present were you able to accomplish your heroic feat and thereafter brag about it!"

Paraśurāma laughingly accepted Bhīṣma's challenge by replying, "It is my good fortune that this opportunity to fight has come to me of its own accord. O Bhīṣma, I can assure you that your mother, Gaṅgā, will weep this very day when she sees the vultures eating your dead body!"

Bhīṣma then respectfully bowed down before Paraśurāma and went to inform Satyavatī of the impending duel. After receiving his step-mother's blessings, Bhīṣma mounted upon his silver chariot that was drawn by white horses, and set out. Bhīṣma was dressed completely in white and he wore a white crown. Overhead was placed a white umbrella, and he was fanned by white *cāmaras*. Bhīṣma and Paraśurāma soon arrived at Kurukṣetra, and both of them were very eager to display their prowess. When he saw that Paraśurāma had come before him, Bhīṣma blew upon his great white conchshell, and at that time he noticed how all of the great demigods and *ṛṣis* had assembled in the sky in order to witness the battle. Paraśurāma was also accompanied by numerous *ṛṣis*, and they surrounded the battlefield in order to watch as spectators. Then, just as the fighting was about to begin, Gaṅgādevī came to Bhīṣma and implored, "My dear son, please do not fight with Paraśurāma! He is a *brāhmaṇa* and you are ignorant of the extent of his prowess. Indeed, if you do not desist, then I shall personally go to Paraśurāma and beg him to spare you!"

Bhīṣma tried to dissuade his mother by explaining to her all of the incidents which had led up to the battle. Gaṅgādevī went to Paraśurāma anyway, and she begged him to give up the idea of fighting with her son. Paraśurāma then replied, "O Goddess, it is Bhīṣma whom you should implore, for this disagreement came about when he refused to obey my order to marry Ambā."

At this, Gaṅgādevī returned to Bhīṣma, but her repeated pleas simply caused him to become irritated. Then, as Bhīṣma was adamantly refusing to comply with his mother's wishes, Paraśurāma approached him for battle. Bhīṣma then smiled and said, "O son of a *brāhmaṇa*, I do not wish
to combat someone who is standing upon the ground. Therefore, please get up onto a chariot before approaching me to fight."

Paraśurāma smilingly replied, "O descendent of Kuru, the earth is my chariot, the Vedas are my horses, and the wind is my driver. Therefore, I do not require an ordinary chariot like you."

After saying this, Paraśurāma released a shower of arrows and then, the next moment, Bhīma saw the son of Jamadagni riding a chariot that had been created out of his own will. Akṛtavrāṇa was the driver, and the chariot was filled with all kinds of weapons. Paraśurāma then sent forth three more showers of arrows, and thereafter, Bhīma got down from his chariot in order to approach his former preceptor on foot. After worshipping Paraśurāma with great reverence, Bhīma requested, "O Lord, please give me your blessings so that I may come out victorious."

Paraśurāma replied, "O my disciple, I would have cursed you if you had not first of all come here and offered your respects, recognizing me as your guru. Still, I shall not give you my blessing for victory, because I have come here to vanquish you."

Bhīma once again bowed down before Paraśurāma and then, after quickly mounting his chariot, he blew upon his mighty conchshell. Thereafter, the fighting began in earnest as Paraśurāma rained down 960 arrows upon Bhīma. The son of Gaṅgā then said, "O Preceptor, while fighting with you, I shall not aim my arrows at the Vedas, which you embody, nor your brahminical status. Nor shall I attack the merit which you have earned by dint of having executed severe austerities. I will simply aim at the kṣatriya nature which you have adopted in order to fight with me. Now, watch as I cut off your bow!"

While saying this, Bhīma took up an arrow which, after being released, severed one of the ornamental horns at the end of Paraśurāma's bow, and indeed, made the bow itself drop from the great warrior's hands. Bhīma then discharged 100 arrows which wounded Paraśurāma all over, covering him with blood. Paraśurāma took up another bow, and as he continued to shower his arrows, Bhīma also became so wounded that he began to tremble because of the pain. Still, the Kuru hero retaliated so ferociously with his own arrows that it soon looked as if Paraśurāma was about to fall unconscious. Feeling pity for his former preceptor, Bhīma stopped fighting and began to condemn the kṣatriya dharma which
sometimes causes one to give pain to his own guru and a brähmaṇa. The sun was already setting, and so the battle was suspended, and after retiring to his camp, Bhīṣma had his charioteer extract all the arrows from their bodies, as well as from the horses. The fighting resumed early the next morning as Bhīṣma and Paraśurāma prepared to rush at each other on their chariots eager for battle. First of all, however, Bhīṣma once again got down from his chariot in order to offer respects unto his former guru. The second day's fighting then began with arrows, but before long, Paraśurāma began to employ his celestial weapons. Bhīṣma replied with celestial weapons and when Paraśurāma saw that all of his attacks were being successfully counteracted, he became highly enraged. Paraśurāma then suddenly came close to Bhīṣma's right side and pierced him in the chest so violently with an arrow, the son of Gaṅgā fell down unconscious onto the floor of his chariot. Then, as Bhīṣma was being taken away from the battlefield by his charioteer, all of Paraśurāma's disciples who were watching the battle became filled with joy. Bhīṣma soon regained consciousness, and he ordered his driver to quickly take him to where Paraśurāma was staying. As he approached, Bhīṣma aggressively showered his arrows, but Paraśurāma easily neutralized all of them. Then, desiring to kill Paraśurāma, Bhīṣma took up an especially powerful arrow and released it. When this arrow struck him, Paraśurāma fell down unconscious, causing exclamations of despair to be heard in all directions. Ambā and the ṛṣis then went and treated Paraśurāma by massaging his body and administering water, and thus he soon recovered. Rising up, Paraśurāma quickly remounted his chariot, and after challenging Bhīṣma, he released a fierce arrow which pierced the Kuru warrior's left side, making him tremble severely. Paraśurāma then showered more arrows, but Bhīṣma did not waver as he countered them all with his own arrows. Thus, the entire sky soon became filled with arrows, causing both the sun and the wind to become obstructed. As the arrows collided, however, they began to burn on account of the created friction, and thus they fell down to the earth as ashes. In this way, the fighting continued for many days. Every evening the duel was suspended and then it was resumed the next morning. After some days, when Paraśurāma saw how Bhīṣma was successfully
countering all of his celestial weapons, he took up a fierce lance and hurled it. Bhīṣma cut the lance to pieces with his arrow, and so the enraged Paraśurāma proceeded to hurl a dozen more, one after another. Bhīṣma cut all these lances to pieces as well, and in this way, the day ended without anyone getting the upper hand. Then, after the fighting had resumed the next morning, Bhīṣma's charioteer suddenly fell down dead after being greatly afflicted by Paraśurāma's arrows. At this, a great fear entered Bhīṣma's heart, and he began to lament to himself very bitterly. Paraśurāma took advantage of this lapse by piercing Bhīṣma in the chest so severely that the arrow went right through his body and stuck into the earth. As a result, Bhīṣma fell down onto the ground unconscious. Thinking that Bhīṣma was dead, Paraśurāma let out a great roar, as did his followers, while, on the other side, all of the Kauravas who had come to witness the fight became grief stricken.

Thereafter, when Bhīṣma regained consciousness, he saw eight brāhmaṇas surrounding him, and because they were supporting him, he did not actually touch the ground. Indeed, it was those brāhmaṇas who had revived Bhīṣma by giving him water. Finally, after being assured by the brāhmaṇas of his success, Bhīṣma got up in order to resume fighting. Bhīṣma then saw his mother Gaṅgādevī seated upon his chariot, for it was she who had controlled his horses after the death of his charioteer. Bhīṣma offered his obeisances at the feet of his mother and then begged her to depart, assuring her that he was quite capable of guiding the chariot and fighting at the same time. Gaṅgādevī departed and so Bhīṣma took up the reins of his chariot and re-entered the battlefield. In the fierce duel that ensued, Bhīṣma suddenly pierced Paraśurāma with a mighty arrow which made him fall down to the ground upon his knees. As Paraśurāma proceeded to lose consciousness, hundreds of meteors fell from the sky along with showers of blood. Fierce winds began to blow, and there was an unexpected eclipse of the sun. Paraśurāma quickly rose up, however, and once again, he approached Bhīṣma for battle. In this way, twenty-three days elapsed, and that night, as Bhīṣma lay down to sleep, wounded all over by arrows, he began to wonder, "Is it actually possible for me to defeat Paraśurāma in battle?"

Bhīṣma then began praying to the demigods, "O lords of the universe, if I am at all capable of vanquishing my opponent, then please appear to me
this night to give me assurances." Toward the end of the night, the eight \textit{brāhmaṇas} who had previously revived Bhīṣma once again appeared to him in his dream. The \textit{brāhmaṇas} then assured him, "O best of the Kurus, we shall always protect you, for you are our very body. The understanding of how to use a weapon named Pravāsa will automatically come to your mind when needed for it was known to you in your former life. Paraśurāma is not aware of this weapon, however, and although it will not kill him, it will make him fall asleep. In this way, you shall be able to vanquish your enemy, for sleep on the battlefield is equivalent to death. Then, in order to reawaken Paraśurāma, all that you will have to do is employ the Samvodhana weapon."

After saying this, those eight \textit{brāhmaṇas}, who all resembled one another, suddenly disappeared. When Bhīṣma awoke, he felt great joy upon remembering his dream. Then, later that morning, after the battle had resumed, the fighting became especially fierce. Paraśurāma hurled a terrible dart which pierced Bhīṣma's shoulder, and blood flowed profusely from that wound. Bhīṣma retaliated by piercing Paraśurāma in the forehead with an arrow. Paraśurāma then responded by piercing Bhīṣma in the chest, causing him to fall down to the ground unconscious. Bhīṣma soon recovered, however, and from the ground he hurled a fierce dart which pierced Paraśurāma in the chest. Paraśurāma then began to tremble violently while losing consciousness, but since Akṛṭavraṇa grabbed him, he did not fall from his chariot. After being cared for by his charioteer, Paraśurāma resumed fighting with even greater anger, and he next invoked the \textit{brahmāstra}. However, Bhīṣma successfully countered with another \textit{brahmāstra}, and as the two supremely powerful weapons collided in mid-air, an intense heat and glaring effulgence were created that afflicted the demigods and made the entire earth tremble. Indeed, all living creatures began to suffer because of the intense heat, and it was at that time that Bhīṣma thought of releasing the Pravāsa weapon. As soon as this weapon was thought of, the \textit{mantras} for discharging it automatically appeared within Bhīṣma's mind. Then, a chorus of loud voices from the sky forbade Bhīṣma by saying, "O best of the Kurus, do not release this Pravāsa weapon!"

Bhīṣma ignored this warning, however, and carefully aimed the weapon at Paraśurāma. Just then, Nārada Muni came to Bhīṣma and said, "O
King, do not humiliate your preceptor in this way."

While Nārada was thus speaking, Bhīṣma could see the eight brāhmaṇas from his dream in the sky, and they smilingly ordered him to obey the Devarṣi's command. Bhīṣma thus withdrew the Pravāsa weapon, but in order to continue fighting, he next invoked another brahmāstra. Paraśurāma then exclaimed, "O Bhīṣma, wretch that I am, I have been defeated by you!"

Jamadagni and other forefathers then appeared before Paraśurāma and advised, "Our dear son, you should never again fight with Bhīṣma, nor with any other kṣatriya for this matter. Instead, you should engage yourself in strictly executing the duties of a brāhmaṇa, such as the study of the Vedas and the performance of austerity. Previously, we had ordered you to exterminate all kṣatriyas, but now, we want you to make this your last fight. Bhīṣma is actually an incarnation of one of the Vasus, and it is Arjuna, and not you, who has been ordained by the Supreme Lord to vanquish him in battle."

Paraśurāma replied, "O pitṛs, it shall not be me who desists first from this fight, for I have never retreated from the battlefield! Therefore, you should approach Bhīṣma instead and make him stop fighting."

These sages, headed by Ricika, next approached Bhīṣma and requested him to put down his weapons. However, Bhīṣma replied, "O venerable brāhmaṇas, due to the nature of kṣatriya morality, I can never agree to turn back from a battle as long as my adversary is still eager to fight."

Indeed, even though Gaṅgādevī, Nārada, and all of the ṛṣis repeatedly tried to dissuade him, Bhīṣma remained poised with an upraised bow and arrow, ready to continue the fighting. The pitṛs then once again went to Paraśurāma and pleaded, "O descendent of our line, because you are a brāhmaṇa, you are supposed to exhibit the quality of forgiveness. Bhīṣma is incapable of being slain by you, and thus you should honor our command by putting aside your weapons."

Finally, Paraśurāma relented, and at this time, the eight brāhmaṇas once again appeared to Bhīṣma and said, "Go now to your preceptor and worship him with great respect."

When Bhīṣma saw that Paraśurāma had desisted from fighting on the advice of his forefathers, he put aside his bow and approached his former teacher. Bhīṣma then worshipped Paraśurāma, and in turn, the son of
Jamadagni smilingly said, "O son of Śantanu, there is no kṣatriya on earth who is your equal. Therefore, I have become highly satisfied to see you exhibit you exceptional prowess in battle!"

Paraśurāma then called for Ambā, and in Bhīṣma's presence, said, "My dear princess, even though I fought to the best of my ability, I could not defeat Bhīṣma. There is nothing more that I can do on your behalf and thus you are free to go wherever you choose. However, in my opinion, Bhīṣma is your only shelter, and thus I suggest that you appeal to him for mercy."

Ambā replied, "I shall only once again approached Bhīṣma after I have obtained the means for killing him in battle myself!"

After saying this, Ambā angrily departed, being determined to perform severe austerities for the purpose of encompassing the destruction of Bhīṣma. Paraśurāma and his associates then set out for Mount Mahendra, and Bhīṣma returned to Hastināpura. However, from the moment of Ambā's departure, Bhīṣma lost all cheerfulness of heart and thus he soon became very depressed. He then employed some spies for monitoring Ambā's activities, and thus, every day, he would receive a report of exactly everything she had said and done. Thereafter, when Bhīṣma described his fears to Nārada and Vyāsadeva, they tried to cheer him up by saying, "O descendent of Kuru, you can rest assured that no amount of individual exertion can ever change the course of Destiny."

Meanwhile, Ambā went to the banks of the River Yamunā, where she began to execute extraordinary austerities. For six months, Ambā gave up all food and drink while standing immovably, just like a wooden post, thus allowing her hair to become matted and her body covered with dirt. Thereafter, she stood for one year in the waters of the Yamunā while continuing to fast. Then, the next year, Ambā stood on the tips of her toes, and during that entire period, she ate only one leaf which had fallen from a tree. Indeed, for twelve years, Ambā practiced such austerities, and as a result, the entire universe became heated.

Thereafter, Ambā began to wander from āśrama to āśrama while visiting the different holy places, and thus she saw the great ṛṣis who resided there such as Cyavana, Viśvāmitra, Māṇḍavya, and Garga. Then, one day, as she was bathing in the Gaṅgā, Bhīṣma's mother approached
Ambā and inquired, "My dear princess, for what purpose are you torturing yourself with these great austerities?"

Ambā replied, "O Goddess, the only objective of all my endeavors is to kill the Kuru warrior, Bhīṣma."

At this, Gaṅgā angrily cursed Ambā by saying, "You are acting wickedly! Therefore, after giving up your body, you will become a crooked river which will remain dry for eight months of the year. Indeed, even during the rainy season, no one will want to bathe in your waters, for it will be infested with frightful alligators!"

After pronouncing this curse, Gaṅgā departed and Ambā continued her austerities undaunted, forgoing all food and water for eight to ten months at a time. Finally, after wandering about the holy places for a long time, Ambā came to Vatsabhūmi, and it is understood that at this place, she became the river which Gaṅgā had described. However, due to Ambā's power of austerity, only half of her became the river, while the other half kept the same identity as the princess of Kāśī. All of the ārya at Vatsabhūmi then inquired about Ambā's purpose while trying to dissuade her from her severe penances. Ambā replied, "O Sages, my goal is not like yours. You wish to achieve an elevated birth in your next life, whereas I simply want to become a powerful man so that I can take revenge against Bhīṣma."

Then, some time later on, Lord Śiva appeared to Ambā in order to offer her a benediction. Ambā joyfully worshipped the lord and then submitted her request that Bhīṣma be slain. Lord Śiva replied, "My dear princess, you can rest assured that you shall one day be able to kill the son of Gaṅgā and Ģantanu."

Ambā inquired, "My dear lord, how will I, a woman, ever be able to kill Bhīṣma?"

Lord Śiva then explained, "In your next life, you will be born as the daughter of King Drupada. However, before long, you shall undergo a transonnation which will enable you to become a great mahāratha. Due to the power of your austerities, as well as my mercy, you will be able to remember the events of your previous life."

After saying this, Lord Śiva suddenly disappeared from view. Ambā had full faith in Lord Śiva's benediction, and so, in order to facilitate her long-cherished desire, she eagerly gathered together some wood from the
forest. Then, in the very sight of the ṛṣis living there, she built a large funeral pyre. Thereafter, as the fire blazed brightly, Ambā calmly entered its flames while saying, "I am doing this for the destruction of Bhīṣma!"

Mahārāja Drupada's first queen was childless, and thus, being very aggrieved, he began to worship Lord Śiva in the hopes of obtaining offspring. Indeed, while performing severe austerities, King Drupada prayed for a son who would be able to gain revenge against Bhīṣma. Then, after some time, Lord Śiva appeared to Drupada and said, "O King, you shall receive a female child who will later on be transformed into a male. Rest assured that he will serve your purposes. Now, please desist from your austerities."

Mahārāja Drupada then returned to his capital, and soon thereafter, his favorite queen became pregnant. In due course of time, a female child possessing great beauty was born. However, keeping this a secret, King Drupada informed everyone that the baby was a boy, and he had all of the reformatory rites performed for a male child. Having full faith in Lord Śiva's words, Drupada gave his "son" the name Śikhaṇḍi. Only Bhīṣma knew the truth about all of this, for he not only received information from his spies, but was also informed of everything by Nārada as well. King Drupada took very good care of Śikhaṇḍi and then, when "he" became a little older, the queen urged her husband to find a suitable wife for her "son." Drupada was hesitant, however, being filled with great anxiety because the girl had already reached the age of puberty. The queen reminded Drupada of Lord Śiva's assurances, and so at last, in consultation with her, Drupada chose the daughter of Hiranyavarman as his daughter-in-law. When Hiranyavarman, the king of the Daśārṇakas, was solicited in this way, he agreed to the proposal, and the marriage was performed soon after. Some time after the wedding, Hiranyavarman's daughter came to find out that her husband was in fact a female, like herself. She then very bashfully revealed this to her maidservants, who sent messengers to Hiranyavarman, explaining how Śikhaṇḍi was an impostor. The king became highly enraged upon receiving this unexpected news, and so he sent the following message to Drupada: "O ruler of the Pañcālas, in order to retaliate against your
foolish act of deception, I shall soon arrive at your kingdom in order to vanquish you along with all of your relatives!"

Drupada felt just like a thief caught red-handed, and thus he was speechless at first after receiving it. Then, after gaining some composure, he sent his own messengers, assuring Hiranyavarman that the information which he had received was completely false. However, by some means, Hiranyavarman was able to confirm that Śikhaṇḍi was indeed a girl, and so he assembled his vast army and then set out for the kingdom of the Pañcālas. The king of the Daśārṇakas had decided that if Śikhaṇḍi was actually a girl, then he would drag Drupada out of his capital, and after killing him along with his so-called son, would install someone else upon the throne.

Drupada was by nature not very aggressive, although he was a most powerful warrior, and because he knew that he was in the wrong, he became very fearful. Calling for his queen and ministers, Drupada pretended to be innocent of the real facts, and thus he innocently questioned his wife about the matter. In order to maintain her husband's good reputation, the queen explained that it was she who had concealed Śikhaṇḍi's femininity from the time of her birth. Thus, pretending that his alliance with Hiranyavarman was made without any fault of his own, Drupada ordered his ministers to prepare for the defense of the city.

Drupada and his queen became very despondent, however, as they thought about the impending war. Śikhaṇḍi could see that her parents were in great anxiety and thus she felt very ashamed, for she understood herself to be the cause of their distress. Being tormented by guilt, Śikhaṇḍi finally decided to commit suicide, and for this purpose, she left her father's palace with a heavy heart. Śikhaṇḍi then entered a dense forest that was the haunt of a Yakṣa named Sthūṇākarna, and thus uninhabited by others. After sitting down tightly there, Śikhaṇḍi began fasting until death. When the Yakṣa saw the princess so engaged, his compassion became aroused, and thus he approached her and inquired, "My dear beautiful girl, what are you doing here in this lonely forest? Perhaps there is something I can do to help you."

In great hopelessness, Śikhaṇḍi replied, "My dear sir, no one can help me."

Sthūṇākarna then said, "I am one of the followers of Kuvera and thus I
am competent to award benedictions."
Śikhaṇḍī then narrated her life-story to the Yakṣa, and she explained how her father was about to be vanquished by the king of the Daśārṇakas. Then, at last, she pleaded, "O Yakṣa, in order to save my poor father, as well as myself, kindly do something which will enable me to become transformed into a man."
Sthūṇākarna thought over the matter for some time. Then, since he was already inclined to help her, and since he considered Śikhaṇḍī's arrival to be part of Destiny's plan, he agreed to transfer his masculinity to her for as long as it would take to extricate herself from her difficulty. Thus, Śikhaṇḍī agreed to return the Yakṣa's masculinity as soon as King Hiranyavarman returned home. Thereafter, Sthūṇākarna had to accept the form of a woman while Śikhaṇḍī became transformed into a handsome male, and then returned to her father's palace. When Mahārāja Drupada heard from Śikhaṇḍī all that had taken place, he became overjoyed. He then quickly sent a messenger to Hiranyavarman, who was rapidly advancing toward his city, along with his army. In this way, Drupada informed the ruler of the Daśārṇakas, "O King, the rumor that your son-in-law is a female is a preposterous lie! I can assure you that he is cent per cent male. Now, please send some trusted persons here and ascertain the truth for yourself."
When Hiranyavarman received this message he dispatched some young girls to go and find out the real sexual status of Śikhaṇḍī. Thereafter, when these girls returned and joyfully informed him that Śikhaṇḍī was a powerful male, Hiranyavarman became highly relieved. He then went to Drupada in order to make amends, and the two kings happily passed a number of days together. Hiranyavarman then gave Śikhaṇḍī many valuable presents, and at last, after strongly rebuking his daughter, he departed for the kingdom of the Daśārṇakas.
Meanwhile, Kuvera happened to come to the forest in order to pay Sthūṇākarna a visit. Upon arriving at the Yakṣa's residence, however, Kuvera was very surprised to find that it was very nicely decorated with flowers and perfumed with sweet scents. Then, when Sthūṇākarna failed to come forward and receive him, Kuvera became enraged at this negligence, and informed his followers that the Yakṣa should be punished. Some other Yakṣas who were residing there then came before
Kuvera and explained, "O Lord, for some reason, Sthūṇākarna has transferred his masculinity to the daughter of Drupada and accepted her femininity in return. Now, being ashamed of his female form, Sthūṇākarna has not come to receive you."

Kuvera then angrily ordered, "Bring Sthūṇākarna here so that I can punish him!" Thereafter, when Sthūṇākarna came and shamefully stood before Kuvera in his feminine form, the lord of wealth cursed him by saying, "Because of the great disgrace which you have brought upon the Yakşa race, you shall always remain a woman while Śikhaṇḍi remains a man."

The Yakṣas then begged Kuvera to set some time limit for this curse, and so at last he conceded, "When Śikhaṇḍi dies, then Sthūṇākarna will again regain his masculinity."

Kuvera then departed, and soon thereafter, Śikhaṇḍi returned to Sthūṇākarna in order to return his masculinity as previously agreed upon. Sthūṇākarna was very pleased by Śikhaṇḍi's non-duplicity, and he explained about Kuvera's curse. Actually, Sthūṇākarna considered the misfortune which had befallen him to be inevitable by the will of Destiny. Thus, in spite of his setback, Sthūṇākarna cheerfully wished Śikhaṇḍi well, and so the prince happily returned to his father and informed him of the fortunate turn of events. Drupada became overjoyed upon receiving this news, and soon thereafter, he handed over his son to Droṇācārya for receiving instruction in the science of weapons.

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Duryodhana, I was able to learn all of this by employing numerous spies and sending them to the kingdom of Drupada. Some of the spies disguised themselves as idiots and others as blind men, and thus they expertly executed the duties of their profession. My dear king, even if Śikhaṇḍi attacks me with weapons, I shall not even look at him, and so what to speak of discharging my arrows. It is my firm vow never to attack a woman, one who has a woman's name, or one whose form resembles that of a woman, lest I be criticized by the righteous."

After thinking over Bhīṣma's words, Duryodhana considered them to be quite befitting a great hero. Then, after the night had passed away, Duryodhana once again approached Bhīṣma and inquired, "O Grandsire, how many days will it take you to single-handedly exterminate the
entire Pāṇḍava army?"
Bhīṣma replied, "O King, according to the rules of combat, one should fight in relation to the status of his opponent. In this way, I shall kill at least 10,000 foot-soldiers and 1,000 chariot-warriors each day. On the other hand, if I were to make an all-out assault with celestial weapons, which can slay hundreds and thousands at a time, then I could annihilate the entire Pāṇḍava army in about one month."
Duryodhana then made the same inquiry to other great heroes, such as Droṇa, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Karṇa. Droṇa replied, "O King, I have now become old. Still, I also feel that I could consume the Pāṇḍava army in one month if I so desired."
Kṛpa estimated that it would take him two months, and then Aśvatthāmā vowed to exterminate the entire Pāṇḍava army in ten days. When Karṇa pledged to annihilate the opposition in just five days, Bhīṣma laughed out loud and then declared, "O Sūta's son, you may boast however you like, but only for as long as you do not actually confront Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on the battlefield!"
Spies reported these conversations to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and so he called together his brothers in order to relate to them the statements which had been made by the Kuru leaders. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then asked, "My dear Arjuna, how long do you think that it would take you to exterminate the enemy?"
Arjuna looked at Lord Kṛṣṇa and then replied, "O King, even if the Kurus' estimates are accurate, you should not become anxious. With Lord Kṛṣṇa as my ally, if He so desired, then I could single-handedly annihilate the entire three worlds in the twinkling of an eye."
Thereafter, both armies marched out onto the vast plains of Kurukṣetra under clear blue skies. There was only a single thought in the minds of all the warriors: to gain victory over the enemy, and while going along, they spoke to each other in such a way as to build up their confidence. All of the great warriors were dressed in white robes, and they carried aloft their insignias along with their upraised weapons.

The Pāṇḍavas' army amassed on the western plain of Kurukṣetra and faced eastward, toward the army of the Kauravas. Men had assembled from all over Jambūdvīpa in order to take part in the battle, and thus,
the entire earth, except Kurukṣetra, appeared to be divested of men and horses, as only the aged, women, and children were left at home. The Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas first of all set ground rules for combat, and thus chariot-warriors were restricted to fighting only with chariot-warriors, and cavalry soldiers would fight only with other cavalry soldiers. Another rule was that before striking an opponent with weapons, a warrior was supposed to give advanced notice in the form of a challenge. In addition, those who were engaged in transporting weapons, as well as musicians and other such noncombatants, were exempted from attack. As the warriors on both sides gazed upon each other, they all felt a great joy and wonder, for never before had there been such an unprecedented assembly of kings on a battlefield.

Meanwhile, as the armies were waiting for the start of the great battle, Śrīla Vyāsadeva came to Dhṛtarāṣṭra in Hastināpura. After being respectfully received, the son of Parāśara said, "My dear son, there is not the slightest bit of doubt that all of your sons will be slain in this battle. Still, you should not lament for this, for such mass destruction takes place under the direction of eternal time, which represents the supreme will of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. O King, I have come here to offer you divine vision so that you shall be able to directly witness the upcoming battle, even from where you are now, seated in your palace."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "My dear father, I do not want to see the slaughter of all my relatives! However, due to my intense curiosity, I am eager to hear all about that which will take place."

For this purpose, Śrīla Vyāsadeva then gave Sañjaya divine eyes, enabling him to perfectly see the entire battlefield at Kurukṣetra so that not even the slightest detail remained concealed from his vision, whether it was day or night. Vyāsadeva also gave the benediction to Sañjaya that no weapon could afflict him, thus insuring that he would survive the great war. The son of Parāśara then said, "O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, there are many evil omens foreboding doom which I see here in your capital city. The deities of the demigods and goddesses which are situated in the temples, are seen to sometimes laugh, sometimes cry, and sometimes break out into a cold sweat. Indeed, sometimes they vomit blood through their mouths and occasionally they fall down from the platform on their altars."
"Women, some of whom are not even pregnant, are giving birth to monstrously deformed children. Cows are giving birth to asses, and there are many highly inauspicious animals being born. Some of these have three horns or four eyes, and others have five legs. Some are seen to have two sets of sexual organs and others have two heads or two tails. Besides this, the wives of many brāhmaṇas here are giving birth to peacocks and Garuḍa birds."

Śrīla Vyāsa-deva went on to list many other evil portents, and he also described in detail the inauspicious positions of the planets and stars, all foreboding the destruction of the Kurus. After hearing everything, Dhṛtarāṣṭra commented, "O great ṛṣi, the terrible slaughter which is about to take place must be ordained by Fate. Thus, I am sure that all of the kings who die upon the battlefield will attain exalted destinations in their next lives."

However, Vyāsa-deva replied, "O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the impending war is abominable and it is within your power to stop it by following the dictates of righteousness. You should obey my command and force your wicked son to give the Pāṇḍavas back their rightful share of the kingdom."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then argued, "My son is not under my control. As a result, even though I am not inclined toward this ghastly war, I was not able to avert it."

Śrīla Vyāsa-deva then departed, leaving Dhṛtarāṣṭra to ponder over the impending calamity by himself. Dhṛtarāṣṭra remained absorbed in thought for some time, and every now and then he would heave a deep sigh. Then, as the old blind king was engaged in thinking about the millions of men who had assembled from all over the world, he suddenly turned to Sañjaya and requested him to utilize his celestial vision in order to describe all of the countries from which the warriors had come. Sañjaya replied, "O King, Jambu-dvīpa is circular in shape, and surrounding it is the salt ocean. Part of Jambu-dvīpa is shaped like a hare and part is shaped like an aśvattha tree (banyan tree). Just as one can see his face when it is reflected in a mirror, so, in the same way, one can see Jambu-dvīpa reflected upon the surface of the moon. There are nine varshas in Jambu-dvīpa, and they are all bow-shaped."
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "My dear Sañjaya, please tell me specifically about Bhāratavarṣa."

Sañjaya replied, "O King, if the resources of Bhāratavarṣa are properly developed according to their inherent qualities and potencies, then the whole world can become just like a great kāmadhenu from which dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa are easily milked. It is to greedily possess this wonderful earth that your sons are now engaged in enmity with the pious sons of Pandu."

Sañjaya next described the duration of life in the four ages, and he concluded by saying, "O King, in the Kali-yuga, there is really no fixed duration of life because many persons have to die within their mother's womb or else just after childbirth."

Sañjaya then went on to describe the six other islands besides Jambūdvīpa, and then he talked of other planets, such as the sun and the moon. Sañjaya concluded by emphasizing to Dhṛtarāṣṭra that even though he was able to see the true perspective of the various planetary systems by dint of his gifted vision, the same perfect description was available in the śāstra so that any common man can take advantage of them.

Finally, after taking Dhṛtarāṣṭra's leave, Sañjaya went to join the Kaurava army at Kurukṣetra. Then, after the completion of the tenth day of fighting, when Bhīṣma was finally defeated and thus lay down on a bed of arrows, Sañjaya quickly returned to the royal court at Hastināpura in order to inform Dhṛtarāṣṭra of everything that had transpired. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard that Bhīṣma had been mortally wounded by Śikhaṇḍī, it was a terrible blow for him, for he had placed all of his hopes for victory upon the grandsire, whom even Paraśurāma had been unable to defeat. Indeed, in a state of shock, Dhṛtarāṣṭra repeatedly questioned, "O Sañjaya, how could the unconquerable Bhīṣma have been slain by Śikhaṇḍī? Please describe to me everything in detail."

Being exceedingly overwhelmed by grief, Dhṛtarāṣṭra then moaned,
"O Sañjaya, all of these agonies have been brought upon me by my foolish and wicked son Duryodhana. Oh, how unfortunate I was to have received such a son by the will of Destiny!"

Sañjaya replied, "O King, everyone suffers as a result of his own past misdeeds. Therefore, no one should place the blame for his miseries upon another person."

Then, in order to comfort Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Sañjaya said, "My dear king, you should not lament on account of your sons, for the destruction of wicked persons is certainly predestined. By the mercy of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, I have obtained knowledge of both past and future and I can see into the hearts of all persons. Not only have I been given divine vision, but I can also hear what is going on in distant places, and I can fly in the sky like the great ṛṣis. Now, please listen carefully as I describe to you everything that took place upon the battlefield at Kurukṣetra:

"After the two armies had been arrayed, Duryodhana called for Duhḍśasana and instructed, "My dear brother, you must see that Bhīṣma is given special protection, for it is primarily upon him that rest our hopes for victory over the Pāṇḍavas. Bhīṣma will be vulnerable because of his unwillingness to fight with Śīkhaṇḍi, and so a great effort should be made to kill the Pañcāla prince."

The two opposing armies looked just like great oceans which were infested by fierce sharks. Karna was absent, however, as well as his friends and relatives, for he had laid aside his weapons according to his former vow. Bhīṣma then summoned all the Kaurava leaders and rallied them with encouraging words which he concluded by saying, "My dear kings, you should fight very heroically and to the best of your ability, for death upon the battlefield is glorious for a kṣatriya, not succumbing to old-age and disease at home."

Although it is said that there were eighteen akṣauhinīs assembled at Kurukṣetra, there is also mention of innumerable other warriors who also took part in the fighting. For example, six million soldiers are described as being employed just to protect the chariot-wheels and elephants on the Kaurava side, and there were also the Nārāyaṇa cowherds and other Samsaptakas, numbering in the millions. Mahārāja
Yudhiṣṭhira then called for Arjuna and said, "My dear brother, according to Brhaspati, when one's army is smaller than the opposition, his soldiers should be arrayed tightly. Therefore, let us arrange our army in the vajra formation."
It was very early in the morning, and as both sides awaited the rising of the sun, a brisk wind carried drops of water, and thunder was heard although not a cloud was to be seen in the sky. After awhile, the wind picked up so that not only was a cloud of dust raised all around, but small pebbles were blown here and there. Meteors then fell from the sky, the earth began to tremble, and as the sun rose, it lacked its usual splendor. And yet, both armies looked magnificent, and all of the warriors appeared to be jubilant with anticipation. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira saw the vast Kaurava army with Bhīṣma shining within its midst, however, he became disheartened, and due to great fear, his face became pale. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear Arjuna, I do not think that we have any chance for victory. This vast army, containing so many illustrious warriors, appears to be impenetrable."
Arjuna replied, "My dear brother, you must remain confident, knowing that even though we are inferior in numbers, victory always belongs to the righteous. O Yudhiṣṭhira, have you forgotten that Lord Kṛṣṇa is protecting us? Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and the possessor of unlimited potencies. Therefore, victory is inherent in Him. Now, please cast off all of your doubts and rest assured that because Lord Kṛṣṇa has taken our side, victory is assured."
At this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's confidence became somewhat revived and so he began to encourage his warriors, and thereafter he ceremoniously gave away charity to the brāhmaṇas. Then, as the Kaurava army slowly began to approach in order to commence fighting, Lord Kṛṣṇa, who was seated as Arjuna's chariot-driver, said, "O son of Kuntī, since Bhīṣma is the commander-in-chief, you should make it your main business to fight with him. However, I first of all want you to purify yourself and then worship goddess Durgā so as to gain her blessings for victory."
Arjuna then got down from his chariot, and with folded hands, he began to offer prayers in praise of goddess Durgā, addressing her as Yogamāyā, the younger sister of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Being pleased with this act of devotion,
the goddess Durgā suddenly appeared in the sky and declared, "My dear Arjuna, rest assured that you will soon gain victory over your formidable enemies. Because Lord Kṛṣṇa has become your ally, even the demigods of heaven could not successfully contend with you in battle."
After saying this, goddess Durgā disappeared from view, and after hearing her words, Arjuna became confident that his victory was assured. Arjuna then got back onto his chariot and joyfully blew upon his mighty conchshell, as did Lord Kṛṣṇa. Sañjaya then said, "My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you should know that wherever there is Lord Kṛṣṇa, there is victory. Therefore, you can also understand without a doubt that your sons are now hopelessly entangled in the meshes of death's network!"
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then inquired, "O Sañjaya, what did my sons and the sons of Pāṇḍu next do after having assembled at the holy place of pilgrimage, Kurukṣetra?"
Sañjaya replied, "O King, your son Duryodhana went to Droṇācārya and said, 'My preceptor, please make sure that you fight wholeheartedly against your disciples, especially Dhṛṣṭadyumna, who has arranged the Pāṇḍava army. Of course, under the care of Bhīṣma, our army is practically unlimited, but since the grandsire has now become old, you and the other great warriors should give him careful protection.'"
Just then, Bhīṣma blew upon his mighty conchshell, and its lion-like roar gave great joy to Duryodhana. When the others on the Kaurava side responded by blowing their conchshells and bugles, the combined sound became tumultuous. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then blew upon their transcendental conchshells, the Pāñcajanya and the Devadatta, shattering the hearts of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Arjuna then requested Kṛṣṇa, "My dear lord, please place my chariot in between the two armies so that I can see who has assembled here, being eager to fight against us in this great battle."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then drove the chariot to a place between the two armies and exclaimed, "O Arjuna, just see all of the Kurus who have assembled here to fight!"
Thereafter, when Arjuna saw how all of his relatives, teachers, and friends had come before him with a fighting spirit, he became overwhelmed with compassion for them. With a faltering voice, he then
said, "O Kṛṣṇa, my mouth is drying up, my hair is standing on end, and my bow Gāndīva is slipping from my hand! Indeed, my mind is reeling so that I can hardly remain standing here any longer, facing the enemy! My dear Kṛṣṇa, I have lost all desire for victory, because even if we regain our lost kingdom, I can see that we will still be the losers. After having slain all of those with whom we wished to enjoy life, how can there be happiness? How can I attack with arrows those who are my superiors? It would be far better for me to face the enemy unarmed or else retire to the forest and live by begging than to slay those who are worshipable. This massacre will only bring on evil, for so many dynasties will be destroyed and thus their family traditions and moral standards will be discarded. As a result, the unprotected women will give birth to unwanted progeny, who will thereafter make the world a hellish place in which to live. O Kṛṣṇa, if, out of greed, I fight this sinful war, then surely I will have to eternally suffer in hell as punishment."

After saying this, Arjuna threw down his bow and arrows and then dejectedly sat down upon his chariot. Lord Kṛṣṇa then chastised Arjuna by saying, "O descendent of Bhārata, this behavior is not at all befitting an Aryan, and it will never lead you to heaven. Give up this petty weakness of heart and fight, for that is your religious duty as a kṣatriya!"

In his bewilderment, Arjuna was intelligent enough to understand that he was simply a tiny conditioned soul, whereas Lord Kṛṣṇa was the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore, he surrendered unto Lord Kṛṣṇa and begged Him to give instructions that would free him from his dilemma and thus set him upon the path of righteousness. In response, Kṛṣṇa first of all chastised His disciple for having tried to speak like an authority while at the same time exhibiting the qualities of a person in complete illusion. Lord Kṛṣṇa then instructed Arjuna on the real nature of the eternal soul as follows:

"O son of Kuntī, you are lamenting that you will have to kill Bhīṣma, Droṇa and the other great warriors on the Kaurava side, but factually you will just be changing their outward dresses under My order. You see, the living being is distinct from his material embodiment. Don't you see how the body is constantly changing from childhood to youth and then to old age? Similarly, the living entity accepts a new body after the destruction of the present one. Actually, the body is just a mechanical
vehicle made of the material elements, and it is imperceptibly changing
at every moment. However, since the body is created by Mother Nature
under My supreme direction, it works so wonderfully that all
conditioned souls become deluded into thinking that they maintain the
same body throughout their entire lifetime. Yet, the fact is that all of the
cells within the body are constantly in flux, whereas you, the witness,
the observer within the body, are unchanging and eternal. My dear
Arjuna, he who dwells within the body is immutable, and he is not
destroyed when the body is slain. The consciousness which pervades the
entire body is indestructible, and this awareness is the visible symptom
of the eternal soul's presence. In other words, even though the soul
cannot be directly perceived due to its atomic size and subtle nature, its
immediately recognizable effect is consciousness. O Arjuna, do not allow
yourself to be bewildered by accepting the external body as the real self.
Because the soul cannot be destroyed at any point, you should not
hesitate to execute your duty as a kṣatriya and fight."
Lord Kṛṣṇa continued, "My dear son of Kuntī, now please listen
attentively as I explain to you more confidential knowledge. Beyond
your duties as a kṣatriya, there is a higher and supreme duty, for the
eternal function of every living entity is to engage in devotional service
of the Supreme Lord without personal motive or attachment. O Arjuna,
even though I am playing the role of your friend and cousin, you should
know that I am the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and that there is
no truth higher than Me. I am the supreme enjoyer, the supreme
proprietor, and the best well-wishing friend, and one who knows Me as
such, never has to take birth within this material world again.
"O descendent of Bhārata, whatever you can see within this universe is
simply a manifestation of My superior and inferior energies, for there is
nothing that exists outside of Me. And yet, although I am in one sense
everything, I still remain distinct as the origin and support of all
manifestations. Therefore, the ultimate goal of life is to fully surrender
unto Me and work under My direction, or that of My representative.
This is the path of unalloyed bhakti-yoga, and all other processes such as
jñāna-yoga, karma-yoga, and aṣṭāṅga-yoga, are simply different rungs on
the ladder of yoga. The complete perfection, which is attained by full
surrender unto Me, is possible only when one realizes My presence in
every sphere of existence, and thus, he sees that there is nothing separate from Me. My dear Arjuna, I am the taste of water, the light of the sun and moon, and I am the ability in man. It is I who have become Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva, and 'Om' is My sound representation. I am also the source of the all-pervading brahmajyoti, and Lord Viṣṇu is My plenary expansion. Indeed, all wonderful and beautiful manifestations in this world spring from but a spark of My unlimited splendor."

Arjuna then said, "My dear Lord, please reveal to me Your universal form, so that I can see just how You have entered into everything within this universe. Of course, I am satisfied simply to hear Your glories, but at the same time, I wish that all persons, and in the future, can understand that You are really God."

Being so requested, Lord Kṛṣṇa first of all gave Arjuna divine eyes. Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa displayed His universal form with its unlimited heads, arms, bellies, and legs, and radiant brilliance surpassing millions of suns. Arjuna could see Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva in that wonderful cosmic form, as well as all of the other demigods, asuras, Nāgas, Gandharvas, human beings, and animals. He could also see all of the planets within the universe, as well as the vast space in between. He could also see how the Dhṛtarāṣṭras, along with Bhīma, Droṇa, and the other great warriors were entering into the fiery mouths of that universal form. Indeed, when Arjuna thus saw how all of the warriors on both sides were being crushed by the terrible teeth of that gigantic form, he became terrified and began to pray to Kṛṣṇa with folded hands as follows: "O Lord of the universe, please forgive me for having treated You so informally, just as if You were my intimate friend. I am now embarrassed to think how I used to joke with You, or criticize You in front of others while we were eating, sitting down, or even lying together on the same bed. Whether I had acted in this way out of madness or out of love, please forgive me for the great offenses which I have committed by treating You as my equal. My dear universal lord, kindly disclose to me Your real identity."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "Time I am, the destroyer of everything, and I have come to engage all beings. All of the great heroes whom you feel such compassion for have already been killed by My supreme will. Now, My dear Arjuna, you should engage yourself as My instrument, for by doing
so, you shall attain everlasting fame as the hero of the great battle of Kurukṣetra."
Arjuna then said, "O Lord, I am no longer able to behold this terrible form of You, for my mind is beginning to lose its balance. Therefore, please show me Your four-armed form as Viṣṇu, and then resume Your most pleasing human-like two-armed form of Śyāmasundara."
Being so requested, Lord Kṛṣṇa next displayed His majestic four-armed form, and then, He resumed His most beautiful human-like feature, thus relieving Arjuna of his fear. Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa described to Arjuna the three modes of material nature, the good qualities of His pure devotees, and the abominable qualities of demoniac persons. Lord Kṛṣṇa ended His discourse by saying, "My dear Arjuna, I have imparted unto you the most confidential of all knowledge. Now, it is up to you to deliberate on it as far as your good intelligence can guide you. Thereafter you must decide whether you wish to fight under My direction or else rebel. O son of Kuntī, because you are My very dear friend, I shall once again repeat the essence of all knowledge which is contained in the śāstra. Become My devotee and always think of Me. Worship Me and bow down to Me. Indeed, give up all other concepts of duty and just surrender unto Me alone. In return, I shall protect you from all sinful reactions so that you can come back to Me without fear. My dear Arjuna, have you listened to Me attentively, and are your doubts now dispelled once and for all?"
Arjuna replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, my illusion is now gone by Your mercy, and thus I can understand that I am constitutionally Your eternal servant. Now, without further hesitation, I am prepared to execute whatever You order Me to do."
Sañjaya then exclaimed, "O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, I am overjoyed to have been fortunate enough to hear this sacred conversation and to have witnessed Lord Kṛṣṇa’s wonderful universal form. This was all the mercy of my spiritual master, Śrīla Vyāsadeva. My dear king, you can rest assured that wherever there is Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, there must be victory, opulence, and morality."
Having thus been enlightened by Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna once again took up his bow and arrows, and upon seeing this, all of the warriors on the Pāṇḍava side let out a tremendous shout. Being overjoyed, they triumphantly blew upon their conchshells and bugles, making a
tumultuous sound.

All of the great demigods, ṛṣis, Gandharvas, and demons had appeared in the sky in order to witness this historic battle. Next, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira caused a great stir by taking off his armor and putting aside his weapons. Getting down from his chariot, the king began to walk toward the Kaurava army with folded hands, and when Arjuna saw this, he quickly dismounted in order to chase after his elder brother. The other Pāṇḍavas and Lord Kṛṣṇa then followed, and being filled with anxiety, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva inquired, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, what do you intend to do by abandoning your army and advancing unarmed toward the enemy?"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira simply remained silent, however, and proceeded onward undeterred. Lord Kṛṣṇa then smilingly said, "My dear sons of Pandu, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira is approaching the Kaurava army in order to pay his respects unto Bhīma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, and Śalya. After doing so, you can rest assured that he will return and fight. It is understood that when fighting with superiors, if one first of all goes and offers them proper respect, then victory is assured."

Meanwhile, all of the warriors in the Kaurava army began to speculate by thinking, "Yudhiṣṭhira must be approaching Bhīma out of fear, and because of this, the other Pāṇḍavas are also seeking the grandsire’s shelter."

Thinking like this, the Kauravas began to criticize Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, although at the same time, they were very curious to hear what he would say. Meanwhile, surrounded by his brothers, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira went right up to Bhīma, and while grabbing onto his lotus feet, he said, "O Grandsire, please grant me permission to fight with you and give me your blessings as well."

Bhīma replied, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, if you had not approached me in this way, then I would have surely cursed you. My dear grandson, I am very pleased with you and I sincerely wish for your success in battle. Now, I shall offer you a benediction, although I think that my words must be useless, for I have taken the side of the Kauravas, being obliged because they have maintained me."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "O Grandsire, even though you will certainly have to fight against us, I still beg you to think of our welfare every day. In addition, please disclose to me now the means whereby you can be slain in this great battle."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I do not see anyone who is capable of vanquishing me in battle, nor has the appointed time for my death arrived."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira accepted these words and once again bowed down before Bhīṣma. Then, accompanied by his brothers, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next proceeded toward Droṇācārya by wending his way through the vast Kaurava army. Then, while all of the Kaurava warriors stared at him as if they were struck dumb with wonder, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira first of all offered his obeisances unto Droṇācārya and then circumambulated him. He then said, "My dear Preceptor, please grant me permission to fight with you, and kindly reveal to me how my enemies can be vanquished."

Droṇācārya replied, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, if you had not approached me before fighting, then I would surely have cursed you. Now, however, I am very pleased with you and so I request you to ask for a benediction. O King, please understand that it was only the obligation for having accepted wealth from the Kauravas that made me take their side."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "O Preceptor, kindly tell me how you can be killed in this great battle."

Droṇācārya replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, as long as I continue to fight, there is no one who can vanquish me. Only if I put down my weapons and engage myself in meditation will I be defeated. O King, I predict that this will actually come to pass when I hear some disagreeable words from a man of credible speech."

After hearing this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira once again offered his obeisances unto Droṇācārya and then proceeded to where Kṛpācārya was staying. After offering his obeisances and circumambulating the preceptor, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira solicited his permission to fight. Kṛpācārya replied, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, if you had gone ahead and fought without having first worshipped me like this, then I would have surely cursed you for your utter defeat. Now, however, I have become very pleased and so I shall wish for your victory and award you any
benediction except taking your side, for I have been obliged to fight with the Kauravas."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then became so overwhelmed by emotion and agitation that after uttering a few faltering words, he simply stood speechless in front of Kṛpācārya. The great brāhmaṇa warrior knew of his intentions, however, and so he replied "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I am incapable of being slain in battle. Still, I shall pray for your victory upon arising each morning."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then once again offered his obeisances and next, he approached his uncle, Śalya. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira offered his obeisances and begged for permission to fight, Śalya also replied that he would have cursed him if he had not done so. Śalya also explained his dependence upon Duryodhana and then offered Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira a benediction. The Pāṇḍava king then requested Śalya to always think of his welfare, and he also reminded him of his promise to discourage Karna. In reply, Śalya assured Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira that he would help him gain victory, and thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas began to wend their way back to their army. At this time, Lord Kṛṣṇa went to Karna and said, "O son of Sūrya, since you have put down your weapons out of hatred for Bhīṣma, why not come and fight on the side of the Pāṇḍavas? Then, when the grandsire is slain, you can return to the side of the Kauravas, thus keeping your promise to Duryodhana intact."

Karna replied, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, I shall never do anything which is disagreeable to Duryodhana."

Seeing Karna's fixed determination, Lord Kṛṣṇa desisted from arguing any further and returned to the side of the Pāṇḍavas. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then stepped forward and loudly announced to all of the opposing warriors, "O great heroes, if any of you would like to change sides before the fighting begins, then I shall happily accept you."

Yuyutsu, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son by a vaiśya wife, responded to this call, and after coming over to the Pāṇḍava side, he was very respectfully welcomed by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then put on his golden armor while all of the kings, headed by Dhṛṣṭadyumna, applauded him highly for his exemplary behavior of having offered due respects unto his superiors in the enemy ranks.
After all of the warriors had remounted their chariots, the call for battle was given, and thus, under the order of Duryodhana, all of the kings in the Kaurava army rushed towards the army of the Pāṇḍavas for battle. Similarly, under the order of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, all of the kings in the Pāṇḍava army came forward to encounter the Kauravas, and no one turned his face from battle. The sounds of the troops, the twanging of the bowstrings, the tread of the infantry, the furious sounds of the horses, the clash of weapons, the clamor of elephants rushing against one another, and the clatter of the chariots, mingled together to produce a loud uproar, causing everyone's hair to stand up on end. And yet, Bhima's loud roars could be heard above all of these noises, and indeed, that terrible vibration caused a great fear to enter the hearts of the Kaurava warriors and made their horses and elephants pass stool and urine.

Thereafter, when the two armies met, a dust-cloud rose up into the sky, covering the battlefield with a dense darkness, and the fighting became so fierce that it was difficult to distinguish one side from the other. Bhīṣma rushed at Arjuna, taking up a bow that resembled the rod of death. Arjuna took up his Gäëòéva bow and rushed to meet Bhīṣma with the intention of slaying him. However, in spite of piercing Arjuna's body with innumerable arrows, Bhīṣma could not make him waver, nor could the son of Kunti make Śantanu's son falter. Sātyaki rushed at Kåtavarmā, filling him full of arrows. Kåtavarmā then counter attacked by covering Sātyaki with so many arrows that he soon resembled a porcupine. The mighty bowman Abhimanyu battled Bṛhadbala, the king of Kośala. Bṛhadbala managed to cut down the standard of Subhadrā's son's chariot and then kill his driver. At this time, Abhimanyu became filled with wrath and retaliated by piercing Bṛhadbala with nine arrows. Then, with another two arrows, Abhimanyu cut down the standard from his chariot and killed his driver.

Bhīma and Duryodhana fought furiously and both of those mighty warriors soon covered each other with hundreds of arrows. While rushing at Nakula, Duḥśāsana pierced him with many sharp arrows. Laughing at Duḥśāsana's advance, however, Nakula retaliated by cutting down his standard, breaking his bow, and striking him with twenty
arrows. The enraged Duḥśāsana then killed Nakula's horses and cut his chariot's emblem. Durmukha rushed at Sahadeva and pierced him all over with sharp arrows. Sahadeva then countered by killing Durmukha's charioteer and then covering him with hundreds of arrows. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira encountered Śalya, the king of the Madras, piercing him with numerous arrows. Śalya retaliated by cutting Yudhiṣṭhira's bow in two. Then, picking up another, stronger bow, Yudhiṣṭhira pierced Śalya with more arrows. In this great battle, Dhṛṣṭadyumna rushed at Droṇa, and Dhṛṣṭaketu encountered Bāhlika. Ghaṭotkaca fought with Alambuṣa and pierced him with 90 arrows. Śīkhandi battled Droṇa's son, Aśvatthāmā, and pierced him with a sharp-pointed shaft. Aśvatthāmā retaliated by piercing his opponent, causing him to tremble. Kṛpācārya rushed at Bṛhadṛatha, the ruler of the Kekeyas, and enveloped him in a shower of arrows. These two great warriors then killed each other's horses, broke each other's bows, and smashed each other's chariots. Being highly enraged, Kṛpa and Bṛhadṛatha at last took up swords and continued to fight on foot. The Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas fought, forgetful of their family relationships, and thus were bent on killing each other, as if possessed by demons. During the great battle, many heroic warriors fell from their chariots, never to rise again. Chariots collided with one another, and large elephants crushed infantry troops and chariots, stepping on them in great anger. These huge elephants, mad with rage, could not be stopped, and thus, they tore through enemy lines until at last, filled with thousands of arrows, they fell to the ground dead. Elephants met elephants and tore at one another with their huge tusks. The foot-soldiers that protected the elephants were armed with bows as well as brightly colored battle-axes, maces, lances and swords, all of which were covered with human blood. When these terrible weapons were brought down upon the enemy, the loud sound of wailing voices could be heard by the other warriors. Some men had their heads severed, some had lost their arms or legs, and some were pierced with lances or hacked with swords. Some were pierced by the tusks of elephants and then flung into the air and then thrown a great distance. Great horsemen, overcome by anger, rushed against other horsemen while hurling long darts that were covered with gold, or else releasing arrows that severed the limbs of the
enemy. Some heroic horsemen carrying swords leaped high into the air in order to sever the heads of great chariot warriors who were engaged in battle. Some horsemen were overthrown by elephants that trampled them underfoot along with their steeds.

Polished javelins flew through the sky like meteors, piercing one soldier and then covering the body of another. Indeed, the entire sky was filled with weapons, and the sounds of the wounded mixed with the war cries of heroic soldiers became deafening. Enraged elephants smashed chariots and then picked them up with their trunks and threw them violently to the ground. Although guarded on all sides, these elephants had thousands of weapons sticking in their bodies. They were cut by swords and were mangled by maces and battle-axes. Some warriors had their armor torn off their body, and even though their backs were cut open by swords, they still fought on, brandishing their weapons in order to kill the enemy.

Very soon, the entire battlefield became a mass of severed heads, arms and legs. Some warriors were crushed to death by maddened elephants, and others had their internal organs cut out by swords and battle-axes. Some warriors had their heads smashed in by maces and clubs, while others were trampled to death by an onrush of thousands of soldiers. Many mangled warriors laid upon the battlefield, crying out the names of their kinsmen, and some, who were weak due to thirst, laid upon the field of battle crying out for water. Other warriors who were mortally wounded laid upon the ground silently, waiting for the end of their life. Then, in the late morning, Bhīṣma managed to penetrate the Pāṇḍava army with the help of Kṛtavarmā, Kṛpa, Śalya, and Durmukha. Indeed, as the grandsire appeared to dance through the enemy ranks, he left a path of destruction in his wake. Abhimanyu became enraged upon seeing Bhīṣma's massacre of the Pāṇḍava soldiers, and so he rushed at the grandsire along with his protectors. With a well-aimed arrow, Abhimanyu shot down the emblem of Śalya. With another arrow, Abhimanyu cut Kṛpa's golden bow in half, and with a third, he beheaded Durmukha's charioteer.

Bhīṣma then rushed impetuously at Abhimanyu, cutting down his emblem and piercing him with nine arrows. However, Abhimanyu retaliated by knocking Bhīṣma's famed palmyra (palm) emblem down to
the ground, causing the Pāṇḍavas' warriors to let out a great roar. Bhīṣma then invoked celestial weapons, covering Abhimanyu with thousands of arrows, causing many great chariot warriors to come to the aid of Subhadrā's son. Bhīṣma pierced all of them, however, and while doing so, he cut down Bhima's lion emblem.

Virāṭa's son, Uttara, then rushed at Śalya while riding upon a gigantic elephant. Although Śalya tried to check the infuriated beast, it killed his horses by crushing them underfoot. Then, while remaining on his chariot, Śalya picked up a fierce dart and hurled it at Uttara. The dart pierced right through Uttara's armor, shattering his chest and causing him to fall down dead from the back of his carrier. Śalya then jumped down from his disabled chariot, and with his sword, he cut off the elephant's trunk, making it fall down dead while uttering a terrible shriek. Śalya then got up onto Krtavarmā's chariot, while Uttara's brother, Śveta, madly rushed at him, accompanied by other chariot-warriors. Seven leading Kaurava warriors then quickly came to protect Śalya. However, Śveta displayed such amazing prowess that he first of all cut in half their bows with seven arrows, and then knocked down their emblems with seven more. Then, as Śveta continued to rush at Śalya, Bhīṣma and Duryodhana finally checked him, and at that time, many of the Pāṇḍava heroes joined the fray so that a very fierce battle took place.

Śveta continued to blaze up with fury, and as a result, he slaughtered many thousands of enemy soldiers, causing the entire Kaurava army to retreat out of fear. However, Bhīṣma also massacred thousands of Pāṇḍava soldiers, making them withdraw, so that practically all others became spectators as the grandsire and Śveta faced each other. Śveta proceeded to successfully counteract Bhīṣma's arrows, while at the same time attack the Kaurava army. At this, Duryodhana gathered together his troops and then rushed at the heroic son of Virāṭa. Because of this, Śveta momentarily turned his attention away from Bhīṣma. However, after quickly routing the Kaurava army again, he turned back to face the grandsire of the Kuru dynasty. These two warriors continued to pierce each other with innumerable arrows, and Śveta then performed an amazing feat by cutting Bhīṣma's bow into ten fragments with ten arrows, and then knocking down his palmyra emblem. Upon seeing this
wonderful accomplishment, the Dhṛtarāṣṭras became afraid for Bhīṣma's life while the Pāṇḍava warriors blew upon their conchshells with great delight. Duryodhana then sent Kṛpa, Śalya, and other leading warriors to Bhīṣma's aid, but Śveta managed to simultaneously foil all of the arrows that were showered upon him and break Bhīṣma's bow. Becoming highly enraged, Bhīṣma picked up another bow, but Śveta immediately cut it into pieces. This caused the Kauravas to become even more alarmed, but in an instant, Bhīṣma strung a stronger bow and killed Śveta's four horses, beheaded his charioteer and knocked down his banner. Enraged, Śveta picked up a powerful dart, and while all of the Kauravas gasped in fear, he hurled it with great force. Bhīṣma was somehow or other able to cut that dart into fragments as it sailed through the air, making the Kauravas shout with joy. On the other hand, Śveta became so furious that he became bewildered about what to do next. Then, while laughing almost dementedly, he picked up a club and rushed impetuously toward Bhīṣma.

Bhīṣma considered Śveta to be uncheckable and so he quickly jumped down from his chariot. Thus, when Śveta hurled his mighty mace, Bhīṣma escaped unscathed while his chariot, horses and driver became reduced to a pile of rubble. Bhīṣma, mounting upon another chariot, then heard a voice from the sky say, “O descendent of Kuru, act decisively for the time has arrived which the Creator has fixed for you to kill Śveta.”

Bhīma, Śātyaki, Dhṛṣṭadyumna and others tried to rescue Śveta, but they were checked by Droṇa, Śalya, and Kṛpa. Śveta, who was still on the ground, then rushed at Bhīṣma, sword in hand, and managed to cut his bow in half. Bhīṣma then took up another bow. Even though Śveta at that time became surrounded by his protectors, the grandsire rushed at him while remembering the celestial instruction. First of all, Bhīṣma showered arrows in order to check all of the Pāṇḍava warriors. Then, he released an arrow empowered by the energy of Brahmā, and when this mighty brahmāstra pierced through Śveta's body and entered the earth, it took with it Śveta's life. Upon seeing the fall of Śveta, the Pāṇḍava warriors lamented bitterly and Śikhaṇḍi trembled with fear. On the other side, the Kaurava warriors shouted with joy and Duḥśāsana danced
gleefully right there on the battlefield.
Thereafter, fierce fighting ensued for the rest of the day, and the victorious Bhīṣma predominated by slaying innumerable Pāṇḍava soldiers. As the sun at last began to set, the Pāṇḍava army was being routed, and so, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira ordered his soldiers to retire for the day. Duryodhana was overjoyed to have witnessed the prowess Bhīṣma had displayed, but in the Pāṇḍava camp there was only gloom. Filled with grief, the Pāṇḍavas approached Lord Kṛṣṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira and began to express their fear that their defeat at the hand of Bhīṣma was imminent. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear Lord, since Bhīṣma is unconquerable, I shall retire to the forest in order to perform austerities. I feel that this will be a much more noble way to spend my remaining days rather than cause the deaths of all the Pāṇḍava warriors. Bhīṣma is slaughtering our soldiers by the thousands with celestial weapons. Only Arjuna can counter him, and yet he seems content to remain on the battlefield as a spectator, as if having lost all enthusiasm to fight."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, do not be aggrieved. I can assure you that Śikhaṇḍī is the destined killer of Bhīṣma. Now, please have faith in My words and give up your anguish."

Yudhiṣṭhira ordered Dhṛṣṭadyumna to arrange the Pāṇḍava army in a krauncha formation. Then, as both sides awaited the arising of the sun, all of the warriors blew upon their conchshells in anticipation of the day's encounter. Duryodhana then urged his army to attack, and the battle thus raged. From the very beginning, Bhīṣma began to rout the Pāṇḍava forces, and indeed, it appeared that he would annihilate the entire army unchecked. Arjuna thus ordered Lord Kṛṣṇa to take him to where the grandsire was. Many warriors then came to support both Arjuna and Bhīṣma, and thus a great battle took place. This time, Arjuna predominated, creating a great slaughter in the Kaurava ranks. At last, Duryodhana approached Bhīṣma and said, "O Grandsire, it is only because of you that my well-wisher, Karṇa, desisted from battle. Now, in his absence, it behooves you to find out the means for slaying Arjuna."
Being thus prodded, Bhīṣma simply exclaimed, "To hell with the kṣatriya
profession!" and then departed for encountering Arjuna. Thereafter, Bhīṣma and Arjuna began to shower their arrows upon each other while skillfully counteracting each other's assaults. Bhīṣma then pierced Kṛṣṇa in the chest with three arrows, and so Arjuna responded by angrily striking Bhīṣma's charioteer with three arrows. Indeed, in this great duel, no difference in ability could be distinguished between the two of them, and from the sky, the demigods exclaimed, "Neither Bhīṣma nor Arjuna are capable of slaying each other!"

Meanwhile, Droṇa and Dhṛṣṭadyumna had been fiercely fighting with equal skill. Droṇa broke Dhṛṣṭadyumna's bow and with a shower of arrows, killed his horses and driver. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then picked up a mace and got down from his disabled chariot. Yet, before Dhṛṣṭadyumna even touched the ground, Drona shattered his club to pieces with his arrows. Becoming enraged, Dhṛṣṭadyumna drew his sword and rushed impetuously at Drona. Then, as Drona checked him with a shower of arrows, Bhīma came and took Dhṛṣṭadyumna up onto his chariot. Duryodhana then ordered the king of Kaliṅga to attack Bhīma, and so Droṇa left off fighting with Dhṛṣṭadyumna and next approached Virāṭa and Drupada. Soon, Bhīma became surrounded by thousands of chariots belonging to Śrutāyu, the king of Kaliṅga, as well as 10,000 elephant warriors belonging to Ketumat, the son of a niśāda king. Then, with the help of the Matsyas, Cedis, and Kārūṇas, Bhīma attacked his assailants so fiercely that the battlefield soon took on the appearance of an expansive graveyard. The son of the Kaliṅga king, Sakradeva, then managed to kill Bhīma's horses. However, when Sakradeva proceeded to rush at him, Bhīma hurled his mighty mace and smashed the prince to death. When the king of Kaliṅga saw that his son had been slain, he came and surrounded Bhīma with his entire army. At this, Bhīma assumed a very ferocious form possessed of superhuman prowess, and after taking up a great sword, he went on a rampage, killing an entire division of cavalry, infantry, chariot-warriors, and elephant-warriors. While ranging through the enemy ranks on foot, Bhīma displayed a myriad of movements, and by jumping high he brought many heroic warriors down from their chariots. Then, as everyone watched Bhīma in amazement, the Kaliṅga king and Śrutāyu attacked. A chariot was then sent for Bhīma, and after mounting upon it, he made short work of the king of
Kaliṅga, as well as Ketumat and numerous others. All of the Kaliṅga chariot-warriors then surrounded Bhīma, hoping to gain revenge. At this, Bhīma jumped down from his chariot, club in hand, and after killing 2,700 chariot-warriors within just a matter of moments, he let out a loud roar and blew upon his mighty conchshell. The remaining Kaliṅga warriors then panicked and fled. Meanwhile, after hearing the cries of the Kaliṅga warriors who were being exterminated, Shishma rushed to encounter Bhīma. Sātyaki and Dhrishtadyurnna carne to Bhīma's aid, and soon the trio surrounded Shishma. The grandsire then killed Bhīma's horses, and while remaining on his chariot, Bhīma retaliated by hurling a fierce dart. Bhīma cut that dart into pieces however, and so, taking up a mace, Bhīma jumped down and got up onto Dhṛṣṭadyumna's chariot. Sātyaki then managed to kill Bhīma's charioteer so that when the unguided horses took the grandsire far away from the battlefield, Bhīma continued to slay the Kalingas without impediment.

Later in the day, Dhṛṣṭadyumna encountered Aśvatthāmā and he soon managed to kill the horses of Droṇa's son. Aśvatthāmā then got up onto Śalya's chariot while Abhimanyu came to assist Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and upon seeing Subhadrā's son, Duryodhana's son, Lakṣmana, came to encounter him. When Lakṣmana broke his bow, Abhimanyu picked up another one and began to afflict the son of Duryodhana very severely with his arrows so that at last, the Kaurava king himself had to come to his rescue. Abhimanyu thus became surrounded by many warriors, who had accompanied Duryodhana, and yet he faced them all fearlessly. Arjuna then appeared on the scene in order to rescue his son, and so Bhīma, Droṇa, and others also came there to oppose him. However, Arjuna blocked the advance of these Kuru warriors with his own showers of arrows, and after assuming a very ferocious feature, he began to slay innumerable Kaurava warriors. Indeed, the entire sky became blackened by Arjuna's arrows, and at that time, no one dared to approach him. Soon, the entire battlefield became strewn over with arms, legs, and heads, as well as heaps of weapons and the bodies of dead animals. At last, the warriors of the Kaurava army fearfully retreated, and so Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna triumphantly blew upon their conchshells. Bhīma then smilingly told Droṇa, "Arjuna is incapable of being
defeated and our army is too fear-stricken to be rallied. Now, since the sun is about to set, we should withdraw our forces for the day."

Early the next morning, Bhīṣma arrayed the Kaurava army in the Garuḍa formation, and so the Pāṇḍavas countered by arranging their forces in a half-moon formation. From the very outset, Arjuna created a great slaughter among the enemy troops, and so, many leading Kaurava warriors soon came and surrounded him, showering their arrows upon him. Arjuna successfully repulsed his attackers, however, and thus the demigods who were watching from above felt great delight.

Elsewhere, Śakuni's army surrounded Abhimanyu and Sātyaki. When his chariot was smashed in the conflict, Sātyaki got up onto Abhimanyu's chariot, and together they began to slaughter Śakuni's soldiers. Meanwhile, Bhīma and Ghaṭotkaca fought together very heroically, and so Duryodhana rushed upon the scene and checked them both with a shower of arrows. Bhīma then pierced Duryodhana in the chest with an arrow, making the eldest son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra faint onto the seat of his chariot. The charioteer then took Duryodhana away from the scene of the battle. Upon seeing this, all of the Kaurava soldiers fearfully retreated, but Bhīma followed them from behind, and along with Dhṛṣṭadyumna, he created a mass slaughter with his showers of arrows. Even though this massacre took place in the sight of Bhīṣma and Droṇa, the two commanders were unable to rally their forces. Only when Duryodhana himself reappeared on the scene did the Kaurava army turn back. Duryodhana then went to Bhīṣma and complained, "O Grandsire, it is hard for me to believe that my army could be routed in your presence. It is now obvious to me that both you and Droṇa favor the Pāṇḍavas, and thus you are not willing to fight with them. You should have told me this before the fighting began so that I could have made another arrangement. Instead, you have attempted the post of commander-in-chief of my armies, and so it behooves you to fight wholeheartedly."

Bhīṣma became very irritated while being criticized like that. With a disdainful laugh he then replied, "O King, I had warned you again and again that the Pāṇḍavas are incapable of being vanquished. Still, I shall do whatever is within my power, and I promise that today you will see
me check all of the Pāṇḍavas in battle."
Duryodhana became very pleased by Bhīṣma's assurances, and so he ordered all of the Kaurava warriors to blow on their conchshells, and he had the musicians beat their drums. It was already after noon, so in order to make good his word, Bhīṣma led the Dhṛtarāṣṭras in a massive attack on the Pāṇḍavas' army. Such a dreadful battle ensued that a river of blood was soon created, and the battlefield became so cluttered with bodies that it was difficult for the chariots to maneuver. In spite of this, Bhīṣma ranged so swiftly over the battlefield, exhibiting his incomparable prowess, that it appeared to the Pāṇḍava warriors that there were many Bhīṣma's. Indeed, no one could approach him, and thus the Pāṇḍava soldiers were slaughtered by the thousands. Sometimes, Bhīṣma killed three soldiers with a single arrow, and at last, the entire Pāṇḍava army began to panic and flee right in the presence of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. The Pāṇḍava soldiers became so afraid of Bhīṣma that some of them took off their armor and began to run away with their disheveled hair blowing in the wind. Many other soldiers were seen wailing aloud, as if deprived of reason. Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Arjuna, have you forgotten your promise to kill all of the Kuru warriors? Now, you must approach Bhīṣma and stop his progress before he exterminates the entire Pāṇḍava army."

Arjuna replied, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, please take me to where Bhīṣma is now staying, for I shall defeat him without delay."

When the soldiers of the Pāṇḍava army saw Arjuna attack Bhīṣma, they regained their composure and rallied. Bhīṣma completely covered Arjuna's chariot with showers of arrows, but then Arjuna managed to break the grandsire's bow. Then, when Bhīṣma picked up another bow, Arjuna skillfully broke it, and the grandsire was very pleased to see his grandson's dexterity, and thus he congratulated him while at the same time urging him to fight to the best of his ability. Bhīṣma then picked up another bow and began to pierce Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna all over their bodies. Indeed, Bhīṣma displayed such remarkable prowess while showering thousands of arrows, that even Lord Kṛṣṇa was amazed to behold it. However, Lord Kṛṣṇa soon became highly enraged to see how Bhīṣma was destroying the Pāṇḍava army while Arjuna appeared to be fighting very mildly. Lord Kṛṣṇa thus thought to Himself, "The way things are
going, Bhīṣma will annihilate the entire Pāṇḍava army this way day! Therefore, I will now take up My Sudarśana-cakra and kill him without delay."

While Kṛṣṇa was thinking like this, many other Kuru warriors, including Droṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛtavrma, and Jayadratha surrounded Arjuna while showering their arrows upon him. Sātyaki then came to Arjuna's aid, and while staying at his side, he tried his best to rally the retreating Pāṇḍava army. Lord Kṛṣṇa then declared, "O Sātyaki, I shall now take up My Sudarśana-cakra to kill Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and all of the sons of Dhrtarāṣṭra, thus enabling the Pāṇḍavas to take back their rightful kingdom!"

After saying this, Kṛṣṇa cast aside the reins of Arjuna's chariot and jumped down onto the battlefield while whirling His blazing cakra in His right hand. Making the entire earth tremble with His terrible strides, Lord Kṛṣṇa rushed at Bhīṣma like a ferocious lion charging an elephant. With His yellow garments waving in the breeze, Lord Kṛṣṇa looked just like a dark monsoon cloud, adorned with lightning. The dazzling Sudarśana-cakra, whirling in Lord Kṛṣṇa's lotus-like hand, looked just like a lotus flower growing from the lake of Kṛṣṇa's dark blue body.

Upon seeing Lord Kṛṣṇa's ferocious feature and hearing His loud roars, all of the warriors on both sides became convinced that the extermination of the Kurus was at hand.

Meanwhile, Bhīṣma stood fearlessly with folded hands and prayed, "My dear Lord, please come and throw me down from my chariot, for, slain by You, I shall attain to the most exalted destination."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then declared while rushing forward, "O Bhīṣma, you are the real cause of this terrible massacre, because it is the duty of a minister to restrain an evil king."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Lord, just as You had tried to instruct Dhrtarāṣṭra, I had also begged him to restrain his son, but to no avail."

Meanwhile, Arjuna had jumped down from his chariot, and after chasing Lord Kṛṣṇa, he was finally able to seize His hands. Lord Kṛṣṇa was so enraged, however, that He continued to drag Arjuna toward Bhīṣma while running. Arjuna then grabbed onto Kṛṣṇa by the legs, and after stopping Him in this way, he implored, "My dear Lord, please give up Your anger. I promise to fulfill my vow by annihilating all of the
Kurus without further hesitation."
Upon hearing this, Lord Kṛṣṇa became pacified and He immediately turned back and remounted Arjuna's chariot. Then, after taking up the reins, Lord Kṛṣṇa blew upon his mighty Pāṇcajanya conchshell so that he entire sky became filled with its awesome vibration. Thereafter, all of the Kuru heroes rushed at Arjuna, showering upon him their torrents of arrows. However, Arjuna counteracted all of these arrows and then he invoked an awesome Mahendra weapon. As a result, torrential showers of blazing arrows were produced, checking the entire Kaurava army. The Kaurava soldiers then became very fearful while seeing their companions slaughtered in great numbers and while repeatedly hearing the twanging of the Gāndiva bow above the awful din of battle. Due to the great massacre, a ghastly river of blood, fat, and marrow was created, and a terrible dread entered the hearts of the Kauravas as the Pāṇḍava warriors applauded Arjuna's blazing prowess. As the influence of the Mahendra weapon continued to spread all over the battlefield, creating a scene which resembled the destruction of the universe, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Duryodhana decided to withdraw their army for the day. The sun was setting, and so the Pāṇḍavas also retired, and that night Arjuna was glorified even in the Kaurava camp, for he had slain 10,000 chariot warriors and 700 elephants during the course of the day.

As the battle resumed after sunrise the next morning, Bhīṣma and Arjuna became engaged in a single combat. Abhimanyu then joined Arjuna, displaying wonderful prowess, but soon, the father and son became surrounded by all the charioteers of the Trigartas, Madras, and Kekayas. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then arrived with a large army, taking a lot of the pressure off Arjuna and Subhadrā's son.
Meanwhile, as Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard from Sañjaya about how the Kaurava army was being repeatedly routed by the Pāṇḍavas, he finally exclaimed with great anguish, "Alas, Destiny is certainly stronger than human exertion, for my son's superior army is meeting with defeat!"
Sañjaya replied, "O King, you should not blame Destiny for your woes, because the entire responsibility for this war rests upon you."
Śalya fought with Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and when he broke the Pañcāla prince's bow, Abhimanyu entered the fray. Duryodhana, Vikarṇa, and
other Dhṛtarāṣṭras then moved in to protect Śalya, while Bhima, Nakula, Sahadeva, and the sons of Draupādi came to oppose them. Thus, ten great chariot-warriors fought on each side, while the remainder of both armies stood aside in order to become spectators. After a brief exchange of arrows, Bhima took up his mighty club with a desire to end the battle then and there, and thus he assumed a very frightening feature. Upon seeing this, all of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra began fleeing fearfully, except Duryodhana, who urged 10,000 elephants of the Māgadha army to attack Bhīma in response, Bhīma jumped down from his chariot, club in hand, and while roaring like a lion, he impetuously charged at the elephants. Thereafter, as Bhima proceeded to exterminate the elephants of the Māgadha army, Nakula, Sahadeva, Abhimanyu, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and Draupādi’s sons joined him by severing the heads of the elephant warriors with their sharp arrows. Bhima smashed innumerable elephants while ranging through their ranks, each with a single stroke of his club. Soon, the elephants began to panic, and while stampeding, they crushed to death many of their own soldiers. While whirling his mace, Bhīma seemed to resemble Lord Śiva at the time of the universal destruction. Then, after driving away all of the elephants, Bhīma stood triumphantly on the battlefield, and seeing this, the enraged Duryodhana urged the entire Kaurava army against him. Thereafter, Bhīma single-handedly checked all of the Kaurava warriors, and thus he appeared just like the shore which stops the great ocean. Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Śīkhaṇḍī, Abhimanyu, and the sons of Draupādi then came to assist, and with their support, Bhīma rushed at the Kaurava army and ranged throughout their ranks, creating a great massacre. With the ease of an elephant crushing a clump of reeds on the shore of a lake, Bhīma smashed the Kauravas’ chariots and mangled the enemy soldiers. He dragged the warriors down from their chariots and killed them with his mace so that soon he became covered all over with blood, fat, and flesh.

As the Kaurava army was thus being routed, Bhīṣma suddenly rushed at Bhīma. Then, as Bhīma ran to meet Bhīṣma, Sātyaki attacked the grandsire so forcefully that all of the supporting Kaurava warriors entered the fray. Bhīma turned to face the Dhṛtarāṣṭras, and they in turn showered their arrows upon him. At this time, a chariot arrived for
him, and so Bhīma mounted upon it and then rushed at the Dhṛtarāṣṭras. When he saw Duryodhana afflicting his driver, Bhīma became highly enraged and immediately broke the Kaurava king's bow in half. Duryodhana angrily took up another bow and then pierced Bhīma in the chest with a powerful arrow, making him faint onto the floor of his chariot. Bhīma quickly regained consciousness, however, and after piercing Duryodhana with arrows, he attacked Śalya so severely that the ruler of the Madras had to be carried away from the battlefield. Fourteen of the Dhṛtarāṣṭras then ganged up on Bhīma. Although he was certainly pained by their onslaught of arrows, Bhīma pounced upon these Dhṛtarāṣṭras just as Garuḍa attacks a bunch of snakes. In a matter of minutes, Bhīma killed eight of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, and so the rest all quickly fled in fear.

Bhīṣma then ordered the Kaurava warriors to seize Bhīma, and so Bhagadatta, the king of the Prägyotisās, led the attack while riding upon his gigantic elephant. Bhagadatta struck Bhīma in the chest with a mighty arrow, causing him to collapse down upon his seat while supporting himself with his hand upon the flagpole. At this, Ghaṭotkaca became highly agitated with rage, and after making himself invisible, he began to create mystic illusions that were very fearful to all of the warriors. Ghaṭotkaca then suddenly reappeared in a fierce form riding upon Airāvata, one of the dik-gajās whom he had created with his mystic power of illusion. Behind Ghaṭotkaca were more Rākṣasas, riding upon the other three dik-gajās, and these four elephants began to attack Bhagadatta’s carrier by piercing it on all sides with their sharp tusks. Bhīṣma then ordered the great heroes of the Kaurava army to go and rescue Bhagadatta, and when Droṇa and others responded, many Pāṇḍava warriors followed them from behind. As the Kaurava army advanced towards him, Ghaṭotkaca roared ferociously, and upon seeing this great eagerness for battle, Bhīṣma turned to Droṇa and said, "It will not be fruitful for us to fight with Bhīma's son now, for at the moment, he is unconquerable. The day is now drawing to a close and our army is very fatigued. Therefore, let us retire our forces and resume fighting the next morning when we are fresh."

Thus, being afraid of Ghaṭotkaca, Bhīṣma ordered the withdrawal of the Kaurava army under the pretext of impending nightfall. The Kaurava
warriors were also terrified at the thought of approaching Ghaṭotkaca, and so they happily obeyed the grandsire's command. When the Pāṇḍava warriors saw that the Kaurava army was giving up the fight, they shouted with joy and triumphantly blew upon their conchshells. The Kaurava warriors thus felt very ashamed at their defeat as they returned to their military camp. The Pāṇḍava warriors then worshipped Bhima and Ghaṭotkaca, keeping them in the front as they departed from the battlefield.

Duryodhana had become very depressed on account of the death of his brothers, and he sat silently for a long while, shedding tears of grief while absorbed in contemplation on the day's events. Meanwhile, in Hastināpura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra inquired, "O Sañjaya, how is it that the Pāṇḍavas are able to repeatedly vanquish my son's mighty army? What austerities did they perform and what benedictions did they receive as a result? Destiny is surely dealing me a heavy blow, for the extermination on my sons is certainly at hand."

Sañjaya replied, "O King, you should not be surprised to hear about how the Pāṇḍavas are defeating your sons and their allies. Not only are the Pāṇḍavas powerful warriors, but they are highly virtuous, and victory always takes the side of the righteous. Your sons are destined to be vanquished because they are so wicked and cruel. They are now reaping the harvest of their previous sinful acts. "O King, on the fourth night of the great battle, your son had approached Bhīṣma with the same thought in his mind as you are now disclosing to me. Therefore, please listen as I continue to narrate all of the events which took place at the holy place of pilgrimage, Kurukṣetra."

Duryodhana inquired, "O Grandsire, how is it possible that the Pāṇḍavas are repeatedly vanquishing the great Kuru heroes, who are capable of withstanding the onslaught of the entire population of the three worlds?"

Bhīṣma replied, "O King, do you not remember how you were repeatedly advised to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas? Even now, it is not too late, for if you regret your past mistakes, then peace can still be negotiated. My dear Duryodhana, the Pāṇḍavas are unslayable because they are under the protection of Lord Kṛṣṇa. In this regard, I shall tell you about something that had happened long, long ago.
"Once, all of the great demigods and celestial ṛṣis worshipped Lord Brahmā on the Gandhamādana mountain. The grandsire of the universe then suddenly saw a blazingly effulgent chariot appear overhead, and by dint of his meditational prowess, he could understand that this was Lord Viṣṇu. Thus, along with the demigods and ṛṣis, Brahmā stood up and began to offer selected prayers in glorification of the Supreme Lord. In these prayers, Lord Brahmā very nicely described how Lord Viṣṇu is the ultimate goal of all yoga processes and the refuge of all living beings. It is Lord Viṣṇu who is the original cause of the creation, for it is He who reveals the universal form to Brahmā after bringing forth all necessary ingredients for a cosmic manifestation. After hearing these prayers, Lord Viṣṇu replied, 'My dear Brahmā, I know the thoughts which are dwelling within your mind, and I shall soon incarnate in order to accomplish the mission of the demigods.' "After saying this, Lord Viṣṇu disappeared, while all of the demigods and ṛṣis looked on with great wonder. The demigods and ṛṣis then inquired from Lord Brahmā about the person whom he had worshipped, and in reply, the grandsire explained, 'O Celestials, I have been conversing with the Supreme Lord of the universe, Who is referred to in the Vedas and Upaniṣads as "Tat" (that). I have requested Him to descend upon the earth in order to annihilate the asuras who had taken birth in human society after having been slain in battle. My dear demigods and great sages, Lord Viṣṇu has already appeared on the earth as Sarayana ṛṣi, and He is accompanied by His eternal associate, Nara. Even though the Lord appears in a human-like form, He remains unchanged as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, full of unlimited potencies. Thus, the Supreme Lord should never be disrespected or considered to be a mere human being when He descends upon the earth as an incarnation.' "After thus instructing them in this way, Lord Brahmā dismissed the demigods and ṛṣis, and thereafter he returned to his own abode. My dear Duryodhana, I have learned from Paraśurāma, Nārada Muni, Mārkaṇḍeya ṛṣi, Vyāsadeva, and other great authorities that Nārāyaṇa ṛṣi has now appeared in the Yadu dynasty as Lord Kṛṣṇa, and Nara has appeared as Arjuna. You were repeatedly forbidden to fight against the Supreme Lord, and yet you stubbornly disregarded this advice. Therefore, I consider you to be no better than a wicked Rākṣasa, for who else but you
could hate the divine Nara and Nārāyaṇa? Success always resides with Lord Kṛṣṇa, for He is the reservoir and controller of all potencies. Because the Supreme Personality of Godhead is now supporting the Pāṇḍavas, there is absolute certainty that they will come out victorious."

Duryodhana then requested, "O Grandsire, please further delineate the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa, for I am becoming eager to hear of them."

Bhīṣma replied, "O King, it is Lord Kṛṣṇa, in His expanded form as Mahā-Viṣṇu, who generates the innumerable universes in seed-like forms. He then enters into each universe as Garbhodaśāyī Viṣṇu, and at last He expands Himself as the all-pervading Paramātmā. This Kṣirodaśāyī Viṣṇu is the source of all the incarnations within the universe and it is unto Him that the demigods look for protection. My dear Duryodhana, it is Lord Kṛṣṇa whom all of the great sages worship and meditate upon, and it is His supreme eternal abode that is their ultimate destination. Therefore you should also develop love for Kṛṣṇa, for it is He who is the Supreme Soul of everyone, including yourself."

After hearing about Lord Kṛṣṇa from Bhīṣma Duryodhana actually began to regard Him very highly. Bhīṣma then urged, "O King, make peace with the Pāṇḍavas, for they are Lord Kṛṣṇa’s beloved devotees. If you do not do so, then you will be doomed to destruction."

Bhīṣma then stopped speaking, and after worshipping the grandsire, Duryodhana returned to his own tent and laid down to take rest.

Early the next morning, Bhīṣma arrayed the Kaurava army in a makara formation and so the Pāṇḍavas countered with a śyena arrangement. Soon after the fight began, Bhīma penetrated deep into the Kaurava army. While remembering how eight of his brothers had been slain the previous day, Duryodhana became very fearful. Going to Droṇācārya, the Kaurava king urged, "O Preceptor, you must do whatever is necessary to kill the Pāṇḍavas, for if left unchecked, they will soon destroy my entire army."

Droṇācārya then set out, and as soon as he began to penetrate the Pāṇḍava army, Sātyaki confronted him. At the same time, Bhīṣma attacked Bhīma in order to protect the Dhṛtarāṣṭras, and as a result of this fierce duel, the battlefield soon became strewn over with countless severed bodily limbs and slaughtered animals. Duryodhana then joined
Bhīṣma, and so Arjuna came to Bhīma's aid. Arjuna twanged his Gāṇḍiva bow and blew upon his Devadatta conchshell while Lord Krṣṇa blew upon the Pāñcajanya, and thus a great fear penetrated the hearts of the Kaurava warriors. Bhīṣma cut Bhīma's bow in half, but then Sātyaki came right up to the grandsire while piercing him with numerous arrows. Bhīṣma retaliated by killing Sātyaki's driver however, and the unguided horses proceeded to carry the Yadu hero away from battle. Aśvatthāmā then confronted Arjuna, hoping to take the pressure off Bhīṣma. Arjuna was reluctant to fight wholeheartedly against Aśvatthāmā, however, in consideration of his being a brāhmaṇa and the son of his preceptor. Abhimanyu then blazed up heroically, slaying many Kaurava warrior, and so Duryodhana's son, Lakṣmaṇa, came to oppose him. Although Lakṣmaṇa fought bravely, Abhimanyu soon killed his four horses and charioteer. Kṛpa took Lakṣmaṇa up onto his chariot, and then bore him out of the range of Abhimanyu's arrows.

All the while, Bhīṣma was slaying innumerable Pāṇḍava warriors, and similarly, Sātyaki was creating a great slaughter in the Kaurava ranks. Duryodhana then sent 10,000 chariot warriors against Sātyaki, but with the use of celestial weapons, the Yadu hero quickly killed them all. After performing this wonderful feat, Sātyaki approached Bhūriśravas, who responded by showering upon him innumerable arrows. Indeed, Bhūriśravas' attack was so violent that all of the warriors who were supporting Sātyaki abandoned him out of fear. Sātyaki's ten sons then surrounded Bhūriśravas, and although they continually showered him with arrows, the son of Somadatta counteracted them all. Bhūriśravas then broke all the bows of Sātyaki's sons, and after doing so, he quickly severed their heads one after the other. At this, Sātyaki let out a loud roar and rushed impetuously at Somadatta's son. Then, when their chariots came so close together that they actually touched, Sātyaki and Bhūriśravas killed each others horses. The two warriors then jumped to the ground and unsheathed their swords. However, before they could encounter one another, Bhima came and took Sātyaki upon his chariot while Duryodhana picked up Bhūriśravas.

Later in the day, all of the Pāṇḍavas combined together to fight with Bhīṣma, and at that time, Arjuna annihilated 25,000 chariot-warriors that had been urged against him by Duryodhana. Finally, as the sun
began to set, Bhīṣma became concerned about the fatigue of his horses and so he ordered the Kaurava army to retire. This time, both armies were glad to gain some respite, for the intense fighting that had taken place that day left them exhausted and full of fear and anxiety.

Early the next morning, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira ordered Dhṛṣṭadyumna to arrange the Pāṇḍava forces in a makara formation, and so Bhīṣma countered with a crane-shaped arrangement. At the beginning of the day, Bhīma and Arjuna continued their massacre of the Kaurava soldiers. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "O Saṅjaya, since our warriors are repeatedly vanquished, in spite of their being protected by the greatest military commanders, Bhīṣma and Droṇa it must be due to Destiny alone. Indeed, in the same way, it must be due to the will of the Creator that Duryodhana never listened to the good advice which was given to him by myself, Vidura, and so many others."

Saṅjaya replied, "My dear king, this great calamity has come about due to your own fault alone. Your foolish son could not see the danger in creating enmity with the Pāṇḍavas. However, even though you could understand the disastrous consequences, you still condoned Duryodhana's sinister plans."

That morning, while ranging through the Kaurava ranks, creating a great slaughter of men and animals, Bhīma came upon the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The Dhṛtarāṣṭras immediately surrounded Bhīma, desiring to gain revenge, and they were aided by thousands of chariot-warriors. Bhīma then took up his mace and got down from his chariot in order to fight with his enemies.

Dhṛṣṭadyumna had seen Bhīma enter the Kaurava ranks alone and so he left aside fighting with Droṇa in order to come to his aid. Thereafter, when Dhṛṣṭadyumna came upon Bhīma's empty chariot, he momentarily became overwhelmed with grief, thinking that the great Pāṇḍava hero had been slain. With a voice that was choked with tears, Dhṛṣṭadyumna made inquiries from Bhīma's charioteer, Viśoka, who then informed him of how Bhīma had dismounted in order to attack the Kauravas on foot. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then followed the path consisting of innumerable dead elephants which had been smashed by Bhīma's mace. Soon, he saw the heroic son of Vāyu, slaughtering the enemy warriors. However, since
Bhima was surrounded by the Dhṛtarāṣṭras, and appeared to be greatly afflicted by their weapons. Dhṛṣṭadyumna quickly went and took him up onto his chariot. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then extracted all of the arrows which were sticking in Bhima's body, and thereafter embraced him with great affection.

When Duryodhana saw how Bhima and Dhṛṣṭadyumna were now on the same chariot, he urged his brothers to launch an all-out attack. Thereafter, when the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra began showering their arrows, Dhṛṣṭadyumna became highly enraged, and with a desire to kill them all, he invoked the Pramohana weapon. As a result, the Dhṛtarāṣṭras fell into a stupor, and upon seeing this, the Kaurava warriors who were supporting them fled due to fear. Droṇa could see how all of the Dhṛtarāṣṭras were deprived of their senses and so he quickly utilized the Prajñā weapon and thus neutralized the Pramohana weapon.

Meanwhile, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became very anxious when he could not see either Bhima or Dhṛṣṭadyumna. He then ordered twelve great chariot-warriors to penetrate the Kaurava army and come to their rescue. A formation called Sucimukha (needle-mouth) was then arranged, with Abhimanyu at the head, followed by Draupadi's sons, the Kaikeya, Dhṛṣṭaketu, and a large army. Since the Kaurava army had already been greatly afflicted by Bhima, this Pāṇḍava force was able to easily penetrate their ranks.

Droṇa then came to check the Pāṇḍava onslaught and so Bhima had Dhṛṣṭadyumna get up onto the chariot of one of the Kekaya kings in order to oppose the preceptor. Thereafter, Dhṛṣṭadyumna rushed impetuously at Droṇa, but the preceptor immediately broke his bow. Dhṛṣṭadyumna picked up another bow, but as he began to release his arrows, Droṇa cut it in half and then killed his four horses. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then quickly dismounted and got up onto Abhimanyu's chariot. After thus having vanquished his adversary, Droṇa proceeded to rout the rest of the Pāṇḍava army, right in the presence of its commanders.

Meanwhile, having regained their senses, the Dhṛtarāṣṭras once again assailed Bhima who was now riding upon his own chariot. The twelve chariot-warriors sent by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then came to assist Bhima, and so the Dhṛtarāṣṭras became so alarmed that they gave up
fighting and fled. The Pāṇḍava heroes could not bear to see the Dhṛtarāṣṭras escape, however, and so they angrily chased after them. Duryodhana then arrived upon the scene in order to rally his younger brothers, and thereafter, a very fierce battle ensued. Thousands of mutilated bodies soon covered the ground, and at this time, the sun began to set, giving the sky a reddish hue. Duryodhana then rushed at Bhīma, and upon seeing his arch enemy before him, the son of Vāyu challenged, "O vile wretch! The hour has finally arrived that I have long waited for. Finally, I have received the opportunity to relieve the grief of Kuntidevī and Draupadī and also pay back all of the insults which you had heaped upon us. Unless you flee from the battle, you will surely have to give up your life this very day!"

Bhīma then stretched his bow and released numerous arrows which broke Duryodhana's bow, killed his driver and horses, cut down his royal umbrella, and knocked over his royal emblem. After achieving this wonderful feat, Bhīma shouted wildly with joy, while all of the Kaurava warriors stood stunned, staring at their king's blazing elephant insignia which had fallen onto the ground. Bhīma proceeded to pierce Duryodhana with more arrows, but then Kṛpa came and picked up the Kaurava king, and because he was severely wounded, the son of Śaradvān placed him on the floor of his chariot.

Jayadratha then ordered his chariot division, consisting of thousands of warriors, to surround Bhīma, while the sons of Draupadī and Abhimanyu continued fighting with the Dhṛtarāṣṭras. The fighting thus became highly intense, and just as the sun was setting, Bhīṣma began to rout the Pāṇḍava army. Because the enemy was fleeing and the sky was already growing dark, Bhīṣma ordered the retirement of his forces for the night, and so the Pāṇḍavas followed suit. Thereafter, in his tent, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra affectionately smelled the heads of Bhīma and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, for he was highly relieved to see that they were still alive and well.

While the Kauravas were arranging their army the next morning, Duryodhana approached Bhīṣma and expressed his anguish as follows: "O Grandsire, yesterday, the Pāṇḍavas easily penetrated our army and inflicted upon it very heavy losses. Indeed, my own wounds are still
giving me great pain. Even more painful, however, is my grief at seeing how you and Drona stand aside as spectators while the Pāṇḍava warriors vanquish my soldiers without impediment. O Bhīṣma, I beg you to defeat the Pāṇḍavas for my sake. You shook remember that it is your sacred duty to annihilate the enemy without giving sway to persona sentiment." Bhīṣma cheerlessly laughed and then replied, "O King, I will surely fight to the best of my ability against all of the Pāṇḍava warriors. However, you should not expect that such numerous and illustrious heroes are going to be easily defeated. Still, I hereby vow to give up all concern for life and penetrate the Pāṇḍava army, either to vanquish them or be slain while attempting to do so."

Duryodhana became very pleased by these heroic words. The grandsire then said, "O King, even though you have many, many warriors who are prepared to lay down their lives for your sake, and although these warriors are competent of vanquishing the assembled demigods, still, the Pāṇḍavas will never be defeated, for they are under the protection of Lord Kṛṣṇa. I know this for a fact, and yet, at the same time, I can assure you that I shall fight wholeheartedly."

Bhīṣma then gave Duryodhana a wonderful herb, and after applying this medicine, all of the Kaurava king's pain went away, and his body became completely healed. Bhīṣma then arrayed the Kaurava army in a maṇḍala formation, and in turn, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira arranged his force in a vajra formation. From the very onset, Suśarmā and the Trigartas launched a massive attack upon their avowed enemy, Arjuna. However, Arjuna invoked his Aindra weapon which routed the entire Trigarta army, and upon seeing this, Bhīṣma rushed at Kunti's son. Duryodhana then went to Suśarmā and said, "O King, Bhīṣma has vowed to fight recklessly against Arjuna today, and so you and the Trigartas must support him to the best of your ability."

Meanwhile, Virāṭa fought with Drona, piercing him severely with his arrows. Becoming enraged, Drona retaliated by killing Virāṭa's driver and horses, forcing the matsya king to get down from his chariot. Virāṭa then fled out of fear, considering Drona to be irresistible. Aśvatthāmā killed Śikhaṇḍi's horses and driver, thus forcing him to get down from his disabled chariot. Then, taking up a sword and shield, Śikhaṇḍi proceeded to defend himself wonderfully from the onslaught of
Asvatthamā's arrows. However, Asvatthamā soon cut that sword and shield to pieces, and so, picking up one of the broken fragments of the shield, Śikhaṇḍī violently hurled it at the son of Droṇa. Then, as Asvatthamā was engaged in cutting off that missile, Śikhaṇḍī mounted upon Sātyaki's chariot and left the scene of battle.

Sātyaki attacked Alambuṣa, but the Rākṣasa soon broke his bow and pierced him with numerous arrows. Then, by utilizing his powers of illusions, Alambuṣa showered so many arrows that it appeared as if Sātyaki had become completely covered. Sātyaki was undaunted, however, and by invoking an Aindra weapon, he simultaneously foiled the Rākṣasas illusions and covered him with a shower of arrows. Alambuṣa then fled from the scene of battle, and in response, Sātyaki roared victoriously.

Dhṛṣṭadyumna broke Duryodhana's bow and then killed his horses. The Kaurava king jumped down from his chariot and then rushed at Dhṛṣṭadyumna while wielding an upraised sword. However, Śakuni quickly came, and after making Duryodhana desist, he took him up onto his chariot and bore him away from the field of battle. Being left unopposed, Dhṛṣṭadyumna proceeded to create a great slaughter in the Kaurava ranks.

The great atiratha Kṛṭavarmā fought with Bhīma, but the heroic son of Vāyu soon killed his charioteer and horses and then cut down his emblem. Thereafter, as Bhīma proceeded to pierce Kṛṭavarmā all over his body with arrows, the Yadu hero turned away from battle by getting up onto Vṛṣaka's chariot.

Irāvān fought with the Avantī kings, Vinda and Anuvinda. Then, when his horses were slain by Ulūpī's son, Anuvinda got up onto Vinda's chariot. The two brothers thus continued to fight by showering their arrows, but Irāvān soon killed Vinda's charioteer so that the unguided horses carried the Avantī kings away from the battlefield.

Bhagadatta appeared exceedingly ferocious while riding upon his colossal elephant. Indeed, the very sight of him approaching made the Pāṇḍava soldiers flee in all directions. Ghaṭotkaca then took the initiative and approached Bhagadatta, and when they saw this, the Pāṇḍava forces rallied. However, after a brief exchange of arrows, Bhagadatta killed Ghaṭotkaca's horses. Bhīma's son then desperately
hurled a fierce dart, but when Bhagadatta easily broke it into pieces, the Rākṣasa hero became afraid for his life and desisted from fighting. After an exchange of arrows, Śalya killed Nakula's horses. Nakula ascended Sahadeva's chariot, and thus the twin sons of Mādrī continued fighting together. Then, while rushing toward Śalya, Sahadeva pierced him with a powerful arrow which caused him to sit down dazed upon the seat of his chariot. Feeling severe pain, Śalya began to lose consciousness, and so his driver quickly carried him away from the battlefield. Having thus vanquished their maternal uncle, the twins shouted with joy and then triumphantly blew upon their conchshells.

At noon, as Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira fought fiercely with Śrutāyu, he suddenly knocked down his royal emblem. At this, Śrutāyu attacked Yudhiṣṭhira more violently with his arrows, making the Pāṇḍava king become so highly enraged that even the demigods in heaven began to tremble, thinking that he might cause the destruction of the universe. As the demigods and great rṣis began to pray for the welfare of the world, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira controlled his anger and thereafter broke Śrutāyu's bowstring and then pierced him severely in the chest. Śrutāyu momentarily became dazed and so Yudhiṣṭhira quickly took advantage of the lapse to kill his horses and driver. Overcome by fear, Śrutāyu then fled from the battlefield, and while the Kaurava warriors who protected him followed, Yudhiṣṭhira was able to slaughter them in great numbers. While fighting fiercely, Kṛpa broke Cekitāna's bow and killed his horses and driver. Cekitāna then picked up his mace, and after jumping down from his disabled chariot, he rushed forward with reckless abandon and killed Kṛpa's driver and horses. Kṛpa then also jumped to the ground, and as he proceeded to release volleys of arrows, Cekitāna hurled his gigantic mace, intending to kill the preceptor. However, Kṛpa skillfully checked the mace's progress by discharging thousands of arrows, and upon seeing his attempt foiled Cekitāna unsheathed his sword. Then, as Cekitāna rushed at him impetuously, Kṛpa threw down his bow, took out his sword, and ran to meet his assailant. When they met, Kṛpa and Cekitāna struck each other simultaneously with their swords, and indeed, both fell down to the ground unconscious, partly due to the force of the blows, and partly because of fatigue. Kārakaṛṣa then quickly came and picked up Cekitāna while Śakuni took Kṛpa away on his
When three of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons rushed at Abhimanyu, the son of Subhadrā soon deprived them of their chariots. However, keeping Bhīma's vow in mind, Abhimanyu refrained from killing them. Bhīṣma then rushed to the aid of the Dhṛtarāṣṭras and so Arjuna urged Kṛṣṇa to take him to where Abhimanyu was staying. In order to protect Bhīṣma, Suśārmā and the Trigartas then came forward. Arjuna quickly drove them back, however, and after slaying many of the Trigarta chariot-warriors, he continued to advance toward Bhīṣma. The other Pāṇḍavas then came to Arjuna's aid, and as the five brothers combined attacked Bhīṣma, all of the Kaurava warriors showered arrows upon them. Bhīṣma then broke Śikhanḍi's bow, causing the son of Drupada to run away out of fear, and upon seeing this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira chastised him by saying, "O Prince, have you forgotten your vow to kill Bhīṣma? Why are you now acting like a coward by fleeing from our enemy? Arjuna has now come to attack the grandsire and so you can rest assured of his protection."

At last, Śikhanḍi took courage and returned to the fray, determined to slay Bhīṣma. The grandsire then broke Yudhiṣṭhira's bow and knocked down his royal insignia. Upon seeing how his elder brother had become overcome by fear, Bhīma put down his bow and picked up his mighty club. Getting down from his chariot, Bhīma first of all rushed at Jayadratha, who was stationed nearby. Although the king of the Sindhus pierced the advancing Bhīma with numerous arrows, the undaunted son of Vāyu came right up to his chariot and killed his horses. The son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra named Citrasena then rushed a Bhīma while riding upon his chariot. In response, Bhīma ran to meet Citrasena, and while raising his mace menacingly, he roared terrifyingly. When they saw Bhīma in this ferocious feature, all of the Kaurava soldiers began to run away. Then, when Bhīma hurled his mace Citrasena managed to jump down to the ground, while his chariot, horses and driver were all smashed to pieces. Vikarṇa then quickly came and took away his brother to safety on his chariot.

Bhīṣma next rushed at Yudhiṣṭhira, and upon seeing this, all of the Pāṇḍava warriors considered the Pāṇḍava king to be already in the jaws of death. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira showered his well-aimed arrows at
Bhīṣma, as did Nakula and Sahadeva, who were protecting his chariot wheels. Still, Bhīṣma killed Yudhiṣṭhira's horses, and so the king had to get up onto Nakula's chariot. Then, as Bhīṣma continued showering his arrows Yudhiṣṭhira ordered the Pāṇḍava army to launch an all-out attack. The result, however, was that the grandsire proceeded to create a great massacre of the onrushing foe. Śīkhanḍi them charged at Bhīṣma, challenging him to fight. However, the grandsire remembered the prince's former femininity and thus carefully avoided him. At last, the sun began to set, and so both armies retired to their respective camps for the night. In the evening, the warriors used to refresh themselves by enjoying musical entertainment for some time, and in this way they briefly forgot the trials of battle.

After the two armies had rushed at each other the next morning, Bhīṣma and the Dhṛtarāṣṭras began to create a great slaughter among the Pāṇḍava warriors. Bhīma then came to oppose Bhīṣma, and after a brief skirmish, he managed to kill the grandsires charioteer so that the unguided horses carried him away from the battlefield. Bhīma then quickly beheaded the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Sunābha, and when seven more Dhṛtarāṣṭras angrily rushed at him in retaliation, the heroic son of Vāyu severed their heads as well. All of the other Dhṛtarāṣṭras then fled in fear, considering that Bhīma's vow to kill them would certainly come true. Duryodhana became very aggrieved upon witnessing the destruction of his brothers. Going to Bhīṣma, the Kaurava king complained, "My dear grandsire, you seem to be taking part in this battle only as a spectator. Because of this, all of my brothers are being slain." Bhīṣma tolerated this insult and then replied, "O King, you may remember how Vidura, Droṇa, Gāndhārī and numerous others, including myself, had previously warned you that this would happen. The Pāṇḍavas are unconquerable and thus both Droṇa and myself will surely have to lay down our lives in this battle. Indeed, you should also fight wholeheartedly with the Pāṇḍavas and thus attain to heaven along with the rest of us."

At noon, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira ordered all of the Pāṇḍava warriors to attack Bhīṣma and thus a very fierce battle took place. Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Sātyaki, Śīkhanḍi, Virāṭa, Drupada and many others attacked the
grandsire while Arjuna and Draupadi's sons fought with Duryodhana. And Bhima, Ghatotkaca, and Abhimanyu contended with the remaining Kaurava warriors. The fighting was very fierce, and both sides suffered exceedingly heavy losses in this triple encounter. Sakuni's six younger brothers, accompanied by a large army, penetrated the Pándava ranks, and so Írāvān and his warriors advanced to check them. Írāvān was the son of Ulūpī, the daughter of the Nāga king, Airāvata. She was a widow, for her husband had been devoured by Garuḍa, and because she was childless and thus very despondent, her father had urged her to approach Arjuna. Arjuna had accepted Ulūpī as she had come to him because she was childless, and from their union, Írāvān was born. Írāvān's wicked uncle Takṣaka hated Arjuna, however, and so he would not allow the prince to enjoy any of the privileges which are afforded to those who are descendants of Nāgas. Thus, Ulūpī had to bring up her son in the nether regions while living practically like an outcast. When Írāvān heard that his father was residing in Indraloka, he went there to see him. While standing before Arjuna with folded hands, Írāvān introduced himself, and when the Pándava hero understood that the prince was his son, he embraced him with great joy. Arjuna then requested Írāvān to lend assistance at the time when the great battle to regain his kingdom would be fought. Írāvān readily agreed to do this and then he departed for Nāgaloka. Írāvān's soldiers began to massacre the enemy, and so Sakuni's brothers surrounded Arjuna's son while riding upon their horses, and they greatly afflicted him with their lances. While tolerating the pain of his wounds, Írāvān countered with showers of arrows, almost making the brothers of Sakuni fall unconscious. Then, taking advantage of the opportunity, Írāvān unsheathed his sword, and after jumping down from his chariot, he rushed at Sakuni's brothers in order to kill them. The six brothers had already recovered, however, and they soon surrounded Írāvān in the hopes of taking him captive. And yet, Írāvān wielded his sword so impetuously that he cut off their limbs, causing five of the six brothers to fall down dead upon the battlefield. Upon seeing this, Duryodhana ordered Alambuṣa to attack Írāvān. First of all, Alambuṣa created 2,000 fierce Rākṣasas by utilizing his powers of illusion, and they charged at the enemy while riding upon swift horses.
Irāvān's soldiers quickly killed all these Rākṣasas, however, and so Alambuṣa himself next rushed at Arjuna's son. Irāvān cut Alambuṣa's bow in half and so in order to protect himself, the Rākṣasa rose up into the sky. Irāvān, who was able to change his form at will, also flew up into the air and began cutting Alambuṣa's limbs to pieces. By his mystic prowess, Alambuṣa was able to once again make his body whole, but Irāvān continued to hack away at him with an ax while roaring deaeningly, and thus torrents of blood flowed from the Rākṣasa's body. Becoming mad with rage, Alambuṣa assumed a more colossal form, and at this time a Nāga relative of Irāvān's mother came there, and along with other gigantic Nāgas, completely covered the Rākṣasa's body. At this, Alambuṣa took the form of Garuḍa and quickly devoured all of these snakes. While beholding this setback, Irāvān became momentarily bewildered, and taking advantage of this lapse, Alambuṣa quickly rushed forward, sword in hand, and severed the Nāga prince's head from his body.

When Ghaṭotkaca saw Irāvān slain, he uttered such terrible roars that most of the Kaurava warriors trembled with fear and began to run about in all directions. Ghaṭotkaca then assumed a terrifying form and, along with numerous other Rākṣasas, he attacked the fleeing army. Upon seeing how his soldiers were about to be exterminated, Duryodhana came to oppose Ghaṭotkaca along with 10,000 elephants. The infuriated Rākṣasa army soon destroyed all these elephants, however, and so Duryodhana impetuously rushed at the enemy in order to retaliate. Then, as the Kaurava king engaged in slaughtering large numbers of Rākṣasas, Ghaṭotkaca became more enraged. Charging at Duryodhana while wielding his bow, Bhima's son vowed to repay his debt to his fathers and step-mother.

Ghaṭotkaca then showered numerous arrows upon Duryodhana, but while tolerating them, the Kaurava king pierced him in return. Ghaṭotkaca then picked up a fierce dart, desiring to kill Duryodhana outright. Bhagadatta saw the great danger at hand, and so he quickly placed his gigantic elephant in front of the Kaurava king's chariot. Upon seeing how Duryodhana had become covered from his view, Ghaṭotkaca became mad with rage and hurled the dart anyway, killing the colossal elephant. While Bhagadatta jumped safely to the ground, all
of the Kaurava soldiers panicked and fled from the scene of battle. By hearing Ghatotkaca's fierce shouts, Bhīṣma could understand that he was fighting with Duryodhana. He therefore ordered thousands of chariot-warriors to come to the Kaurava king's aid. Thus, Drona, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, Jayadratha, Bhūriśravas, Somadatta, and Śalya staged a massive attack, and yet, Ghaṭotkaca stood firm, bow in hand, and thus a terrible battle ensued between the Rākṣasas and the Kauravas. Indeed, the enraged Ghaṭotkaca broke Drona's bow, knocked down Somadatta's royal insignia, and pierced all of the other warriors with his arrows. Finally, when all of the Kaurava heroes became so afflicted that they began retreating, Ghaṭotkaca once again attacked Duryodhana. Numerous Kaurava warriors then bravely came and surrounded Bhīma's son, piercing him with their arrows. In response, Ghaṭotkaca flew up into the air and began to roar loudly again and again.

Upon hearing these terrible shouts, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira understood that Ghaṭotkaca was outnumbered, and so he dispatched Bhīma to the rescue. Thereafter, when the Kaurava soldiers saw Bhīma approaching, followed by Draupadi's sons, Abhimanyu and others, many of them began to flee in fear. Still, an exceedingly fierce battle took place between the great chariot-warriors on both sides, and the Pāṇḍava heroes soon gained the upper hand, forcing the Kauravas to retreat. Duryodhana became highly enraged upon seeing the defeat of his army, and so be impetuously rushed at Bhīma while sending forth showers of arrows. Indeed, Duryodhana was able to break Bhīma's bow and then pierce him so deeply in the chest that, because of the severe pain, the Pāṇḍava hero had to grab onto his flagpole in order to support himself. Ghaṭotkaca and Abhimanyu then rushed to confront Duryodhana, and so Drona ordered numerous Kaurava warriors to come to the king's rescue. Drona himself released showers of arrows in order to check the Pāṇḍava assault, but after recovering, Bhīma responded with such a violent attack that he severely wounded his aged preceptor, making him fall down unconscious onto the floor of his chariot. At this, Aśvatthāmā and Duryodhana became very excited with rage and rushed at Bhīma. When the son of Vāyu saw these two great warriors approaching for battle, he took up his mace and then jumped down from his chariot in order to face them. Bhīma then suddenly rushed at Duryodhana and
Aśvatthāmā, and so all of the Kaurava warriors, headed by Droṇa, covered him with torrents of arrows. Abhimanyu and other Pāṇḍava warriors quickly rushed to Bhīma’s aid. Ghaṭotkaca and the other Rākṣasas then impetuously charged at Aśvatthāmā, but the enraged son of Droṇa responded by slaughtering many of the man-eaters. Ghaṭotkaca then created very fearful illusions which momentarily stunned Aśvatthāmā and made his soldiers turn their backs and flee. These illusions made it appear as if all of the Kaurava warriors were being cut to pieces while the great commanders, such as Droṇa, Duryodhana, Śalya, and Aśvatthāmā ran away in fear. The Kaurava army panicked upon seeing this dreadful sight, and even though Bhīṣma and Sañjaya assured them that it was merely an illusion, the soldiers were so afraid that they refused to turn back. It was late in the afternoon, and the Pāṇḍava warriors shouted victoriously upon seeing the flight of the Kaurava army. Duryodhana then went to Bhīṣma, and with great anguish he humbly said, "O Grandsire, Ghaṭotkaca has completely routed my army. Therefore, I beg you to do something that will somehow enable me to slay this terrible son of Bhīma."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Duryodhana, it is the duty of a king to fight with another king. Therefore, you should fight with Yudhiṣṭhira and the other Pāṇḍavas. Leave Ghaṭotkaca to your leading warriors. Now, let us first of all send Bhagadatta to contend with the ferocious Rākṣasa."

As Bhagadatta advanced onto the battlefield along with his soldiers, Bhīma, Abhimanyu, and Ghaṭotkaca confronted him with the support of the Pāṇḍava army. Bhīma quickly killed the 100 warriors that were protecting Bhagadatta from the rear and so the ruler of the Prāgyotiṣas urged his gigantic elephant to attack the son of Vāyu. The Pāṇḍava army then surrounded Bhagadatta on all sides while showering upon him their weapons. The king tolerated this onslaught, and by continuing to prod his elephant, he made the colossal beast crush thousands of enemy soldiers. At this, Ghaṭotkaca angrily hurled a fierce dart at Bhagadatta, but the latter easily cut it to pieces with his arrows and then retaliated by throwing a blazing lance. Ghaṭotkaca then displayed amazing prowess and dexterity by leaping into the air, catching the lance in his bare hands and breaking it in half over his knee. Indeed, upon seeing this
spectacular feat, even the demigods who were watching from the sky were struck with wonder.
The enraged Bhagadatta then took up his bow, and after piercing all of the Pāṇḍava warriors, he killed Bhīma's horses, cut down his royal emblem and deeply wounded his driver, Viśoka, making him fall to the floor of the chariot. Bereft of his charioteer, Bhīma picked up his mace and jumped down to the ground, causing many of the Kaurava warriors to panic. Arjuna then rushed to Bhīma's aid, and at this time, Bhīma informed Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna about the death of Irāvān. Upon hearing this news, Arjuna became highly aggrieved and then exclaimed, "O Kṛṣṇa, this war is so repugnant and sinful! Simply for the sake of some wealth, we are fighting at the cost of so many lives! It would be much more noble for me to give up my life rather than fight with and kill all of my friends and relatives, simply for some material gain. Now I can understand Yudhiṣṭhīra's wisdom in requesting only five villages in order to avoid this abominable war. However, because the wicked Duryodhana refused even that offer, I am now forced to fight just so that others may not call me a coward. My dear Kṛṣṇa, please take me without delay to where the Kaurava army is stationed upon the battlefield."
Droṇa and the Dhṛtarāṣṭras then rushed at Bhīma, while Bhīma, Kṛpa, Bhagadatta, Suṣarmā, and many others attacked Arjuna. Bhīma soon killed nine of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, causing the rest to run away in fear.
Droṇa tried to check Bhīma by showering his arrows upon him, and yet, the Pāṇḍava hero simultaneously resisted the preceptor's attack and drove away the Dhṛtarāṣṭras in his presence. The sun then sank below the western horizon, and as darkness began to set in, the two armies retired for the night.
At the Kaurava camp, Duryodhana, Śakuni, Duḥśāsana, and Karna consulted with each other in order to ascertain the means whereby the Pāṇḍavas could be defeated. Duryodhana then said, "My dear friends, it is my opinion that our army is being exterminated because Bhīma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, Śalya, and Bhagadatta do not want to fight wholeheartedly against the Pāṇḍavas."
Karna replied, "O King, you should go to Bhīma and request him to step aside. In this way, I will be free to enter the battlefield and slay all of the Pāṇḍavas and their allies. I think that the grandsire is very fond of
fighting, and so he does not want to kill the Pāṇḍavas and thus bring the war to a close."
Duryodhana assured Kṛṣṇa that he would do this, and after taking leave of his associates, he went to Bhīṣma's tent, surrounded by his brothers. Duryodhana then came before the grandsire and implored, "O commander of my forces, you must immediately slay the Pāṇḍavas. Otherwise, if you are thinking to spare them out of kindness, then please step down so that Kṛṣṇa can fight and obtain victory."
Bhīṣma was deeply hurt by these words, but he carefully controlled his anger, and without replying at first, he thought over the matter for some time. Then, while raising his eyes, Bhīṣma said, "My dear Duryodhan, why are you challenging me like this? You should be confident that I always try my best to do that which is for your benefit. Indeed, I am ready to lay down my life on the battlefield for your sake. Unfortunately, you fail to understand that the Pāṇḍavas are invincible. Have you already forgotten all of Arjuna's heroic accomplishments? Do you discount the fact that he is being personally protected by the Lord of the universe, Śrī Kṛṣṇa? Duryodhana, you always view things perversely, just like a man about to die who sees that the trees are made of gold. It was you who provoked this hostility with the Pāṇḍavas and so you should be the one who encounters them in battle. Why don't you defeat the Pāṇḍavas and thus prove what kind of great hero you are? Anyway. because you are challenging me, I hereby vow that I shall fight so fiercely tomorrow that the battle will be talked about for as long as the world continues to exist. I will either slay all of the Pañcālas and Somakas, except Śikhaṇḍī, or else lay down my life upon the battlefield. Now, my dear king, be satisfied with my words and retire for the night."

After listening to Duryodhana's lamentations, Bhīṣma had begun to think seriously about fighting with Arjuna. Understanding this, the next morning, the Kaurava king ordered that all of the great warriors give special protection to the grandsire, especially against the attacks of Śikhaṇḍī, so that he would be free to slay the Pāṇḍavas. Arjuna came to learn of all this, and so, in response, he ordered Dhṛṣṭadyumna to have Śikhaṇḍī attack Bhīṣma under his protection.
From the onset, Abhimanyu inflicted heavy losses upon the Kaurava
army while checking all of the great chariot-warriors. Duryodhana then ordered Alambuṣa to attack Subhadrā's son, and while rushing forward, the Rākṣasa slaughtered a great number of enemy soldiers, causing the Pāṇḍava army to retreat. Indeed, simply upon hearing the Rākṣasa's fierce roar, many soldiers dropped down upon the battlefield deprived of their life due to fear. Draupadī's sons then rushed at Alambuṣa, and they showered their arrows upon him so forcefully that the wounded Rākṣasa soon began to fall unconscious. Alambuṣa quickly recovered, however, and he became so inflamed with rage that his form swelled to twice its normal size. The Rākṣasa then broke all of his adversaries' bows and insignias, and he killed their horses and drivers while simultaneously piercing them with thousands of arrows. Since the sons of Draupadī were now deprived of their chariots, Alambuṣa rushed at them impetuously, but Abhimanyu quickly intervened and thus a great battle took place between the two heroes. Abhimanyu fought so violently that he soon forced the Rākṣasa to retreat. Then, resorting to the use of his powers of illusion, Alambuṣa caused a dense darkness to set in. When everything thus became invisible, Abhimanyu invoked a Sūrya weapon which illuminated all directions as it blazed forth. Abhimanyu then continued to shower his arrows upon Alambuṣa, and even though the Rākṣasa tried to create more illusions, the heroic son of Arjuna was able to neutralize them all. At last, Alambuṣa became afraid for his life, and after abandoning his chariot, he quickly ran away from the battlefield. Abhimanyu then easily slaughtered the Kaurava soldiers without impediment, and so Bhīṣma and the Dhrītarāṣṭras came to check him. Arjuna then rushed to the aid of his son, and Bhīṣma and the sons of Dhrītarāṣṭra, turned to meet him. At this time, the other Pāṇḍavas came to support their brother, and so a very fierce encounter took place.

In that great battle, Sātyaki fought impetuously with Aśvatthāmā, and so Droṇa came to his son's aid. Arjuna countered Droṇa's assault, for, according to the principles of kṣatriya behavior, a preceptor forgets his affection for his student while fighting, and similarly, a disciple disregards his teacher. Suśarmā and the Trigartas then came to assist Droṇa while sending forth showers of arrows. In retaliation, Arjuna invoked a Vāyavya weapon which proceeded to create such strong winds
that not only were many gigantic trees felled, but numerous Trigarta warriors were slain while the rest retreated out of fear. Drona then quickly counteracted the Vāyavya weapon with a Saila weapon, and thus the atmosphere soon became calm.

Duryodhana sent a huge elephant division against Bhīma, who then took up his mace and jumped down from his chariot. Thereafter, as Bhīma proceeded to exterminate this division of elephants, the huge beasts panicked, and in the stampede which followed, they crushed to death many Kaurava soldiers who stood in their path. At noon, Bhīṣma flared up with great energy and began to kill the Pāṇḍava soldiers by the thousands. In order to check the grandsire, all of the great Pāṇḍava chariot-warriors rushed upon the scene, and all of the leading Kaurava heroes joined the fray. In that great conflict, the carnage became so gruesome that many warriors exclaimed, "To hell with Duryodhana, for he has caused the destruction of all the kṣatriyas on earth!"

Duryodhana could hear these painful criticisms, and so he went to Bhīṣma, Drona, Krpa, and Śalya and with very harsh words, he ordered them to fight without further procrastination. After being prodded in this way, the commanders of the Kaurava army resumed fighting with renewed vigor, determined to convince Duryodhana of their eagerness for battle. Thus, even though the Pāṇḍava army, led by Bhīma, Yudhiṣṭhira, Sātyaki, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Nakula, and Sahadeva surrounded Bhīṣma, showering upon him unlimited arrows, the grandsire responded by blazing up like a fire fed with ghee. Indeed, that afternoon, he inflicted the Pāṇḍava forces with devastating losses, slaying more than 14,000 chariot-warriors so that exclamations of woe could be heard on all sides. Upon seeing this grave situation, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "My dear Arjuna, the time has come for you to fight against Bhīṣma. You should remember your vow to kill him and thus fulfill your duty as a kṣatriya."

Arjuna then hung his head down as he listened to Kṛṣṇa. Then, while raising his eyes, Arjuna replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, my alternatives are certainly bleak! Either I will have to kill my superiors and then suffer in hell, or else give up this fight and spend the rest of my life in the forest. My dear Lord, even though I shall execute Your command and fight with Bhīṣma, I must admit that I have no desire to do so."

Arjuna then ordered Kṛṣṇa to take him to where Bhīṣma was on the
battlefield, and when the Pāṇḍava army saw this, they rallied.
Thereafter, when Bhīṣma saw Arjuna approaching, he roared like a lion and
began to send forth torrents of arrows. Arjuna remained undaunted and
retaliated by shooting an arrow to break Bhīṣma's bow to pieces.
Bhīṣma quickly strung another bow, but Arjuna cut that one as well.
The grandsire applauded this feat and then, after picking up another
bow, he continued to shower his arrows upon Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Soon, however, Kṛṣṇa
could see that Arjuna was fighting very mildly, and as a result of this indifference, Bhīṣma was able to slaughter a great many
Pāṇḍava warriors. Indeed, Lord Kṛṣṇa was not able to tolerate Arjuna's
passivity and so, all of a sudden, He jumped down from the chariot. He
picked up a wheel of a chariot from the ground, and while roaring again and again, He rushed at Bhīṣma, desiring to kill him. Upon seeing this, all of those who were in the vicinity became struck with wonder and exclaimed, "Now Bhīṣma is slain!"
Bhīṣma then reverently addressed the onrushing Kṛṣṇa, "O lotus-eyed lord, I bow down to You, who are the supreme master of all the demigods, headed by Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva. Please come and strike me as You wish, for" I am Your eternal servant. I am confident that after having been slain by You in battle, I shall achieve the highest destination."
Meanwhile, Arjuna had jumped down from his chariot, and after
chasing Lord Kṛṣṇa, he finally caught Him in his arms. Still, Lord Kṛṣṇa
continued to drag Arjuna for some distance. Then, at last, Arjuna was able to stop the Lord's progress by grabbing hold of His legs. With great anguish, Arjuna then pleaded, "O Kṛṣṇa, please do not break Your promise by taking part in this battle. Kindly give up Your anger, for I assure You that I shall fight wholeheartedly and slay the grandsire."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then appeared to be exceedingly grave, and without replying, He turned back and remounted Arjuna's chariot. Bhīṣma then resumed fighting, and his dense showers of arrows rained down so forcefully that the entire Pāṇḍava army soon broke and began to flee from the scene of battle. At this time, the sun was setting, and when Yudhiṣṭhira saw that his army was incapable of facing Bhīṣma, he ordered them to withdraw for the night. Thereafter, while returning to their military camp, all of the Kaurava warriors worshipped Bhīṣma for his having vanquished the
Pāṇḍava army. That night, the Pāṇḍavas called for a meeting because they were in great anxiety after having witnessed Bhiṣma's unrivaled prowess. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then lamented, "O Kṛṣṇa, I think that the grandsire is invincible. Therefore, I would rather retire to the forest than become the cause of everyone's destruction."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should not lament. If Arjuna is unwilling to kill Bhiṣma, then I shall do so upon receiving your order. Anyone who is the enemy of the Pāṇḍavas is My enemy, and indeed, for Arjuna's sake, I would be willing to cut the flesh off from My own arm and give it away."

Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Kṛṣṇa, I am convinced that under Your protection we shall certainly come out victorious. However, under no circumstances do I want You to break Your promise. My dear Lord, at the time when I had approached Bhiṣma in order to offer my respects before beginning the battle, the grandsire had explained how he was obliged to fight for Duryodhana, but would at the same time give me advice later on as to how I can achieve victory. O Kṛṣṇa, I think that we should go to Bhiṣma now and request him to disclose the means whereby he can be slain."

Lord Kṛṣṇa liked this idea, and so He replied, "Yes, you should approach Bhiṣma now. Then, according to the advice that he gives, you can arrange your strategy for tomorrow."

The Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa then cast aside their armor and weapons and went to the Kaurava camp. After entering Bhiṣma's tent, they bowed down to him and worshipped him with great respect. In turn, Bhiṣma warmly welcomed them and then asked what he could do for them. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then affectionately requested, "O Grandfather, please tell us how you can be killed so that we can gain victory in this terrible battle and thereby regain our rightful kingdom."

Bhiṣma replied, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, as long as I remain alive, you shall never be able to achieve victory, and thus you should wholeheartedly endeavor to slay me without delay."

Yudhiṣṭhira once again asked, "O Grandsire, by what means can you be vanquished? It appears to me that you are invincible."

Bhiṣma then disclosed, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, it is a fact that for as long as I remain with my weapons in my hands, I am indeed invincible. However,
if I can be influenced to lay aside my weapons, then it is possible for me to be slain. My dear grandson, I have vowed not to fight with Śikhanḍī on account of his former femininity. Therefore, I suggest that Arjuna keep the son of Drupada in front, while attacking me with his arrows. In this way, it may be possible for me to be killed. Except for Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, there is no one on the battlefield who is competent to vanquish me."

After hearing this, the Pāṇḍavas once again worshipped Bhīṣma and then returned to their military camp. Then with his face contorted due to grief, Arjuna said, "O Kṛṣṇa, how can I possibly be expected to fight with my grandfather? When I was a small child, I used to climb upon his lap, thinking that he was my father. Only after a long time did he reluctantly inform me that he was not actually my father, but my grandfather."

Upon hearing this, Kṛṣṇa sternly reprimanded Arjuna for his sentimentality and then once again reminded him of his former vow to kill Bhīṣma. Lord Kṛṣṇa then tried to encourage Arjuna by assuring him that Bhīṣma was actually destined to die in this great battle. Finally, after casting aside his grief, Arjuna said, "O Kṛṣṇa, I know that Śikhanḍī is the ordained slayer of Bhīṣma, and so I shall keep the Pañcāla prince in front of me. As I protect Śikhanḍī by warding off all of the Kaurava warriors, he can attack Bhīṣma without impediment."

In this way, the next day's strategy was decided upon in accordance with Bhīṣma's own advice, and then, the Pāṇḍavas retired for the night.

As the Pāṇḍava army entered the battlefield the next morning, Śikhanḍī was kept in the center. Bhīma and Arjuna protected him on both sides, while Abhimanyu and Draupadi's sons remained at his rear. Right from the start, the Pāṇḍavas assaulted the Kaurava soldiers with great vengeance, forcing them to turn their backs and flee. This was intolerable for Bhīṣma, and while flaring up with rage, he began to consume the Pāṇḍava army. Śikhanḍī then summoned his courage and rushed at Bhīṣma, piercing him in the chest with three arrows. This only served to further enrage the grandsire, and when he saw that it was Śikhanḍī who had wounded him, he laughingly announced, "O prince of the Pañcālas, even if you attack me, I will never fight back, for I still
consider you to be the female whom the Creator originally fashioned."
This remark enraged Śikhaṇḍi and he replied, "You wretch! Rest assured
that I shall slay you this very day in battle!"
Śikhaṇḍi then once again pierced Bhīma with arrows. At the same
time, Arjuna urged him on by saying, "Rush at Bhīma and kill him
quickly. O Śikhaṇḍi, you can attack him without fear, for I will check all
of the Kaurava warriors who dare to oppose you."
Arjuna, Bhīma, and Ghaṭotkaca then proceeded to greatly afflict the
Kaurava warriors and therefore, Duryodhana went to Bhīma and urged
him to slay all of the great Pāṇḍava heroes. Then, after thinking for a
moment about what should be done, Bhīma replied, "O King, even
though I have steadily fulfilled my vow to slay 10,000 enemy warriors
each day, today I promise to complete my full obligation by either killing
the Pāṇḍavas or else laying down my life."
After saying this, Bhīma launched a ferocious attack upon the Pāṇḍava
army. Indeed, on that tenth day, he truly fulfilled his words to
Duryodhana by slaughtering more than 200,000 foot-soldiers, as well as
tens of thousands of chariot-warriors, cavalry, and elephants. Then, as
Bhīma was exterminating the Pāṇḍava forces, Arjuna urged Śikhaṇḍi,
"O Prince, give up your fears and rush at Bhīma. While staying behind
you I shall slay him myself."
Upon hearing Arjuna's command, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Abhimanyu, Virāta,
Drupada, Kuntibhoja, and many other great heroes combined to rush at
Bhīma while the Kaurava warriors came fearlessly to resist them. At
this time, Duḥṣāsana abandoned all fear of death in order to perform a
wonderful feat by checking Arjuna as he was advancing toward the
grandsire. Then, when Duḥṣāsana pierced Arjuna in the forehead with
an arrow and Kṛṣṇa with numerous shafts, the Pāṇḍavas became
inflamed with rage and drove the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra back to the shelter
of Bhīma.
At this time, Droṇa began to observe many inauspicious signs, and since
he was very expert in deciphering their meanings, he could understand
that there would soon be a dreadful conflict between Bhīma and
Arjuna. Droṇa thus ordered his son to come to Bhīma's aid by attacking
Śikhaṇḍi. Kṛpa, Bhagadatta, Śalya, Kṛtavarmā, and Jayadratha then
collectively attacked Bhīma and showered upon him unlimited arrows.
Bhima stood fast, however, and after piercing all of his adversaries in return, he broke Kṛpa's bow with a well aimed arrow. Bhima next killed Jayadratha's horses and driver, making the king of the Sindhus jump down from his chariot. Then, as Jayadratha continued to release his arrows from the ground, Bhima broke his bow in half, forcing him to get up onto Citrasena's chariot. Thereafter, as Bhima continued to check all of the great Kuru warriors, Arjuna came to his aid. In response, Duryodhana ordered Suśarmā and the Trigartas to attack Arjuna, and thus thousands of chariot-warriors rushed forward.

While Bhima and Arjuna simultaneously checked the great Kuru warriors and slaughtered thousands of Trigartas, Bhīṣma and Duryodhana joined the fray while Dhṛṣṭadyumna led the Pāṇḍava army in a counter-attack. Thus, in that great battle, all of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas fought for the sake of Bhīṣma, and the encounter became exceedingly gruesome. For ten days, Bhīṣma had been relentlessly slaughtering the Pāṇḍava warriors, just as Arjuna had been massacring the Kaurava troops. Finally, however, the grandsire gave up all desire to continue fighting, and thus he said to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, I have now given up all desire to protect my body from the onslaught of weapons. Therefore, you and your brothers should attack me wholeheartedly in order to gain victory."

After hearing this, the Pāṇḍavas, placing Śikhaṇḍī at their head, became fully determined to kill Bhīṣma at all costs. Thereafter, as the fighting raged between the Pāṇḍava and Kaurava warriors, the din of the battle, which was accentuated with the blares of conchshells and terrifying shouts, became unbearable. Arjuna repeatedly urged Śikhaṇḍī to rush toward Bhīṣma, but each time the Pañcāla prince would attack, the grandsire would blaze up like an all-consuming fire and thus exterminate innumerable Pāṇḍava warriors. In this way, Bhīṣma killed practically all of the chariot-warriors belonging to the Cedis, Somakas, Kāśis, and Kārūṣas, and indeed, everyone else who came near him. While rushing forward, Śikhaṇḍī would pierce Bhīṣma with his arrows, but the grandsire only retaliated against Arjuna. In fact, the arrows released by Śikhaṇḍī were received laughingly by Bhīṣma, for they caused him very little pain.

Duryodhana then ordered a massive attack upon Arjuna, assuring his
warriors that he would personally take the lead. Thereafter, when the Kaurava warriors fell upon him en masse, Arjuna invoked celestial weapons which covered the entire sky with countless arrows. As a result, numberless Kaurava warriors were slain and, at this time, Arjuna rushed at Duḥśasana, killing his chariot-driver and horses. Arjuna then attacked Viviṃśāti, Kṛpa, Vikarna, and Śalya, depriving them of their chariots so that they had to flee on foot. Because of this, Arjuna proceeded to slaughter the unprotected supporting soldiers, and thus thousands of smashed chariots soon littered the battlefield. Finally, in a fit of rage, Bhīṣma invoked a powerful celestial weapon and then rushed toward where Arjuna was engaged in routing the Kauravas. However, Śikhaṇḍī intercepted Bhīṣma by coming in-between him and Arjuna, causing the grandsire to reluctantly withdraw his weapon. Thereafter, Bhīṣma seemed to become more ferocious as he relentlessly slaughtered thousands of warriors, including Virāta's brother, Śatānika. Indeed, no one dared to even look at the grandsire, for he resembled the midday sun in the summer season. Lord Kṛṣṇa then smirkingly said, "O Arjuna, now is the time to attack Bhīṣma, for only you are capable of slaying him."

All the great Pāṇḍava heroes, including Bhima, Sātyaki, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Nakula, Sahadeva, Abhimanyu, and Ghaṭotkaca were in a precarious condition on account of Bhīṣma's unprecedented display of prowess. However, Arjuna quickly came upon the scene, and by checking Bhīṣma, he rescued the Pāṇḍava leaders from their plight. Under Arjuna's protection, Śikhaṇḍī then rushed at Bhīṣma with all of the great Pāṇḍava warriors behind him, and thus they pierced the grandsire with countless arrows. And yet, the mighty son of Śantanu sportingly baffled all of these arrows as they rained down upon him. While all of the leading Pāṇḍava warriors surrounded Bhīṣma, Arjuna ceaselessly showered his arrows upon the grandsire while keeping Śikhaṇḍī in front. And yet, amazingly enough, Bhīṣma did not even appear to feel pain, in spite of being pierced all over, but instead, he blazed up more powerfully, like the great fire of annihilation which consumes the universe at the end of the millennium. Then, as Bhīṣma was engaged in attempting to beat back the Pāṇḍava warriors, Arjuna suddenly broke his bow. Being unable to tolerate this feat, Droṇa, Kṛtavarmā, Jayadratha, Bhūriśravas,
Çala, Çalya, and Bhagadatta impetuously rushed at Arjuna while releasing their celestial weapons. Bhima, Sātyaki, Dhrṣṭadyumna, Virāṭa, Drupada, Ghaṭotkaca, and Abhimanyu then came to Arjuna's aid, and the battle that took place became so intense that everyone's hair stood up on end.

When Bhīṣma's bow was broken, Śikhaṇḍī had been able to pierce him repeatedly and then cut down his royal emblem. Bhīṣma then picked up a stronger bow, but Arjuna cut it to pieces with three arrows. Indeed, again and again Bhīṣma tried to string one bow after another, but every time Arjuna broke them. Finally, out of frustration, the grandsire picked up a fierce dart and hurled it. Fixing five arrows onto his bowstring at a time, Arjuna deftly cut that dart into five fragments as it coursed through the air. Upon seeing this, Bhīṣma became very angry and thought to himself as follows: "If they were not being protected by Lord Kṛṣṇa, then I could easily vanquish all of the Pāṇḍavas with a single blow. However, because of Lord Kṛṣṇa's protection, the Pāṇḍavas are incapable of being defeated by me. Besides this, I cannot even retaliate against Śikhaṇḍī, who repeatedly attacks me. Thus, I think that I should now once and for all make up my mind to give up my life. At the time of his marriage to Satyavatā, my father granted me two boons: that I would be incapable of being slain in battle, and that I would be able to die at my own will. And yet, I feel now is the time to end this deadlock. I have already fulfilled my obligation to Duryodhana, and so I should now keep my promise to act for the welfare of the pious King Yudhiṣṭhira."

When Bhīṣma made this determination, the Vasus, who were stationed in the sky as spectators, understood it, and so they said to the grandsire, "O best of descendants in the dynasty of Kuru, we approve of your decision. Now, please heed our advice and withdraw from battle."

At this time, fragrant breezes began to blow containing droplets of cool water, and celestial sounds could be heard while showers of flowers fell from the sky upon Bhīṣma's head. Only Bhīṣma and Sañjaya could hear the voices of the Vasus and the other celestial vibrations. Picking up another bow, Bhīṣma then rushed at Arjuna, and even though Bhīṣma was struck by Śikhaṇḍī in the chest with nine arrows, he did not waver. Arjuna then pierced Bhīṣma with hundreds of arrows, and while keeping Śikhaṇḍī in front, he broke the grandsire's bow. Arjuna then pierced
Bhīṣma with ten more arrows and cut down his royal emblem. Then, when Bhīṣma picked up another bow, Arjuna immediately cut it into pieces. The grandsire had finally become bereft of arrows, and thus he lost all desire for further combat with Arjuna, even though the latter continued to pierce him with arrows. Bhīṣma then said to Duḥśasana, "Both Arjuna and myself are incapable of being slain. Śikhanḍi's arrows hardly cause me any pain, nor do those which are being released by any of the other Pāṇḍava warriors. Only Arjuna's arrows pain me."

After saying this, Bhīṣma picked up a powerful dart and hurled it. However, Arjuna easily cut it to fragments with his arrows. Then, desiring to either gain victory or death, Bhīṣma took up his sword and shield and began to dismount from his chariot. However, before the grandsire could even put his feet on the ground, Arjuna cut his shield into 100 fragments. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then urged his entire army at Bhīṣma, and thus there was a great onrush of Pāṇḍava warriors as the Dhṛtarāṣṭras protectively surrounded Bhīṣma. Arjuna then attacked the Kauravas so violently with his arrows that the Kaurava army began scattering here and there, forsaking their commander-in-chief.

Numerous Pāṇḍava warriors then surrounded Bhīṣma, desirous of slaying him, and the grandsire's body became so covered with arrows that there was not a single vacant space between any two arrows which would allow the passage of two fingers. Finally, a little before sunset, while being assaulted by the entire Pāṇḍava army, Bhīṣma fell down from his chariot with his head facing toward the east. Upon the fall of Bhīṣma, cries of anguish could be heard from the sky as well as from all the assembled kings on the battlefield. As Bhīṣma fell, so did the hearts of all the Kuru warriors. Being pierced all over, Bhīṣma did not actually touch the ground, but laid upon a bed of arrows. From above, Bhīṣma could hear voices questioning one another, "Why should this great hero voluntarily give up his life while the sun still remains in the southern hemisphere?"

Bhīṣma replied, "I have not yet given up my life. I shall certainly do so at the proper time."

Gaṅgādevī then sent her son some great ṛṣis who took the form of swans which reside at the Māṇasa lake. After circumambulating the grandsire, the swans questioned each other, "Why would this great hero and
possessor of mystic power give up his life while the sun still remains in the southern hemisphere?"
Upon hearing this, Bhīṣma first of all reflected for awhile and then replied, "O celestial swans, I received a benediction which enables me to die at my own will. Therefore, I shall maintain my life until the sun crosses over into the northern hemisphere, providing an auspicious time for me to quit my body."
When the Pāṇḍava army saw Bhīṣma fall down from his chariot, they had shouted with great joy, whereas Duryodhana and the other Kurus had become stunned with grief and began to shed tears. While the Pāṇḍava army blew upon their thousands of conchshells and let out victorious shouts, the Kauravas discontinued fighting. Duḥśāsana then rushed to where Droṇa was stationed on another part of the battlefield. When the preceptor was informed of Bhīṣma's fall, he fainted from his chariot onto the ground. After regaining consciousness, Droṇa forbade the Kaurava army from further combat, and when the Pāṇḍavas saw this, they also withdrew from fighting. Thereafter, all of the warriors on both sides put down their weapons and went to where Bhīṣma was lying upon his bed of arrows. Coming before the grandsire, both the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas offered him great respect. In turn, Bhīṣma welcomed everyone with great affection and said, "O rulers of the earth, my head is hanging down without any support. Therefore, I wish that someone please bring me a suitable pillow."
Upon hearing this, all of the assembled kings hurriedly went and brought excellent pillows that were covered with fine cloth. However, Bhīṣma refused to accept any of them and laughingly said, "These are not befitting a warrior's bed."
Seeing Arjuna in the midst of the assembled kings, Bhīṣma then requested him to bring a suitable pillow. In response, Arjuna strung his bow, and after offering obeisances to the grandsire, he pierced the ground with three arrows, feather side up, which served to support Bhīṣma's head. Being very pleased with this arrangement, Bhīṣma said, "My dear Arjuna, you have supplied me with just the sort of pillow I had desired. Indeed, if you had acted otherwise, I would have surely cursed you in great anger."
Bhīṣma then announced to the assembly, "O Kings, I shall give up my life
when the sun crosses over into the northern hemisphere. Now, if you wish to honor my dying request, then I beg all of you to give up your enmity and cease from further fighting."

Many physicians then arrived there, and all of them were highly accomplished in the art of extracting arrows. Bhīṣma then ordered, "Let all of these physicians be rewarded with charity and dismissed, for I have already achieved that goal which is desired by heroic kṣatriyas."

When evening arrived, all of the great kings on both sides circumambulated Bhīṣma. Then, after assigning guards for the grandsire's protection, everyone returned to their respective military camps in order to take rest. Lord Kṛṣṇa then approached Yudhiṣṭhira and said, "O King, it is your great fortune that Bhīṣma has at last been overthrown, for he was the greatest stumbling block on your path toward victory."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, the credit goes to You alone, for the grandsire's defeat is simply the result of the merciful protection which You give to Your unalloyed devotees."

The next morning, all of the kings, headed by the Pāṇḍavas and the Dhṛtarāṣṭras, once again put aside their weapons and went to where Bhīṣma was lying. There, they saw thousands of women gently sprinkling flower petals mixed with sandalwood paste upon the grandsire's body. Indeed, all sorts of people had gathered there, including old men and children, just to see the great Kuru hero lying upon his bed of arrows.

However, Bhīṣma's body was burning with pain on account of his wounds, and thus he had become almost bereft of consciousness. Being exceedingly parched by thirst, Bhīṣma then requested all of the kings who had come before him to bring some water. At this, all of the great warriors went and brought cool, clear water in numerous varieties of costly containers made of gold and adorned with jewels. The grandsire rejected them all, however, saying, "O Kings, I have now renounced the use of all kinds of articles which are intended for human enjoyment."

Once again, Bhīṣma called for Arjuna, who then came forward with folded hands, awaiting his order. Bhīṣma said, "My dear son of Kuntī, my entire body feels as if it is burning, and my mouth is parched just like a desert. Therefore, please bring me some water."

In response, Arjuna quickly mounted his chariot and then strung his
Gāṇḍīva bow, striking fear into the hearts of all the Kaurava warriors. He next circumambulated the grandsire while riding upon his chariot, and then took up an arrow which he empowered with the *mantras* of the Parjanya weapon. Then, after drawing his bow all the way back to his ear, Arjuna pierced the earth with that arrow, a little to the south of where Bhīṣma lay, and from out of the crevice which was thus created, a stream of cool clear water rose slightly into the air and entered into the grandsire's mouth, satisfying his thirst with its nectareous taste. Upon seeing this astonishing feat, all of the assembled kings became struck with wonder, and thereafter, they blew upon their conchshells and beat their drums in order to honor the heroic son of Pāṇḍu. Then, in the presence of those great monarchs of the world, Bhīṣma began to glorify Arjuna by describing him as the foremost of all human beings and the best of all bowmen. The grandsire then concluded by saying, "O Kings, like an idiot, Duryodhana ignored the good advice which he repeatedly received from Vidura, Sañjaya, Paraśurāma, Droṇa, and Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thus, he will surely have to lie down upon the battlefield after being slain by Bhīma's mace."

When Duryodhana heard these words, he became very depressed at heart. Bhīṣma then turned to him and said, "O Duryodhana, you should admit that Arjuna possesses superior prowess, and that while fighting under the protection of Lord Kṛṣṇa, he is unconquerable. Give up your enmity now and make peace with the Pāṇḍavas. Let the remaining warriors live by giving back to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira one-half of the kingdom so that he can rule from Indraprastha. My dear grandson, please accept my advice, for otherwise, you shall have to face the dire consequences which will follow."

After saying this, Bhīṣma became silent, and thereafter, he began to apply himself to the practice of mystic *yoga* while awaiting the auspicious time for passing away from this material world. Duryodhana had certainly heard the beneficial words which were spoken by the grandsire. However, he declined to accept them, just like a dying man who refuses to take medicine. All of the warriors then returned to their respective camps. After their departure, Karna came alone to Bhīṣma, who was lying upon his bed of arrows with eyes closed. After falling down at the grandsire's feet in order to offer obeisances, he quietly
announced, "O Bhīṣma it is I, Karnā, who had formerly looked upon you with so much hatred."
Upon hearing this, Bhīṣma slowly opened his eyes, and after dismissing the guards so that they could be alone, he affectionately embraced Karnā with his one free arm. The grandsire then said, "O Karnā, you are actually the son of Kunti, and not the son of Adhiratha, and thus your enmity toward the Pāṇḍavas is simply due to ignorance. Because of the circumstances surrounding your birth, and due to later association with evil-minded persons, an animosity developed within your heart toward the righteous Pāṇḍavas. Actually, I bear no malice toward you, but only because you envied the Pāṇḍavas did I treat you so harshly. Otherwise, I admire you, for I know that you are truly equal to Arjuna in prowess. Now, please honor my request and join with your real brothers, the Pāṇḍavas. In this way, the evil-minded Duryodhana will be forced to come to his senses and thus give up fighting with his cousins."
Karnā replied, "O Grandsire, I long ago learned about the truth regarding my birth, but I still took Duryodhana's side because I had become dedicated to him. Now, I am unwilling to abandon Duryodhana's cause, and thus it is too late for me to discard my enmity toward Arjuna. Therefore, please give me permission to enter the battle and also forgive me for any harsh words which I may have spoken to you in the past."
Bhīṣma replied, "O Karnā, I forgive you, for it is natural for powerful warriors to boast and exhibit such harsh behavior toward one another. And, I gladly give you permission to fight with the Pāṇḍavas and thus attain to a heavenly destination. For a kṣatriya, there is no greater happiness than that which is experienced upon obtaining the opportunity to fight in a righteous battle."
Karnā then mounted his chariot and departed for Duryodhana's quarters.

After the death of Droṇa during the fifteenth day of battle, Sañjaya hurried back to Hastināpura in order to relate everything in detail to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Coming before his master, Sañjaya first of all offered his respects and then said, "My dear king, after having killed more than two akṣauhinīs of the Pāṇḍava army, Droṇa has been slain by Dhṛṣṭadyumna!"
Upon hearing this news, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's heart became exceedingly grief-stricken. With great agitation, he replied, "O Sañjaya, please tell me everything about the battle that took place. Droṇa was unconquerable! How then could he have been slain?"

Actually, Dhṛtarāṣṭra went into a state of shock and disbelief upon hearing of Droṇa's death, and after repeatedly questioning Sañjaya, he suddenly fainted away, falling down unconscious onto the floor. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's servants quickly came and sprinkled cool water over his body and fanned him while the palace ladies rubbed his hands with theirs. After slowly raising him up from the ground, the ladies placed the unconscious Dhṛtarāṣṭra back upon his throne. Soon thereafter, a violent tremor passed through the old blind king's body as he began to regain consciousness. Finally, after coming to his senses, Dhṛtarāṣṭra interrogated Sañjaya, requesting him to give a blow-by-blow account of the battle. Dhṛtarāṣṭra had lost all hope for his son's victory, and in that mood, he declared, "Alas! Because Lord Kṛṣṇa is the benefactor and protector of the Pāṇḍavas, there is no possibility of their being defeated. Indeed, Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and therefore the refuge of all living entities. He is the Absolute Truth which is changeless and eternally exists above the relative dualities of material existence. For this reason, the great rśis engage in chanting His transcendental glories in order to attain the highest state of tranquillity and spiritual bliss. I shall now also describe Lord Kṛṣṇa's heroic pastimes in order to pacify my mind, which is reeling on account of the grief which I feel at the thought of the impending massacre of my sons."

Thereafter, Dhṛtarāṣṭra proceeded to recount the transcendental pastimes which Kṛṣṇa had enacted in Vṛndāvana, Mathurā, and Dvārakā along with his eternal associates. He told such stories as how Kṛṣṇa had killed great demons like Pūtana, Kaṁsa, and Śālva, and how He had gained victory over all of the demigods, headed by Indra, while forcibly taking away the pārijāta flower from heaven. Dhṛtarāṣṭra declared, "O Sañjaya, even if my sons were somehow able to defeat the Pāṇḍavas in battle, I know that Lord Kṛṣṇa would put on His armor and immediately destroy them in retaliation. Oh, how foolish my son is for not recognizing the supreme position of Kṛṣṇa and His eternal associate, Arjuna. Due to his gross ignorance, Duryodhana cannot see how death
personified is already standing before him, simply waiting for Lord Kṛṣṇa's command."

Meanwhile, after the fall of Bhīṣma, the Kauravas felt as if they were sinking into an ocean of helplessness. However, when they remembered Karna, the Kauravas took shelter of him the way in which a drowning man takes refuge in a boat. Karna was also very eager to display his prowess in order to rescue the Kauravas from their plight, and so he approached Duryodhana and said, "O King, please give up your grief, for I am now prepared to fight to my utmost ability. O Duryodhana, for your sake, I promise to either kill all of the Pāṇḍavas or else lie down slain upon the battlefield."

Karna's confident and chivalrous words enlivened the Kaurava warriors. Duryodhana then said, "O Karna, you are our only shelter. Now, please give us direction so that we can understand how to proceed from here."

Karna replied, "My dear Duryodhana, you should be the one who gives the orders. After all, no one can better understand what should be done in a particular circumstance than the person whose concern it is."

Duryodhana then said, "Our first concern is to select a commander-in-chief to replace Bhīṣma. My dear Karna, kindly advise me in this regard."

Karna replied, "O King, Droṇacārya is the most experienced warrior among us, and he is indeed our worshipable preceptor. Therefore, he should be implored to take up the command of our army."

Duryodhana then went and very respectfully requested Droṇacārya to take up the post, and when the preceptor agreed, all of the Kaurava warriors shouted with delight. Droṇa then said, "O King, I shall gladly take command of your army, but I will never be able to slay Dhṛṣṭadyumna, for he has been especially created for my destruction."

Thereafter, Droṇa was formally installed as the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army with proper rituals. Then, at the completion of the ceremony, the preceptor said, "My dear Duryodhana, I now request you to please ask for a benediction in return for the great honor which you have shown me."

Duryodhana first of all consulted with Karna, Duḥṣāsana, and Śakuni. Then, he requested, "My dear preceptor, please capture Yudhiṣṭhira and bring him to me alive. This is the boon which I desire."

With great surprise, Droṇa then inquired, "O King, why do you want
Yudhiṣṭhira to be captured and not killed outright? It appears to me that the Pāṇḍava ruler truly deserves the name Ajātaśatru, for even you do not wish to see him slain!"

Even the most intelligent Brhaspati cannot fully conceal his mind and heart. Indeed, no one can completely avoid revealing his true feelings through his facial expressions and so was the case with Duryodhana. The Kaurava king then gleefully replied, "My dear Droṇa, if we were to kill Yudhiṣṭhira, then the other Pāṇḍavas would become so inflamed with rage that they would certainly slay us all in retaliation. On the other hand, if the truthful Yudhiṣṭhira is captured alive, then we can make him play dice so as to once again banish him to the forest for another period of exile."

Thus learning of Duryodhana's evil intentions, Droṇa thought over the matter for awhile and then replied, "O King, I shall attempt to arrest Yudhiṣṭhira. However, I must inform you that it will only be possible to accomplish this if the Pāṇḍava king remains unprotected by Arjuna. Arjuna is unconquerable by me, and thus you must first of all remove him from Yudhiṣṭhira's presence. Only then shall I endeavor to seize the pious emperor."

Duryodhana knew of Droṇa's partiality toward the Pāṇḍavas and therefore, just to insure that the preceptor would keep his promise, the Kaurava king announced his plan before all of the assembled warriors. In response, there arose loud shouts of joy.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira also learned of Duryodhana's intention from spies, and he requested Arjuna to always stay close by so that he could remain under his protection. Arjuna replied, "My dear elder brother, rest assured that I shall always keep an eye on you. Although I will never slay our preceptor, I shall make sure that he is never given the opportunity of seizing you."

Thereafter, Droṇa arrayed the Kaurava army in a śakaṭa formation while Yudhiṣṭhira arranged the Pāṇḍavas in a crane formation. Upon seeing Karna at the head of their army, all of the Kaurava warriors forgot the grief they had felt due to the loss of Bhīṣma. Actually, the Kauravas considered Bhīṣma to have been too lenient with the Pāṇḍavas. On the other hand, they knew that Karna was the Pāṇḍavas'
sworn enemy, and they expected him to perform great feats on the battlefield. Arjuna was at the head of the Pāṇḍava army, and as he and Karṇa angrily gazed at each other, a tide of enviousness and hatred swelled up within their hearts. Then, as the Kaurava army set out, many inauspicious omens became visible. Indeed, the cloudless sky began to shower blood, bone, and pieces of flesh upon the Kaurava warriors while thousands of hawks, crows, and vultures hovered overhead. As the two armies clashed, Droṇa immediately flared up with unchecked prowess, and while fearlessly ranging through the Pāṇḍava ranks, he slaughtered thousands of enemy soldiers. Yudhiṣṭhira thus ordered many great chariot-warriors to surround the preceptor, and soon afterwards a fierce battle took place. Abhimanyu displayed superb skill and fierce energy while attacking Droṇa, and so the Kaurava hero, Paurava, rushed forward, showering his arrows upon Subhadrā's son. Abhimanyu retaliated by piercing Paurava's horses and driver and then fixed upon his bowstring a very powerful arrow which was intended for that warrior's death. Kṛtavarmā broke Abhimanyu's bow and arrow, however, and so, in a fit of rage, Abhimanyu picked up his sword and shield and jumped down from his chariot. Running forward very quickly, Abhimanyu jumped into Paurava's chariot and grabbed him by the hair. While holding Paurava in this way, Abhimanyu killed his driver with a violent kick and cut down his emblem with his sword. Abhimanyu then raised Paurava up by the hair in order to cut off his head, but Jayadratha rushed upon the scene and jumped off his chariot with a sword in his hand. Abhimanyu then released Paurava in order to contend with Jayadratha, and thus a dramatic duel of swords ensued. Jayadratha's sword then happened to stick into Abhimanyu's shield, but it broke while he was trying to remove it. Thus, Jayadratha made a hasty retreat and remounted his chariot. Abhimanyu also got back onto his chariot and proceeded to slaughter the Kaurava soldiers as Jayadratha fled. Śalya then hurled a dart at Abhimanyu, but the son of Subhadrā proceeded to perform an amazing feat. Leaping high into the air, Abhimanyu caught that dart in his hand and hurled it back, killing Śalya's driver and knocking Śalya off his seat. The Pāṇḍava warriors applauded Abhimanyu highly, but then Śalya picked up his club and began to rush at him. Abhimanyu picked up his own club, but then, with
great difficulty, Bhīma persuaded Abhimanyu to stand aside. Śalya was one of the very few warriors who could dare to challenge Bhīma with a club, and thus the duel that took place between the two heroes was wonderful to behold. Bhīma and Śalya fought equally, and when their maces crashed together, sparks of fire were produced. Bhīma and Śalya then happened to strike each other simultaneously so that they both fell down to the ground. When he saw how Śalya was practically unconscious and writhing in pain, Kṛtavarmā quickly picked Śalya on his chariot and drove him away from the battlefield. Bhīma then stood up, mace in hand, and as he reeled just like a drunken man, the Dhrtrāśtras panicked and fled while the Pāṇḍava warriors blew on the conchshells and shouted with joy.

Thereafter, Kṛtavarmā's son, Vṛṣasena, began to fight very valiantly, and he killed innumerable Pāṇḍava soldiers in the process. The sons of Draupadī then opposed him, and a great combat resulted. Soon, however, the Pāṇḍavas completely subdued the Kaurava army, and this was intolerable for Droṇa. The preceptor then rushed Yudhiṣṭhira after challenging him not to flee from the battlefield out of fear. After breaking Yudhiṣṭhira's bow, Droṇa impetuously charged in order to seize him. However, he was checked by the Pañcāla prince Kumāra, who was protecting Mahārāja's Yudhiṣṭhira's chariot-wheels, and who pierced him in the chest with numerous arrows. Droṇa then killed Kumāra, and after driving away the other Pāṇḍava warriors who tried to check him, he once again rushed towards Yudhiṣṭhira. Virāṭa, Drupada, Sātyaki, and many other valiant chariot-warriors then surrounded Droṇa, and yet the preceptor fought so heroically that he soon came very close to Yudhiṣṭhira's chariot, making it appear that the Pāṇḍava king would surely be seized. However, Arjuna suddenly appeared upon the scene, and he began to afflict the Kaurava army very severely with his showers of arrows.

The sun had already set, and darkness was rapidly obscuring everything from view. Seeing that the Kaurava warriors were fatigued and hard-pressed, Droṇa decided to withdraw his army for the night, and so Arjuna also ordered the Pāṇḍava army to retire. Back at the Kaurava camp, Droṇa went to Duryodhana. Feeling ashamed and dejected, he said, "O King, it is impossible for me to seize Yudhiṣṭhira as long as he
remains under the protection of Arjuna. With Lord Kṛṣṇa on his chariot, Arjuna is absolutely unconquerable, and thus someone must challenge him in order to lead him far away from his elder brother. Only if you can arrange this shall I be able to fulfill my promise to capture the Pāṇḍava king."

Upon hearing this, Suśarmā volunteered to fight with Arjuna along with his five brothers and 20,000 Trigarta chariot-warriors. These soldiers were known as Samsaptakas, for they had all vowed to either conquer or die in battle. Then, in order to make their vow more firm, each Samsaptaka warrior lit a sacrificial fire, and before it, they promised to either kill Arjuna or else die on the battlefield without having turned their backs.

The next morning, Droṇa arranged the Kaurava army in a Garuḍa formation, and so the Pāṇḍavas countered by arraying their army in the shape of a semi-circle. As soon as the Trigartas entered onto the battlefield, they challenged Arjuna. As a kṣatriya, Arjuna could not refuse, and so he approached Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira in order to take his permission before fighting with the Samsaptakas. Yudhiṣṭhira then expressed his anxiety about Droṇa's vow to capture him, and so Arjuna appointed Satyajit as his protector and then assured his elder brother by saying, "O King, as long as this hero lives, the preceptor will never be able to capture you. However, if Satyajit is killed, then you must immediately leave the battlefield, no matter who else may come to your rescue."

When the Kauravas saw Arjuna depart in order to fight with the Trigartas, they became very eager to capture Yudhiṣṭhira. The Trigartas were also very jubilantly awaiting the chance to combat Arjuna, but when the Pāṇḍava hero blew upon his Devadatta conchshell, all of the Samsaptakas became practically motionless due to fear, and their horses stood petrified with wide-open eyes while passing urine and vomiting blood. Then, after regaining their composure, the Trigartas rushed forward and began to shower their arrows upon Arjuna. When Arjuna retaliated, however, the Trigartas became so afflicted that they soon began to retreat toward the Kaurava army. Suśarmā then severely chastised his warriors for their cowardice, and when the Trigartas
rallied, the Nārāyaṇa cowherds came to their aid. Thus, Arjuna became surrounded by innumerable chariot-warriors, and so he invoked a Tvāṣṭra weapon, causing thousands of duplicate Arjunas to be created. Upon seeing this incredible display of illusory mystic power, the Nārāyaṇa cowherds became so bewildered that they began to slay each other, thinking one another to be either Arjuna or Kṛṣṇa.

While the Nārāyaṇa cowherds were thus thrown into confusion, Arjuna attacked the Trigartas, but these Samsaptakas fought back so heroically that Arjuna's chariot soon became completely invisible due to being covered by dense showers of arrows. Thinking that Arjuna must have been slain, the Trigartas began to wave their cloths and shout with great joy, and at this time, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "O son of Kuntī, I cannot see you anymore. Are you still alive?"

Without replying, Arjuna immediately employed a Vāyavya weapon which created a raging wind that blew away all of the enemy's arrows. Indeed, after being invoked, Vāyu carried away many of the Trigartas, along with their weapons and horses, as if they were just so many heaps of straw. Then, as the Trigartas continued to be afflicted by the hurricane winds, Arjuna was able to slaughter them by the hundreds with his arrows.

Meanwhile, as Arjuna was thus engaged elsewhere, the Kauravas made a combined attack upon Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. When he saw the vast army approaching, Yudhiṣṭhira fearfully implored Dhṛṣṭadyumna, "O Prince, please take the necessary precautionary measures so that Droṇa's vow may not be fulfilled."

Dhṛṣṭadyumna then rushed at Droṇa, but he was intercepted by a son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra named Durmukha. While these two warriors fought, Droṇa began to consume the Pāṇḍava army, and when most of the warriors had fled, the preceptor rushed at Yudhiṣṭhira without impediment. Satyajit then charged toward Droṇa while piercing his charioteer with numerous arrows. Then, as the driver fainted away, Satyajit cut down the preceptor's emblem. Droṇa retaliated by cutting his assailant's bow in half. Again and again Satyajit picked up more bows, but all of them were broken by Droṇa's perfectly aimed arrows. Finally, Droṇa cut off Satyajit's head, and so Yudhiṣṭhira fearfully began to flee from the battlefield. Numerous Pāṇḍava warriors then rushed at Droṇa in order
to rescue their king, but the preceptor slaughtered all of those heroes who dared to come before him. Upon seeing his army's plight, Yudhiṣṭhira returned to the battle, supported by Sātyaki, Śiśukañḍī, Dhrṣṭadyumna, and other great chariot-warriors. Finally, due to being greatly afflicted, the whole Pāṇḍava army began to waver, however, and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira once again fled from the scene of battle. Because of this, Drona was able to freely slaughter whatever Pāṇḍava soldiers remained in his vicinity, and thus the entire Pāṇḍava army was routed by him single-handedly. The Kaurava warriors then joyfully chased after the fleeing Pāṇḍava army and thus continued to slaughter its soldiers from behind.

Upon seeing this triumph, Duryodhana felt great jubilation. He then expressed his confidence to Karṇa by saying, "My dear friend, after this defeat, I think that the Pāṇḍava army will abandon all desire to fight with us any further!"

Karṇa replied, "O King, the Pāṇḍava army will very soon regroup in order to attack Drona with full force. Therefore, we had better go quickly and protect the preceptor."

By the time that Duryodhana and his brothers came to where Drona was stationed, the Pāṇḍava warriors had already renewed their attack. Bhīma, Sātyaki, Dhrṣṭadyumna, Sākula, Sahadeva, Abhimanyu and Ghaṭotkaca were in the lead, and they were followed by 12,000 Pañcāla chariot-warriors. During the fierce battle that ensued between practically all of the chief Pāṇḍava and Kaurava heroes, Duryodhana led the elephant division of his army in an attack upon Bhīma. However, Bhīma soon drove back all of the elephants with showers of arrows, and thus he and Duryodhana remained to face each other. Then, after the two arch-enemies had pierced each other with arrows for some time, Bhīma suddenly broke Duryodhana's bow and knocked down his jeweled-elephant emblem.

Bhīma then attacked the Kaurava army, causing its soldiers to turn their backs and flee, and so Bhagadatta rushed forward, riding upon his colossal elephant. Indeed, Bhagadatta's charge was so sudden and violent that Bhīma barely managed to jump onto the ground while his chariot was smashed to atoms. Bhīma then darted underneath Bhagadatta's elephant and began to strike it with his bare arms. However, when
Bhīma once again came out, the elephant caught him in its trunk and then dashed him forcefully onto the ground. Fortunately, Bhīma was able to free himself from the elephant's clutches by twisting its trunk, and after doing so, he once again went underneath its body. When the Pāṇḍava warriors saw Bhīma's precarious condition, they thought that he would surely be slain. Then, hoping to save his brother, Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra took the Pañcālas and surrounded Bhagadatta while showering upon him innumerable arrows. Remaining undaunted, Bhagadatta urged his elephant toward Sātyaki's chariot as it came close by. The gigantic elephant then grabbed onto Sātyaki's chariot and hurled it some distance while the Yadu hero jumped safely to the ground. Thereafter, Bhagadatta's infuriated beast slaughtered numerous warriors who happened to come in its path, and so the rest of the Pañcālas began to flee in all directions.

Upon seeing this, Bhīma once again rushed at Bhagadatta after having ascended another chariot. However, Bhagadatta's elephant managed to scare Bhīma's horses by showering water on them from its trunk, and thus the uncontrolled steeds quickly carried the Pāṇḍava hero away from the scene of battle. The remaining Pāṇḍava army still tried to vanquish Bhagadatta's elephant with their torrents of arrows, but the colossal beast continued to mangle them while being urged on by its master.

When Arjuna saw the dust clouds being raised by Bhagadatta's elephant and also heard the wailing of the Pāṇḍava soldiers, he could understand the seriousness of the situation. Considering himself and Kṛṣṇa to be the only match for Bhagadatta, Arjuna ordered the Lord to immediately take his chariot to where the battle was raging. However, as Arjuna proceeded toward Bhagadatta, thousands of Nārāyaṇa cowherd-warriors returned to the battlefield and challenged him to fight. Thus, Arjuna was put into a dilemma, and after deliberating for some time, he decided to first of all slay the Samsaptakas. Then, as Arjuna turned to encounter them, the Nārāyaṇa cowherds showered their arrows so fiercely that Lord Kṛṣṇa began to perspire heavily. Upon seeing this, Arjuna became exceedingly anxious, and so he immediately released a brahmāstra which nearly exterminated all of the enemy chariot-warriors. Lord Kṛṣṇa heartily congratulated Arjuna for having accomplished that wonderful
feat, and then Arjuna again urged the Lord to quickly approach Bhagadatta. However, Suśārmā and the Trigarta warriors suddenly approached Arjuna from behind, challenging him to stop and fight. Thus, Arjuna was once again faced with the same dilemma. He asked Kṛṣṇa, "My dear Lord, what should I do: go to the rescue of all the Pāṇḍava warriors who are being afflicted by Bhagadatta, or turn back to encounter the Trigartas?"

Without even replying, Lord Kṛṣṇa turned the chariot around in order to face the onrushing Trigartas. Arjuna soon broke Suśārmā's bow, knocked down his royal insignia, and killed his five brothers. The infuriated Trigarta king then hurled a dart at Arjuna and a lance at Lord Kṛṣṇa. However, Arjuna deftly foiled both of these weapons and, with a shower of arrows, made Suśārmā fall unconscious onto the floor of his chariot. Bereft of their leader, the Trigartas became easy prey to Arjuna's arrows, and thus they were soon routed. Arjuna could thus once again proceed toward Bhagadatta, but next, 10,000 chariot-warriors of the Kaurava army approached him in an attempt to check him. Thereafter, when Arjuna proceeded to smash all of the Kaurava warriors, Bhagadatta could not tolerate it, and so he goaded his gigantic elephant forward, hoping to crush the heroic son of Kuntī. A fierce duel ensued, and Bhagadatta hurled many lances and darts, one after another, in retaliation. All of these were cut off by Arjuna before they could reach him, however. Arjuna then knocked down Bhagadatta's royal emblem and umbrella, and deeply pierced him with numerous arrows. When Bhagadatta picked up another bow, Arjuna broke it as well, and then pierced him with more arrows, giving him great pain. Finally, in the hopes of ending the battle without further ado, Bhagadatta empowered his elephant hook by use of mantras, thus converting it into a Vaiśṇava weapon. Then, when Bhagadatta hurled it, Lord Kṛṣṇa placed Himself in front of Arjuna, thus allowing the weapon to fall on His chest. And yet, as soon as the Vaiśṇava weapon touched Kṛṣṇa's transcendental body, it transformed into a garland of victory (vaijayanti) and hung around the Lord's neck. Arjuna was very unhappy, however, and said, "O Kṛṣṇa, You should remember Your vow not to take part in this battle, at least for as long as I am competent to defend myself."
Then, in reply, Lord Kṛṣṇa narrated to Arjuna a very confidential history as follows: "O son of Kuntī, I exist within this universe in four forms: as Garbhodaśāyī Viṣṇu Who lies upon the great ocean; as the all-pervading Supersoul Who witnesses everything, Paramātmā; as Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, who continually engages in performing austerities; and My incarnation within human society. While lying in the mystic slumber known as yoga-nidrā, upon the waters of the Garbhodaka ocean, when I awaken after 1,000 years, I become inclined to award benedictions to all those who are deserving. Once, the demigoddess presiding over the earth approached Me at that time and said, 'My dear Lord, all glories unto You, who are the original cause and resting place of the cosmic manifestation. My dear Lord Viṣṇu, I have come here to beg for a benediction on behalf of my son, Naraka. Please award him the Vaiṣṇava weapon so that he will be unslayable to both the demigods and the demons.' "I then replied, 'O Bhūmi, I shall give this weapon to your son, and as long as he possesses it, he will remain invincible.' My dear Arjuna, Bhagadatta had received the Vaiṣṇava weapon from Naraka, and there is no one in existence who can escape with his life when this terrible weapon is invoked against him. It is for this reason that I violated My promise by baffling the Vaiṣṇava weapon for your sake. Now, you must slay Bhagadatta, just as I had formerly killed Naraka for the welfare of the world."

Being urged on by Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna proceeded to overwhelm Bhagadatta with his arrows, and he then violently pierced the king's elephant in the forehead. Although Bhagadatta still tried to goad him on, the colossal elephant could no longer obey its master's command, but instead fell down to the ground, piercing it with its sharp tusks. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Arjuna quickly pierced Bhagadatta in the chest with a powerful arrow, and thus that greatly heroic warrior fell down dead from the back of his slain carrier. Arjuna then went and respectfully circumambulated Bhagadatta's dead body, and thereafter proceeded to attack the Kaurava army. Two of Śakuni's brothers, Vṛṣaka and Acala, then rushed forward, piercing Arjuna deeply with their arrows. Arjuna turned to meet his assailants, and after killing Vṛṣaka's horses, he slaughtered 500 of the
supporting Gândhāra soldiers. Vṛṣaka then got onto his brother's chariot, and together they continued to shower their arrows upon Arjuna. Becoming infuriated, Arjuna then performed an exceedingly amazing feat by slaying both brothers with a single arrow. Upon seeing this, the Dhrtarāstras rushed at Arjuna, hoping to retaliate. Śakuni, who had become highly enraged upon the death of his brothers, began to employ his mystic power in order to create fearful illusions. First of all, innumerable clubs, darts, swords, arrows, rocks, axes and other weapons began to fall upon Arjuna from all sides. Then, countless wild camels, asses, buffaloes, lions, tigers, as well as swarms of crows and fierce Rākṣasas all hungrily rushed forward as if to devour Arjuna with their gaping mouths.

Arjuna employed celestial arrows to attack these ferocious beasts, and thus they all soon fell mortally wounded to the ground while screaming painfully. After this, dense darkness shrouded the battlefield, and in that terrible gloom, harsh voices could be heard rebuking Arjuna. Arjuna quickly employed a Jyotiñka weapon causing the darkness to be quickly dispelled, but at the next moment, there appeared very frightening waves of water, threatening to overflow everything. However, Arjuna dried up all the water with an Āditya weapon, and in this way, whatever illusions Śakuni created were laughingly destroyed by the heroic son of Kuntī. Finally, when Arjuna began to assail Śakuni with his piercing arrows, the son of Subala quickly fled from the scene of battle out of fear.

Thereafter, Arjuna proceeded to divide the entire Kaurava army in two, as half took shelter of Droṇa while the other half ran to Duryodhana for protection. The Samsaptakas then once again took Arjuna far away by challenging him, and so Droṇa regrouped his warriors in order to mount another attack on the Pāṇḍava army in the hopes of capturing Yudhiṣṭhira. Droṇa, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, Karna and many other Kuru heroes thus fought against Bhīma, Yudhiṣṭhira, Nakula, Sahadeva and their allies. Becoming excited with rage, Droṇa created a great slaughter among the Pāṇḍava soldiers, but then Arjuna suddenly appeared upon the scene after having massacred the Samsaptakas.

As Arjuna proceeded to slay hundreds of Kaurava warriors, Karna angrily rushed at him so that the two great heroes began exchanging
arrows. Bhīma, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and Sātyaki then rushed forward to aid Arjuna, but with three arrows, Karna cut their bows to pieces. Bhīma, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and Sātyaki then sent forth streams of darts, and while Karna was busy defending himself, Arjuna killed three of his brothers. Sātyaki then took up another bow, and after breaking Karna's bow, he pierced the sūta hero deeply in the chest. Duryodhana, Droṇa, and Jayadratha then rushed at Sātyaki, but since the sun had already set, both armies were gradually withdrawn. That night, a gloom pervaded the Kaurava camp, because Droṇa had failed to fulfill his vow, and their warriors had been severely routed by Arjuna.

Early the next morning, Duryodhana went to Droṇa, being very angry and depressed because of the Pāṇḍavas' previous day's success. Duryodhana then said, "O Preceptor, it is obvious that you are intentionally breaking your promise. Even though Yudhiṣṭhira had come within easy reach, you refrained from seizing him."

These sharp words made Droṇa feel very ashamed and hurt. He then replied, "O King, you should not accuse me like this, for I am making a genuine effort to fight wholeheartedly on your behalf. What you fail to realize is that with Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on the battlefield, the Pāṇḍavas cannot be defeated. However, since you are prodding me like this, I hereby solemnly vow that today I shall slay one of the leading warriors on the Pāṇḍava side. All that I request is that you keep Arjuna away from me, for in his presence, I am helpless to do anything."

Thereafter, Droṇa arrayed his army in a circular formation, and as soon as the fighting began, the Samsaptakas once again challenged Arjuna in order to take him to a distant place on the battlefield. All of the great Pāṇḍava warriors then rushed at Droṇa, but the heroic son of Bhāradvāja checked them all fearlessly and drove them back. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became very aggrieved and fearful while gazing upon the unapproachable preceptor, and so he went to Abhimanyu, who possessed energy superior to that of Arjuna, and who was the embodiment of all the Pāṇḍavas' good qualities. Indeed, the son of Subhadrā had the steadiness of Yudhiṣṭhira, the heroism of Bhīma, knowledge of the sāstra like Arjuna, and the humility and mild behavior of Nakula and Sahadeva. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear nephew, only Lord
Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, Pradyumna, and yourself know how to penetrate the Kaurava's circular array. Since Droṇa is afflicting us greatly, and we are unable to retaliate, I request you to break through the enemy ranks in order to rout the Kaurava army. O son of Subhadrā, please grant me this boon, for I am afraid that when Arjuna returns he will chastise us for our impotence."
Abhimanyu replied, "My dear uncle, I shall certainly obey your command. However, I must warn you that even though I had learned from my father how to penetrate this formation, I do not know how to extricate myself if I happen to fall into a precarious condition." Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear Abhimanyu, many of the great Pāṇḍava warriors, including myself, will follow you when you penetrate the Kaurava ranks. Therefore, you can rest assured that there is no reason for you to be afraid."
Abhimanyu's intelligent charioteer then took his master aside and said, "O Sire, I beg you to carefully consider whether you are capable of successfully executing the exceedingly difficult task which has been entrusted to you."
Still, Abhimanyu did not hesitate to accept Yudhiṣṭhira's order, nor did he feel any fear. Thereafter, when Abhimanyu rushed toward Droṇa, followed by all of the great Pāṇḍava heroes, the Kaurava warriors stood ready to face their onslaught. During the fierce battle that ensued, Abhimanyu suddenly penetrated the enemy ranks, and all of the Kaurava warriors joyfully surrounded him while releasing their showers of arrows. Abhimanyu then blazed up like fire and began to consume the Kaurava soldiers as if they were heaps of dry grass. While ranging through the enemy ranks, Abhimanyu caused the entire battlefield to become strewn over with innumerable severed limbs and heads, piles of smashed armor and weapons, and countless broken chariots. While witnessing Abhimanyu's superhuman prowess, the hair of all the Kaurava soldiers stood on end, and in a panic-stricken state, these warriors began to flee here and there.
All of this was intolerable to Duryodhana, however, and so he angrily rushed to check Abhimanyu. Droṇa ordered all of his leading chariot warriors to assist the Kaurava king, and thus Abhimanyu was soon surrounded on all sides. Amazingly enough, Abhimanyu not only
fearlessly checked all of the great Kaurava warriors with his torrents of arrows, but he also pierced Karna so deeply that his entire body became paralyzed, and he trembled violently. Then, when Salya came nearby, Abhimanyu attacked him so violently that the Madras king fainted away onto the floor of his chariot. Upon seeing this, the Kaurava army began to fearfully retreat in the very presence of their commanders. Salya's younger brother then rushed at Abhimanyu, hoping to gain revenge, but he was quickly deprived of his head by the heroic son of Arjuna. Thereafter, as Abhimanyu continued to oppress the Kaurava army, Droña went to Kripa and began to praise the young hero very highly. Durodyhana overheard this and so he said to Karna and the others who were nearby, "How lamentable it is that because Droña refuses to fight with the son of his dear disciple, our soldiers are being slaughtered in great numbers. Indeed, it is only because of our preceptor's leniency that Abhimanyu still remains alive on this battlefield. Therefore, I want all of you other great heroes to attack Arjuna's son and slay him before he consumes our entire army."

In response, Duhshasana vowed to kill Abhimanyu, and after doing so, he led a massive attack on Subhadrä's son. Thereafter, when Abhimanyu saw the enraged Duhshasana approaching, he challenged, "O wretched son of Dhrtarashtra, I shall now repay my debt to the Pañavas by properly rewarding you for all of your previous harsh words and wicked deeds!"

After saying this, Abhimanyu released a powerful arrow that penetrated Duhshasana's shoulder right up to the feathers. Then, as Abhimanyu pierced him with more arrows, Duhshasana fell down unconscious, and so his driver quickly took him away from the battlefield. Durodyhana then became exceedingly pained at heart upon seeing this, and he bitterly expressed his sorrow to Karna. Then, in order to satisfy the Kaurava king, Karna proceeded towards Abhimanyu while showering upon him hundreds of arrows. Abhimanyu did not waver, however, and in order to retaliate, he released a single arrow which broke Karna's bow and knocked down his emblem. One of Karna's younger brothers then rushed at Abhimanyu, and with a single arrow, Subhadrä's son beheaded him. Then, after driving Karna away from the battlefield, Abhimanyu continued to exterminate the Kaurava army so that thousands of
mutilated bodies were soon strewn all over the battlefield. Meanwhile, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Nakula, Sahadeva, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Drupada, Śikhaṇḍī, and the sons of Draupadi had all followed Abhimanyu when he had daringly penetrated the Kaurava ranks. Jayadratha then came forward to oppose them, and due to the benediction which he had previously received from Lord Śiva he was able to singlehandedly check all of those great heroes. Indeed, Jayadratha's unprecedented showers of arrows pierced all of the great Pāṇḍava warriors so severely that they were forced to halt their progress. Then, as the Pāṇḍava heroes struggled to overcome Jayadratha's fierce attack, the path which Abhimanyu had opened through the Kaurava's circular formation once again became closed. Next, the son of Śalya, named Rukmaratha, rushed at Abhimanyu, desiring to put an end to his slaughter of the Kaurava soldiers. As Rukmaratha approached, Abhimanyu first of all broke his bow into pieces, then severed his arms, and at last cut off his head. One hundred enraged friends of Rukmaratha then surrounded Abhimanyu while releasing torrents of arrows in the hopes of gaining revenge. Indeed, the attack was so violent that for a moment Duryodhana thought that Abhimanyu had been slain. The young Pāṇḍava hero, who was only sixteen years old, then employed a Gandharva weapon. As a result, an illusion was created whereby it sometimes appeared as if there was only one Abhimanyu on the battlefield, and then, the next moment, it looked as if there were hundreds or even thousands of Ahhimanyus. This completely bewildered the friends of Rukmaratha, and taking advantage of this situation, Abhimanyu cut them all to pieces in short order with his arrows.

Even though he had become very afraid upon seeing this wonderful display of mystic power, Duryodhana rushed at Abhimanyu. However, after a short but fierce battle, Duryodhana had to retreat due to being wounded by Abhimanyu's sharp arrows. When they saw their king fleeing, the soldiers of the Kaurava army began to break formation and so, Droṇa, Aśvatthāmā, Karna, Kṛpa, Kṛtavarmā, and Duryodhana's son, Lakṣmaṇa, all rushed together at Abhimanyu. Flaring up with rage, the heroic son of Arjuna drove all of these Kuru heroes back with his onslaught of arrows, except Lakṣmaṇa, who continued to rush forward.
Duryodhana then returned to the fray in order to support his son, and upon seeing this, other Kaurava warriors also rallied. Then, while being pierced by Lakṣmaṇa's arrows, Abhimanyu announced, "O wicked son of a wicked king, you had better take one last good look at the world around you, for you are about to leave it for the next!"

After saying this, Abhimanyu took out a very powerful arrow and fixed it upon his bowstring. Indeed, after being released by the incredible Pāṇḍava prince, that blazing arrow flew magnificently through the air and then struck off Lakṣmaṇa's head. At this, all of the Kaurava warriors uttered exclamations of horror and grief, and Duryodhana became filled with an intolerable rage. Thus, with great agitation, the Kaurava king urged all of his great warriors to immediately avenge the death of his son by slaying Abhimanyu. Six greatly powerful heroes responded to Duryodhana's command, and they soon surrounded Abhimanyu. These were Droṇa, Kṛpa, Karna, Aśvatthāṁa, Bṛhadbala and Kṛtavarmā, and all of them were eager for battle.

Abhimanyu tried to escape their attack by penetrating through Jayadratha's army, but the elephant division blocked his way. Thus, Abhimanyu turned back in order to face the six Kuru warriors, and thereafter a gruesome conflict ensued. After piercing all six of his adversaries with numerous arrows, Abhimanyu killed Kṛpa's horses and slew many of his supporting soldiers. Bṛhadbala, the king of Kośala, then pierced Abhimanyu in the chest with a barbed arrow. However, Arjuna's heroic son retaliated by killing Bṛhadbala's horses and driver and then knocking down his royal insignia. At this, Bṛhadbala took up his sword and got down from his chariot, desiring to cut off Abhimanyu's head. However, as Bṛhadbala rushed forward, Abhimanyu pierced him in the heart with a fierce arrow that took away his life. After the fall of Bṛhadbala, Abhimanyu continued to slay numerous Kaurava soldiers, and so Karna and Śakuni went to Duryodhana in order to express their great frustration. Karna and Śakuni then lamented, "My dear king, it appears that Abhimanyu cannot be defeated by any of us. Therefore, you must devise some special means whereby he can be slain."

Duryodhana then went to Droṇa for advice, and in reply the preceptor said, "O King, because Abhimanyu's armor is impenetrable, and because he is the foremost of all bowmen, he is unconquerable for as long as he
continues to release his arrows. However, if Abhimanyu's bow can be broken and his horses slain, then we may be able to overwhelm him." After receiving this advice, Duryodhana went and urged Karna to make an all-out effort to execute the preceptor's plan. Karna then rushed at Abhimanyu, and after a fierce exchange of arrows, he managed to break the son of Subhadra's bow. Krtavarma then took the opportunity to slay Abhimanyu's horses, while Kripa killed the two drivers. Thus seeing how their enemy had fallen into a helpless condition, all six Kuru warriors began to ruthlessly shower their arrows upon him with great force. Abhimanyu then took out his sword and jumped into the air so high that he appeared to be flying. Indeed, all of the Kaurava warriors became struck with fear, thinking that Abhimanyu would fall upon them at any moment. However, Droña then broke Abhimanyu's sword with an arrow, and Karna smashed his shield to pieces. Being deprived of all weapons, Abhimanyu jumped down from his chariot and picked up a broken wheel which he had found lying upon the battlefield. Then, as Abhimanyu rushed toward Droña with the wheel upraised, he looked just like Lord Visnu wielding His Sudarshana-cakra. Although they certainly became terrified upon seeing this sight, the Kuru warriors smashed Abhimanyu's wheel into hundreds of fragments with their arrows. Abhimanyu then picked up a mace which he saw lying nearby and rushed toward Aśvatthama. Indeed, Droña's son hurriedly jumped down in the nick of time as Abhimanyu smashed his chariot to pieces along with the horses and driver. Covered all over with arrows, Abhimanyu looked like a porcupine, and his cloth was dyed red from the blood which flowed from his innumerable wounds. Still, the heroic son of Arjuna proceeded to slay many Kaurava soldiers who stood in his path. Then, when Abhimanyu rushed at Duḥśasana's son, the prince was forced to jump to safety while his chariot was also smashed to pieces along with his horses. Then, mace in hand, the son of Duḥśasana challenged Abhimanyu to fight, and so the two young warriors began to strike one another with heavy blows. Then, it so happened that the two warriors struck each other simultaneously so that they both fell onto the ground at the same time. Duḥśasana's son was the first to get up, however, and as Abhimanyu struggled to his feet, the Kaurava prince struck him on the head very
severely with his mace. And, because of that terrible blow, Arjuna's incomparable son fell down dead onto the ground.

All of the Kaurava warriors then came and surrounded Abhimanyu, who looked just like a great fire that had finally been extinguished after consuming an entire forest. While the Kauravas shouted with joy, tears fell from the eyes of the Pāṇḍava warriors. Voices from the sky were then heard to exclaim, "Alas! The slaying of Abhimanyu by the combined forces of six great warriors was certainly an unrighteous act!"

All over the battlefield, the corpses of dead warriors and animals lay in heaps, and everywhere there were smashed chariots and broken weapons. Thus, in many places, the field was impassable. The sun had already set when Abhimanyu was slain, and so the two armies gradually withdrew to their respective camps. Thus, the battlefield, being strewn over with dead bodies, became the playground of dogs, jackals, wolves, carnivorous birds, Rākṣasas, and Piśācas. While roaming about, these creatures tore at the skin of the dead bodies and drank their blood that flowed from those warriors' wounds. While thus engaged in gorging themselves upon fat, flesh, and blood each night, the Rākṣasas would laugh grotesquely while singing, dancing, and merrily dragging the dead bodies about.

After the fall of Abhimanyu, all of the leading Pāṇḍava warriors took off their armor, put down their weapons, and then sat down, surrounding Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. While brooding intensely, the grief-stricken king lamented, "Alas! How shall I ever be able to look at Arjuna and Subhadrā? It was on account of my fault that Abhimanyu was slain, for I had first of all ordered him to perform an unnecessarily dangerous feat and then failed to give him protection."

Just then, Śrīla Vyāsadeva arrived at the Pāṇḍava camp, and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and all of the other kings stood up in order to worship him with great respect. Finally, after the son of Parāśara was seated, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira informed him of Abhimanyu's death, and then expressed his unbearable grief at how the prince had been unfairly killed while he and the other Pāṇḍava warriors stood by helplessly. Śrīla Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear grandson, you should not lament, for Abhimanyu has already ascended to heaven. Because death is unavoidable, when someone attains a glorious destination, then it is a
cause for great joy and not sadness."
Maharaja Yudhisthira then inquired, "O foremost of all great sages, please tell me more about death. What is death actually, and why does it take away all living beings, even though no one is willing to voluntarily give up his material body?"
Then, in order to answer Maharaja Yudhisthira's questions, Sriла Vyasadeva related the following ancient history which describes the origin of death: There was once a powerful king named Akampana who had a son named Hari. After killing innumerable soldiers in battle, the heroic Hari himself was finally surrounded by many enemy warriors and slain. Thereafter, Akampana grieved continually for his dead son, and thus he could no longer obtain any peace of mind. Understanding Akampana's plight, Nara Muni mercifully came to him, and so the king very respectively received the great sage among the demigods. Thereafter, when the two were seated together, Akampana explained how he had been defeated by his enemies, and how his son had been slain in the battle. Then, as he continued to lament, the king inquired, "O Nara, please tell me who death is, and what is the extent of his prowess?"
Nara Muni wanted to give relief to the king's distressed mind, and in order to do so, he narrated the following story: In the very beginning of creation, Lord Brahma saw that none of the beings which had been created by him were undergoing any deterioration. Thus, he thought to himself, "Without deterioration, there is no question of destruction, which is essential for fulfilling the very purpose of material existence. Therefore, what can I do to rectify this situation?"
And yet, in spite of thinking in this way, Lord Brahma could not ascertain any means for bringing about the needed destruction of the living beings. Indeed, he finally became so enraged due to frustration that from his anger a great fire was generated which began to spread in all directions throughout heaven and earth. Then, upon seeing how all of the living creatures within the universe were being threatened with destruction, Lord Siva came and fell down at his father's feet. Lord Brahma became pacified, and being very pleased with Lord Siva, he agreed to fulfill his desire. Lord Siva then said, "My dear father, I feel great compassion for all the living creatures, and thus I desire to act for
their welfare. O Lord, you first of all created these living beings, but now you are destroying them by means of this terrible fire."
Lord Brahmā replied, "My dear son, I have no desire to destroy the universe. However, Mother Earth had requested me to relieve her great burden by killing the excessive creatures who reside upon her surface. For a long time, I considered how to fulfill the earth's desire, and yet, I could not think of any way to relieve her burden. Thus, I finally became very angry, and as a result, this fire was generated."
Lord Śiva then pleaded, "My dear father, I beg you to now stop this great annihilation, for I think that your purpose has already been served." At this, Lord Brahmā extinguished the all-encompassing fire by winding it up within himself. Then, from out of his various senses came a female person of dark complexion and having reddish eyes. After coming out from Lord Brahmā's body, that female being smiled at the two lords and then prepared to depart for the south. Lord Brahmā then said, "O fortunate one, your name shall be Death, and your duty is to kill all of the creatures that have been created by me. Rest assured that you will be benefited by following my order."
Upon hearing Lord Brahmā's words, however, the woman became very aggrieved and began to cry. Lord Brahmā quickly caught those tears before they could reach the ground, and then Death personified pleaded with folded hands, "My dear lord, I am very mortified at the thought of having to engage in such a cruel occupation. Certainly the relatives of those whom I kill will become very grief-stricken and thus curse me. Therefore, please give me permission to perform austerities instead of taking away the life-breaths of all creatures."
Lord Brahmā was adamant, however, and he replied, "My dear Death, you must perform the work for which you have been created. Rest assured that people will not find fault with you on account of your thankless task."
However, Death was very frightened at the thought of executing Lord Brahmā's command, and she felt compassion for all of the living entities. Being unable to set her heart upon killing the created beings, she simply stood there silently with folded hands. Lord Brahmā also remained silent for some time while controlling his anger, and then, after gaining some composure, he began to look upon the creation with a more sympathetic
eye. Finally, Death took her leave without having agreed to perform her assigned duty, and she went to the āśrama of Dhenuka. There she began to execute severe austerities by standing upon one leg for billions of years. After this, Death wandered over the earth for billions of more years, and all the while she worshipped Lord Brahmā with unalloyed devotion. By traveling to all of the sacred rivers, Death personified became fully purified of all sins, and at last, Lord Brahmā approached her. The grandsire of the universe then inquired, "O Death, why are you performing such severe penances?"

Death replied, "My dear Lord, I am very afraid of receiving sinful reactions for killing the living beings, because they are so virtuous that they do not even harm one another with their words. Therefore, I beg you to do something to relieve me from my fears."

Lord Brahmā then assured her by saying, "My dear Death, you will never incur any sinful reactions by killing the living beings. In any case, my former command cannot be retracted, but in order to favor you, I shall arrange for Disease and Yamarāja to assist you in your work."

Death then pleaded, "O Lord, kindly engage Greed, Anger, Malice, Envy, Quarrel, Foolishness and Shamelessness in the work of killing the living entities instead of me."

Lord Brahmā replied, "These descendants of Irreligion will assist you along with the diseases that I shall create from the tears which you had shed. Now, cast off all attachment and aversion and accept your duty, for it is you who will be my chief agent for encompassing the living entities' destruction."

Being afraid of Lord Brahmā's curse, Death finally agreed to accept the task of taking away the lives of all living beings. Nārada Muni then said, "My dear Mahārāja Akampana, please give up your grief, because by Lord Brahmā's order, all living beings must inevitably meet with Death. Your son has already ascended to heaven, and so there is no need for you to lament any longer."

Akampana's grief had subsided while listening to Nārada Muni's instructions, and after being worshipped by the king, the devarṣi departed. Śrila Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, in the same way, you should cast off your grief over the death of Abhimanyu. Like Akampana's son, he is now enjoying life in heaven along with Soma,
from whom he had originally come."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear grandfather, your narration has
certainly begun to pacify my mind. Therefore, please describe the
activities of other former great kings so that I may become further
consoled."

Being eager to gratify his grandson, Śrīla Vyāsadeva next related the
following story: There was once a king named Svitya, whose son was
Srñjayas. Nārada and Parvata Munis were close friends of Srñjayas and so
one day they decided to pay him a visit. When Mahārāja Srñjayas saw
that the two great rṣis had arrived at his palace, he received them in a
very royal manner. Being very pleased by the kings' hospitality, Nārada
and Parvata decided to reside with him for some time. Then one day
while Srñjayas was seated upon his throne in the company of the two rṣis,
his daughter came there to see him. Upon beholding the princess'
exquisite youthful beauty and enchantingly sweet smiles, Parvata Muni
inquired, "O King, who is this girl? Is she the daughter of some demigod,
or perhaps the goddess of fortune herself?"
Srñjayas replied, "My dear rṣi, she is not a goddess at all. This girl is
simply my daughter."
Nārada then said, "My dear king, I would be exceedingly pleased if you
were to bestow upon me this princess so that I may accept her as my
wife."
Srñjayas was delighted with this proposal, and he immediately agreed.
However, Parvata Muni was not at all pleased, and with great anger he
said, "O Nārada, because you have taken as your bride the girl whom I
had first of all chosen within my heart, I hereby curse you to be unable
to reach heaven."
Nārada Muni then angrily replied, "O Parvata, a marriage is concluded
only after all of the proper mantras have been chanted, and the bride
has taken seven steps while circumambulating the groom. Therefore,
your heart's desire is not a rightful claim to Srñjayas's daughter. Now,
because you have become unnecessarily angry with me, I curse you to be
incapable of reaching heaven for as long as I am unable to do so."
After this little incident, Nārada and Parvata Munis continued to reside
at Mahārāja Srñjayas's palace. For a long time, the king had been very
eager to receive a son, and so he had worshipped the brāhmaṇas for this
purpose. Then, when these brāhmaṇas became highly satisfied with Mahārāja Srñjaya, they approached Nārada Muni and requested him to benedict the king with a Son. Nārada Muni agreed to do this, and when he inquired from Srñjaya as to what kind of son he desired, the king replied, "O Devarṣi, I wish to have a son who is endowed with all good qualities, and whose perspiration, stool, and urine are all made of gold." Thus it came to pass that by the benediction of Nārada Muni, Srñjaya's queen gave birth to such a son in due course of time, and because of his golden stool, the boy was named Suvarṇaṇṭhin. Because of the son's unique capability, Mahārāja Srñjaya became fabulously wealthy, and he was able to construct houses, boundary walls, beds, chariots, and all of his domestic utensils out of gold. However, a band of thieves came to learn of the source of Srñjaya's opulence, and so they decided to kidnap his son. After entering the royal palace late one night, these thieves took away Suvarṇaṇṭhin to a dense forest. Then, being impelled by greed and foolishness, these impatient rascals killed the prince and cut open his body. They performed this vile act in the hopes of getting some gold at once, but instead, they ended up with nothing. Being thus frustrated in their attempt, the thieves began to quarrel among themselves in great anger, and in the brawl that ensued, they killed one another. As soon as Suvarṇaṇṭhin was slain, all of the gold which Srñjaya had obtained by Nārada Muni's benediction miraculously disappeared. Then, when the king found about the death of his beloved son, he began to lament very bitterly, and so Nārada approached him in order to impart some good instruction. Nārada Muni then said, "My dear Srñjaya, you are lamenting over the death of your son, but you do not realize that, like all other kings of the past, that you will also have to die, in spite of your unfulfilled aspirations. Now, please listen attentively as I narrate to you the histories of some of the world's most illustrious monarchs, beginning with King Marutta, the son of Avikṣit. Once, King Marutta was awarded a golden plateau in the Himālayas as a benediction. Thereafter, by utilizing that vast amount of gold, he began to perform exceedingly opulent sacrifices. Indeed, all of the demigods, headed by Bṛhaspati and Indra, used to appear at the conclusion of King Marutta's sacrifices in order to personally accept his worship and offerings. King Marutta would then entertain the demigods using
furniture, carpets, and other paraphernalia, all of which were made of gold. Finally, he would feed the brāhmaṇas sumptuously on golden plates, and the demigods themselves would distribute the food. My dear Śrīnāya, in spite of all this, King Marutta still had to die. O King, since such a superior person as Marutta had to give up his life, why should you lament for the death of your son, who had never performed such sacrifices or given in charity? Now, please listen as I narrate the history of Mahārāja Suhotra.

"Indra became so pleased by this monarch's sacrificial performances that he showered down liquid gold upon his kingdom instead of rain. Indeed, not only did Indra create rivers of gold in this way, which were freely used by the citizens, but he also showered down golden alligators, crabs, and fish, as well as golden hunchbacks and dwarves. Upon seeing all this, King Suhotra became struck with wonder, and out of profound gratitude toward Indra, he thereafter performed 1,000 horse-sacrifices and 100 Rājasūya sacrifices, after which he distributed all of the gold to the brāhmaṇas.

My dear Śrīnāya, even this great king had to eventually succumb to death. Therefore, you should not be aggrieved on account of your son. Now, please listen as I describe to you the glories of Mahārāja Śibi, the son of Uṣīnara. This illustrious king gave away as many cows in charity as there are raindrops falling during a storm. Lord Śiva became very pleased with Śibi and so blessed him by saying, 'O King, no matter how much wealth you give away in charity, your treasury will remain inexhaustible. Similarly, your devotion to the Supreme Lord, your fame, your religious merit, the love that all creatures have for you, and your heavenly destination will all be limitless.'

"My dear Śrīnāya, even Śibi had to die when his time came. Therefore, you should not become overwhelmed with grief because of the death of your son, who performed no such sacrifices nor gave in charity."

Thereafter, Nārada Muni described many other great kings, such as Bhāgirathī, Dilīpa, Māndhātṛ, and Yayāti. King Yayāti had indulged in sense gratification for innumerable years and yet, he found that he was still not satisfied. Therefore, he at last came to the following realization: "Since all of the women and wealth in the world are not sufficient for one man, it is better to cultivate self-satisfaction rather than sensual
enjoyment."

When thinking in this way, King Yayāti retired to the forest in order to undergo penances while engaging himself in meditation. Nārada Muni then described King Śaśabindu whose 100,000 queens each gave birth to 1,000 sons. After performing a great aśvamedha-yajña, Mahārāja Śaśabindu gave away all of his sons to the brāhmaṇas, and each prince was accompanied by thousands of maidservants. Each beautifully decorated maiden was followed by 100 elephants and each elephant was accompanied by 100 chariots. Each chariot was drawn by 100 horses, for each horse there were 1,000 cows, and for each cow there were 50 goats. At the end of that great horse-sacrifice, thirteen mountains of food and drink remained untouched after all had been fed, and each hill was two miles high.

Nārada Muni then described King Gaya, who had performed unparalleled sacrifices upon an altar 30 yojanas long, 26 yojanas broad, and 20 yojanas high, and was made entirely of gold and inlaid with diamonds and pearls. Nārada Muni told about King Rantideva, who used to employ 200,000 cooks so that food could be distributed at any time of the day or night. Indeed, the animals used to voluntarily approach Rantideva's sacrificial arena, being desirous of attaining heaven.

Nārada Muni described Bhārata, the son of Duṣmanta, who, as a child, used to capture lions, rhinoceroses, and other wild animals, and then let them go after beating them to within an inch of their lives. Nārada also described the glories of Mahārāja Ambarisha, Lord Rāmacandra, and Prīthu Mahārāja. He then concluded by saying, "My dear Śrījaya, all of these great kings had to die, and even Paraśurāma, the son of Jamadagni, will one day have to leave this world although discontented with the duration of life which had been allotted to him."

Then, after a pause, as Śrījaya sat silently, absorbed in thought, Nārada Muni inquired, "My dear king, have you understood my purpose in narrating the life-histories of these great personalities?"

Śrījaya replied, "O Devarṣi, my grief has been dispelled, just like darkness upon the rising of the sun. This is all your great mercy upon me."

Nārada Muni then said, "O King, I am very pleased to hear you say this. Now, kindly take a benediction from me, according to your choice."
Mahārāja Śrṅjaya very humbly replied, "O Nārada, just to know that I have satisfied you is in itself a sufficient reward."
Nārada Muni wanted to gratify his friend, however, and so he announced, "My dear Śrṅjaya, watch now as I bring back your son from hell!"
Indeed, as soon as this was said, Suvarṇaṣṭhivin suddenly appeared there, as splendid as a demigod, and when the king saw his beloved son, he became overwhelmed with joy. Śrīla Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, because Śrṅjaya's son had died without fulfilling the purpose of his human existence, he was brought back to life by Nārada Muni. Suvarṇaṣṭhivin had never performed any sacrifices, nor had he produced any children, and he had died in a very inglorious manner. On the other hand, Abhimanyu was a great warrior and he was killed while fighting heroically on the battlefield after having slain thousands of enemy soldiers. Thus, he fulfilled the aim of human life and indeed, he has already attained an exalted destination. Since Abhimanyu is now living in heaven in a celestial body, what would be the gain if he were to be brought back to life here on earth? Now, my dear grandson, please give up your unwarranted grief, and set your mind upon slaying your enemies."
After saying this, Śrīla Vyāsadeva departed, and by reflecting upon his grandfather's words, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became somewhat relieved. However, when the king thought about how Arjuna would soon return from battle, he once again became overwhelmed with anxiety, wondering what he would dare to say to his younger brother.
Meanwhile, after killing innumerable Samsaptakas by employing his celestial weapons, since the sun had already set, Arjuna desisted from further fighting and began to return to the Pāṇḍavas' camp. While going along, however, Arjuna felt a terrible fear enter his heart and he began to observe signs of foreboding misfortune. While sensing tragedy, tears came to Arjuna's eyes, and he inquired, "O Kṛṣṇa, has some terrible calamity overtaken Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, or has there occurred any other misfortune?"
Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira is quite well. There is just some trifling mishap which you should not grieve about."
Soon thereafter, upon arriving at their camp, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna
noticed that gloom pervaded everywhere, and the usual sounds of musical entertainment could not be heard. Indeed, all of the warriors were seen sitting with their heads hanging down, and so Arjuna very anxiously inquired, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, what has happened?"

Arjuna then saw his four brothers sitting together as if plunged into an ocean of grief, and this sight caused him to become exceedingly depressed. Carefully noting that Abhimanyu was not present, Arjuna could guess that his dear son had been slain, and after getting down from his chariot, he faltering began to question his brothers. Arjuna knew that Abhimanyu was the only one who could have penetrated the Kaurava's circular formation, but he also knew that his son was unable to come out from it. Deeply mortified by the thoughts which raced through his mind, and alarmed by his brothers' silence, Arjuna suddenly declared, "If I am not able to see my son this very minute, then I shall go to the abode of Yamaraja if need be in order to bring him back!"

Thereafter, while tearfully lamenting at great length, Arjuna wailed, "Alas! My heart must be made of iron, for it has not broken into thousands of pieces upon learning of my dear son's death!"

Arjuna could then recall how he had heard the victorious cries of the Dhṛtarāṣṭras. Overwhelmed by sorrow and with tears in his eyes, Arjuna then inquired in a agonized voice, "O Kṛṣṇa, why didn't You tell me about Abhimanyu's death when it had happened so that I could have immediately killed all of the Kuru warriors who had fought against him?"

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Arjuna, do not lament for your son. Such a heroic death is the way of life for a kṣatriya. Indeed, the warrior who fights courageously upon the battlefield and then dies without having turned his back, receives the highest merit and thus goes to live in the heavenly kingdom."

Arjuna then asked, "My dear brothers, how could Abhimanyu possibly have been slain in your presence? Are you all impotent cowards? Is this why you were unable to protect my dear son? It now appears to me that the armor which you wear and the weapons that you carry are merely ornamental decorations."

Arjuna then sat down, overcome by anger and grief, and at this time, no one dared to even look at him in the face. Finally, however, Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhira began to speak, and he gradually related to Arjuna all that
had taken place as follows:
"My dear brother, after you had departed to fight with the Samsaptakas, we attempted to attack Droṇa but were immediately driven back. Then, as the preceptor proceeded to exterminate our army, I approached Abhimanyu and requested him to penetrate into the Kaurava ranks, assuring him that all of the great Pāṇḍava warriors would follow in his wake. However, after Abhimanyu broke through the Kauravas' circular array, Jayadratha was able to check us all due to the benediction which he had received from Lord Śiva. Abhimanyu was then surrounded by six of the greatest Kuru warriors, and after fighting with them very heroically, he was at last slain by Duḥśāsana's son."

Upon hearing this, Arjuna exclaimed, "O my son!" and then fell down unconscious onto the ground. All of the leading Pāṇḍava warriors then hurriedly surrounded Arjuna, and when he at last regained consciousness, he appeared to be almost crazed with anger and grief. Then, while looking around feverishly and breathing heavily, Arjuna vowed, "I hereby promise to kill Jayadratha tomorrow, and if I fail to do so before the sun sets, then I shall enter into a blazing fire. Besides this, I agree to willingly accept the hellish destination which is attained by the most sinful of persons, such as those wretches who eat sweets in front of servants, children, and wives without sharing them; those who bathe naked; those who pass urine into a body of water; those who touch brāhmaṇas or the fire with their feet; and those who falsely utter the praises of others."

After saying this, Arjuna picked up his bow and began twanging it menacingly, and then he and Lord Kṛṣṇa blew upon their mighty conchshells. Indeed, all of the Pāṇḍava warriors roared loudly in order to express their approval of Arjuna's words. Arjuna's vow was then related to Jayadratha by means of Duryodhana's spies, and thus the king of the Sindhus became exceedingly dejected due to fear. Jayadratha then hurried to the assembly of Kuru warriors and pleaded, "O Kings, you must provide me with all protection, or else grant me permission to return home."

Then, turning to Duryodhana, Jayadratha begged, "O King, please let me return to my kingdom so that Arjuna will not even be able to find me tomorrow."
Duryodhana then tried to pacify Jayadratha by assuring him that all of the great Kuru heroes would give him ample protection by surrounding him on all sides. Duryodhana then took Jayadratha to Drona, and when the preceptor understood the situation, he also tried to console the anxious king. Drona said, "My dear Jayadratha, I shall personally take responsibility for protecting you from the wrath of Arjuna. Still, my dear king, you should keep in mind the inevitability of death. Remember that the destination of a kṣatriya who dies on the battlefield is the same as that which is attained by ṛṣis after performing very severe austerities."

Meanwhile, back in the Pāṇḍava camp, when they were once again alone together, Lord Kṛṣṇa chastised Arjuna as follows: "O son of Kuntī, you have acted very rashly by making such a serious vow without having consulted Me first. You have put yourself in a very dangerous position, for the Kauravas have already arranged to give Jayadratha full protection by keeping him constantly surrounded by Karṇa, Bhūriśravas, Aśvatthāmā, Vṛṣasena, Kṛpa, and Śalya."

Arjuna then boasted, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, You can rest assured that I shall easily slay Jayadratha. These six warriors do not equal even half of myself, and even if all of the demigods were to oppose me, it would not be sufficient to protect Jayadratha when I invoke my celestial weapons. Just make sure that my chariot is ready at dawn. O Kṛṣṇa, please go now and console Subhadrā, for I cannot even bear to think of how aggrieved she must be."

With a cheerless heart, Lord Kṛṣṇa then went to Subhadrā and tried to pacify her by saying, "My dear sister, Abhimanyu has died a hero's death, and thus he is now enjoying his heavenly reward. O Subhadrā, please do not lament, for death is inevitable. Arjuna has already vowed to slay Jayadratha tomorrow, and thus I can assure you that your son's death will soon be avenged."

Instead of becoming consoled, however, Subhadrā responded by indulging in piteous lamentations. Draupadī and Uttarā then joined her, and after the three women had sorrowfully wailed aloud for some time, they suddenly fainted onto the floor. Lord Kṛṣṇa was prepared for this, and thus, from a container which He held in His hand, He began to sprinkle water over the three ladies while once again assuring them that Abhimanyu had attained an exalted destination.
Then, after taking His leave, Lord Kṛṣṇa first of all returned to Arjuna, and then finally retired to His own tent in order to take rest. That night, while lying down upon His bed, Lord Kṛṣṇa passed the time thinking of various ways in which Jayadratha could be slain, and thus He appeared to be in a meditative trance of yoga-nidrā. Indeed, no one was able to sleep that night in the Pāṇḍava camp, for everyone was in too much anxiety, wondering how Arjuna would be able to fulfill his difficult vow. Since all of the Pāṇḍava warriors knew that Arjuna would enter fire if he failed to keep his promise, a great fear penetrated the very core of their hearts.

Then, in the middle of the night, Lord Kṛṣṇa suddenly woke up with a start and addressed his charioteer, who was resting nearby: "O Dāruka, I shall do whatever is necessary for Arjuna to accomplish his vow before the sun sets tomorrow. Indeed, I will make sure that Jayadratha is slain, even if I have to first of all vanquish all of the Kurus My very self. I could no longer bear to cast My eyes upon the earth if it was devoid of Arjuna. Arjuna is My very self. Thus, one who hates Arjuna verily hates Me, and one who follows him is My true devotee. O Dāruka, make sure that My chariot is ready and equipped with My Kaumodakī club, Sudarśana-cakra, Śārṅga bow and other invincible weapons. Keep My four white horses yoked and ready to go, and make sure that the standard of Garuḍa is raised. If you hear Me loudly sound the Rṣabha note on My Pāñcajanya conchshell, then you must immediately bring My chariot."

After Arjuna had fallen asleep that night, Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared to him in his dream. Since Arjuna never failed to rise up in order to give Kṛṣṇa proper respect, he did this in his dream and then offered the Lord a nice seat. Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Arjuna, do not grieve for the death of your son and the difficult task that is ahead of you, for moroseness is a great impediment to action. One's grief always gladdens the hearts of his enemies, and thus you should simply apply yourself to the task at hand."

Arjuna then expressed his doubts by saying, "O Kṛṣṇa, how will I be able to kill Jayadratha, since he will be kept at the back of the Kaurava army and surrounded by numerous warriors? At this time of the year, the sun sets very early, and thus I am afraid that I have made a big mistake in vowing to kill the king of the Sindhus."
Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "O Arjuna, previously you had satisfied Lord Śiva, and at that time he promised to reward you with his pāśupata weapon when needed. By obtaining this weapon, you shall surely be able to kill Jayadratha. Therefore, please call upon Lord Śiva and beg him to make good his promise."

After hearing this, Arjuna touched water in order to purify himself. Then, when the hour of Brāhma-muhūrta arrived, he sat down in meditation upon Lord Śiva. In his meditation, Arjuna saw Lord Kṛṣṇa dragging him by the left arm through the sky at the speed of the mind toward the Himālayas. In this way, they soon reached Kailāsa, after having passed over many beautiful and sacred spots. There, on the top of Kailāsa Hill, Arjuna saw Lord Śiva seated along with Pārvatī and surrounded by his innumerable associates. Being ever engaged in the performance of austerities, Lord Śiva blazed forth with his own effulgence, and he was being adored by great ṛṣis. After coming before Lord Śiva, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna bowed their heads down and then offered him praises by chanting the appropriate hymns of the Vedas. Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O best of all demigods, please be kind upon us and fulfill our wish."

Arjuna saw numerous offerings placed there which Lord Śiva used for his daily worship of Kṛṣṇa. In this way, Arjuna could vividly understand the supreme position of his dear friend and cousin, and so he began to mentally worship Him. Arjuna then requested, "My dear Lord Śiva, previously you had promised to give me your pāśupata weapon. Now, in my time of great need, I have come here in the hopes of receiving it from you."

Lord Śiva welcomed Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna and then said, "Nearby is a lake of nectar wherein I have kept the bow which I had formerly used to slay the demons. My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, You should go now and bring that bow to me along with the arrow that You will find accompanying it."

Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then set out for that celestial lake, accompanied by many of Lord Śiva's attendants. Upon their arrival, they saw two great serpents within the lake, the larger of which had 1,000 hoods and vomited-fire. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna first of all touched water for purification and then approached the two snakes with folded hands while uttering praises of Lord Śiva which are found in the Vedas. The
two snakes then immediately gave up their reptilian bodies and revealed themselves to be the bow and arrow which had been described by Lord Śiva. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then happily took up these weapons and returned to Lord Śiva, placing them in his hands. As soon as this was done, a brahmacārī having red hair and bluish throat emerged from the side of Lord Śiva's body. Taking up the bow and arrow, this brahmacārī proceeded to teach Arjuna how to utilize them after being invoked with the proper mantras. When the lesson was finished, the brahmacārī shot the arrow into the lake of nectar and then threw the bow in after it. Śiva then smilingly said, "My dear Arjuna, you can rest assured that you will accomplish your vow with the help of this invincible weapon."

Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then took leave of Lord Mahādeva and returned to the Pāṇḍava camp, confident that their object had been achieved. Upon awakening that morning, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira bathed, recited his usual prayers and engaged the brāhmaṇas in performing various sacrifices. Then, after dressing, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was approached by Kṛṣṇa and all the other leaders of the Pāṇḍava army. In the presence of these great warriors, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then prayed, "My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, You are our only shelter. Therefore, please rescue us from this dangerous situation by enabling Arjuna to fulfill his vow."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I promise you that Jayadratha will fall down dead upon the battlefield before the sun sets today. My words cannot prove false, and so please rest assured that there is no doubt of this."

Arjuna then entered that assembly, and after being heartily embraced by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, he related the previous night's wonderful dream wherein he met Lord Śiva by Lord Kṛṣṇa's grace. After hearing Arjuna's account of the dream, all of the Pāṇḍava warriors became very enlivened, for they were confident that he would fulfill his vow.

As the Pāṇḍava army set out that morning, fragrant breezes blew from behind, and there were many other signs indicating their victory. Arjuna then ordered Sātyaki to protect Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira that day so that he would be free to penetrate the Kaurava ranks in order to fulfill his vow. Meanwhile, Drona had arranged for Jayadratha to stay twelve miles behind the main body of the Kaurava army, surrounded by
six of their leading warriors, as well as 60,000 chariots, 10,000 elephants, 100,000 cavalry and 21,000 infantry. Droṇa had arrayed the Kaurava army partially in a circular formation and partially in the śakaṭa formation, causing the vast expanse of soldiers to spread out for 48 miles. In the rear of the Kaurava army was a lotus formation, and within the lotus was a needle formation consisting of Jayadratha and his six protectors.

Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then blew upon their conchshells, the Pāñcajanya and the Devadatta, and when they heard this transcendental sound, all of the Kaurava soldiers fearfully trembled and lost heart while their animals passed stool and urine. Then, as the Pāṇḍava warriors let out a ferocious roar, Arjuna urged Kṛṣṇa to take him to where Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son Durmaṛṣaṇa stood at the head of the Kaurava elephant division. Although Durmaṛṣaṇa was very eager to fight, Arjuna soon created a great massacre of all the Kaurava warriors who tried to oppose him, and thus, he proceeded to penetrate the enemy ranks.

Duḥśāsana then rallied his fleeing elephant division and led a furious attack so that the Kaurava warriors soon surrounded Arjuna on all sides. However, the heroic wielder of the Gāṇḍiva bow began to slay them so impetuously that once again, the entire division was routed, and the battlefield became strewn over with the bodies of slain elephants and men. Duḥśāsana himself had been injured by Arjuna, and as the elephant-warriors fled, he went to the shelter of Droṇa, who was stationed at the head of the Kaurava formation. Arjuna also rushed toward Droṇa, but then, at Lord Kṛṣṇa's urging, he suddenly halted his chariot, and while standing with folded hands, he begged for the preceptor's blessings in order to penetrate his army to kill Jayadratha. Droṇa then smilingly replied, "My dear Arjuna, unless you vanquish me first, there will be no possibility for you to even approach the king of the Sindhus."

After saying this, Droṇa began to send forth showers of arrows, completely covering Arjuna's chariot. Arjuna attacked Droṇa in return, but it soon became apparent that the preceptor was getting the better of his disciple. Droṇa then cut off Arjuna's bowstring. Arjuna quickly restrung it and began to kill many of Droṇa's supporting warriors, but
the preceptor pierced the son of Kuntī very deeply in the chest, causing him to tremble violently. Arjuna soon regained his composure and continued to fight, but still Droṇa predominated, piercing his disciple with innumerable arrows. Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O Arjuna, you must keep in mind today's aim and thus not waste time by fighting with Droṇa. Pass him by in order to penetrate deeper into the Kaurava ranks."

Obeying Kṛṣṇa's command, Arjuna left aside Droṇa, and at this, the preceptor challenged, "O son of Kuntī, why are you fleeing? Come back here and try to vanquish your enemy!"

Arjuna cleverly replied, "My dear Droṇa, you are not my enemy. You are my guru and therefore, I am not capable of vanquishing you."

After saying this, Arjuna continued to penetrate the Kaurava ranks while the Pañcāla heroes, Yudhāmanyu and Uttamaujā, followed him just like a shadow in order to protect his chariot wheels. Numerous Kaurava warriors then rushed to check Arjuna, and when Droṇa came to support them, a very fierce battle ensued. Arjuna first of all encountered the preceptor, and in that battle he killed numerous Kaurava warriors. Then, in order to avoid the preceptor, Arjuna rushed at Kṛtavarmā and Sudakṛṣṇa, the king of the Kāmbhojas. Thereafter, as he fiercely battled with Kṛtavarmā, Lord Kṛṣṇa once again said, "O Arjuna, do not waste time in this way. Disregard your family relationship with Kṛtavarmā and slay him quickly without showing any further mercy."

In response, Arjuna launched a furious attack upon Kṛtavarmā, causing the Yadu hero to fall unconscious. Then, as Arjuna proceeded to penetrate the army of the Kāmbhojas, Kṛtavarmā quickly recovered himself and attacked Yudhāmanyu and Uttamaujā so fiercely that they had to leave off accompanying Kuntī's son. Although Arjuna could have turned back and easily vanquished Kṛtavarmā, he proceeded on and next encountered Śrutāyudha.

A fierce duel ensued as these two warriors repeatedly pierced each other with their arrows, but at last, Arjuna managed to kill Śrutāyudha's horses and charioteer. After jumping down, Śrutāyudha rushed forward with his mace uplifted, and then he hurled that terrible weapon at Lord Kṛṣṇa, even though he had been warned not to do so by his father.
Śrutāyudha was the son of Varuṇa by the River Parnasa, and she had begged the lord of the waters to benedict him so that he would be unslayable in battle. Varuṇa first of all explained to his wife how immortality was impossible within the material world. Then, in order to satisfy his wife, Varuṇa gave Śrutāyudha a celestial mace which would enable him to vanquish all of his enemies. However, while instructing his son how to use this weapon with the required mantras, Varuṇa warned, "My dear Śrutāyudha, if this mace is ever hurled at one who is not engaged in fighting, then it will come back to slay he who has released it."

Thus, after striking Lord Kṛṣṇa on His shoulder, without giving Him any pain, that celestial mace returned to knock Śrutāyudha off from his chariot, making him fall down dead onto the ground. Sudakṣiṇa then rushed at Arjuna, but after a brief exchange of arrows, his bow was broken and emblem cut down. Sudakṣiṇa then hurled a blazing dart which pierced Arjuna deeply making him momentarily fall unconscious. However, after recovering himself, Arjuna angrily smashed Sudakṣiṇa's chariot to pieces with his arrows, and then sent him to the abode of Yamarāja.

Thousands of Kāmbhojas warriors then rushed at Arjuna in order to retaliate, but then when 600 of them were slain within moments, the rest beat a hasty retreat. Being unable to tolerate this, Śrutāyu and Acyutāyu next rushed impetuously toward Arjuna while showering their arrows upon him. Śrutāyu then pierced Arjuna with a lance, making him reel due to dizziness, and taking advantage of this, Acyutāyu pierced him with a spear. Being deeply wounded, Arjuna had to steady himself by holding onto his flagpole, and when they saw this, the Kaurava warriors thought that the Pāṇḍava hero was slain and thus began to shout with joy.

Lord Kṛṣṇa became exceedingly aggrieved to see how Arjuna had practically lost consciousness, and He began tending to him while Śrutāyu and Acyutāyu continued showering their arrows. Then, when Arjuna came to his senses and saw how his chariot was being heavily bombarded, he quickly invoked a weapon of Indra, causing thousands of arrows to issue forth, severing the limbs and heads of both Śrutāyu and Acyutāyu. Thereafter, thousands of mleccha warriors, having unclean
habits, rushed at Arjuna while riding upon their elephants. Although surrounded, Arjuna quickly exterminated those Mlecchas along with their elephants, and then killed 6,000 cavalry and 1,000 chariot-warriors of the Kaurava army. Indeed, while engaged in annihilating the enemy, Arjuna appeared to be dancing upon the battlefield like a dramatic actor upon the stage. Thereafter, as Arjuna proceeded to penetrate the Kaurava ranks, Duryodhana went to Droṇa in a state of panic and pleaded, "O Preceptor, you must do something quickly to stop Arjuna from approaching Jayadratha. Because of your partiality toward the Pāṇḍavas, you appear to be just like a razor soaked with honey. O Droṇa, you had promised to check Arjuna, and yet he has already broken into our ranks. Now, I can see what a fool I was for believing your words. If I had known that your were not going to keep your promise, then I would have given Jayadratha permission to return home."

Droṇa mildly replied, "My dear king, I do not take offense at your accusations. However, I am not willing to leave the head of my army in order to fight with Arjuna, for I have already vowed to capture Yudhiṣṭhira. With the support of all the other leading Kaurava warriors, you should be the one who contends with Arjuna."

Duryodhana then said, "O Preceptor, I know that I am incapable of standing before Arjuna, and that is why I am begging you to come to our rescue."

Droṇa then put a wonderful celestial armor on Duryodhana's body, and after empowering it with mantras, he explained, "My dear king, once long ago, when the demigods had been defeated by Vṛtrāsura, thousands of their warriors were slain. The demigods then took shelter of Lord Brahmā, and after hearing of their plight, the grandsire instructed them to approach Lord Śiva, since it was he who had empowered Tvaṣṭā to create Vṛtra after the rṣī had performed austerities for many thousands of years. Lord Brahmā then took Indra and the demigods to Mount Kailāsa. After welcoming them, Lord Śiva offered the demigods a benediction, and so they described their defeat at the hands of Vṛtra and then begged him for protection. In response, Lord Śiva took the effulgent armor off from his body and presented it to Indra, while instructing him how to put it on by mentally pronouncing the proper mantras. Thereafter, Indra proceeded against Vṛtra's army, and in the
great battle that ensued, the king of heaven was struck by numerous weapons, and yet, none of them could penetrate his wonderful armor. After killing Vṛtrāsura, Indra gave away the armor to Aṅgirāś, who later on handed it down to his son, Bṛhaspati. Bṛhaspati in turn gave the armor to Agniveśa, and it is from him that I had received it. My dear Duryodhana, this very armor has now been given by me to you, and with its protection you shall be able to fight with Arjuna."

Duryodhana then took leave of Drona and proceeded toward where Arjuna was staying, followed by 1,000 elephants, 100,000 horse-soldiers, and innumerable chariot-warriors. Meanwhile, at noon, the Pāṇḍava army attacked Drona as he was stationed at the head of the Kaurava army. Dhṛṣṭadyumna led the Pāṇḍava forces, and while assailing Drona, he succeeded in dividing the Kaurava army into three parts so that a great massacre took place. Drona then flared up like a raging fire and began to consume the Pāṇḍava warriors in retaliation, and at this time, no one dared to come before him.

Bhima fought against Jalasandha, Yudhiṣṭhira battled Kṛtavarmā, Sātyaki fought with Duḥṣāsana, Sañjaya was engaged in fighting with Cekitāna, and Śakuni became so hardpressed while fighting with Nakula and Sahadeva that he fled to the shelter of Drona. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then rushed forward to check Drona, and in the fierce duel that ensued, a great number of warriors were slain on both sides. The two then came so close together that as the white horses of Drona mixed with the red horses of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, it appeared as if clouds were surcharged with lightning. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then quickly put down his bow, picked up his sword and shield, and jumped onto Drona's chariot. With bow in hand, Drona was prepared for this attack, and so Dhṛṣṭadyumna avoided him by darts here and there on his chariot. The preceptor then shattered Dhṛṣṭadyumna's shield to pieces with 100 arrows, broke his sword with 10 more, and killed his horses and driver. Next, Drona took up a fierce arrow in order to kill Dhṛṣṭadyumna, but Sātyaki broke that shaft before the preceptor could release it. The Pañcāla warriors then launched a sudden attack upon Drona, and in the heat of battle, Dhṛṣṭadyumna was taken away on another chariot.

A hectic duel then took place between Drona and Sātyaki, as each showered thousands of arrows upon the other. Indeed, all other warriors
stopped fighting in order to watch this wonderful contest, surrounding the two commanders as spectators. Sātyaki then broke Drona's bow, and when the preceptor quickly picked up another bow he cut that to pieces as well. Indeed, again and again, altogether sixteen times, Drona picked up one bow after another and Sātyaki broke them all. Although the preceptor was highly enraged, he mentally applauded his adversary by thinking, "This warrior is on the level of Bhīṣma, Kārtavīryārjuna, and Paraśurāma!"

Finally, becoming frustrated in his attempts, Drona began to invoke celestial weapons, but Sātyaki successfully countered them all with his own. At this time, the four Pāṇḍavas and their allies suddenly rushed at Drona in order to help Sātyaki, and so Duḥśāsana led thousands of Kaurava warriors in a counter-assault. Meanwhile, as this very fierce battle took place while the afternoon was drawing on, Arjuna continued proceeding toward Jayadratha. After many hours of grueling combat, however, Arjuna's four white horses had become very fatigued and afflicted by hunger and thirst, as well as wounded by innumerable arrows. Understanding this, Vinda and Anuvinda attacked while piercing Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and his horses, with showers of arrows. Arjuna then broke the bows of both Avanti kings, and when they picked up two more, he broke these as well. Arjuna then quickly killed the brothers' horses and drivers, and at last, he cut off Vinda's head. At this, the enraged Anuvinda got down from his disabled chariot, and after rushing forward with his upraised mace, he struck Lord Kṛṣṇa on the forehead. Kṛṣṇa did not even flinch, however, and with his arrows, Arjuna angrily cut off Anuvinda's arms, legs, and head. The followers of the Avanti kings then rushed at Arjuna in the hopes of taking revenge, but they all perished like flies entering a great fire.

Knowing that his horses were greatly fatigued, the entire Kaurava army gradually surrounded Arjuna, who then asked, "O Kṛṣṇa, what should be done, for we are still a long distance from Jayadratha? I think that You should quickly get down from the chariot in order to tend to the horses. Pluck the arrows from their bodies and then allow them a few moments rest before we continue penetrating the Kaurava ranks."

Lord Kṛṣṇa considered this to be a good idea, and so both He and Arjuna got down from their chariots. The Kaurava warriors were overjoyed to
obtain this golden opportunity, and so they began to shower their arrows upon Arjuna with great enthusiasm while rushing forward. Arjuna stood upon the ground, bow in hand, and as he proceeded to foil the Kaurava warriors' weapons and check their progress, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "Your horses are desperately in need of water but there is no well to be found here."

Upon hearing this, Arjuna pierced the earth with a wonderful celestial weapon which instantly created a beautiful lake containing cool transparent water, and abounding with lotus flowers and exotic birds. Next, Arjuna constructed a spacious hall, completely out of arrows, and upon seeing these two extraordinary feats, Lord Kṛṣṇa praised him very highly. Kṛṣṇa then unyoked the horses and led them into that arrowy hall, and while Arjuna proceeded to hold all of the Kaurava warriors in check, He plucked out the arrows from their bodies. Lord Kṛṣṇa then massaged the horses with His lotus-like hands and had them drink the cool water of the lake. In this way, the horses' fatigue was soon relieved, and then, after Lord Kṛṣṇa had yoked them, as He and Arjuna once again mounted their chariot, all of the Kaurava warriors praised them for this unprecedented achievement. Indeed, when Lord Kṛṣṇa and Ajuna departed in great haste, all of the Kaurava warriors considered Jayadratha to be already slain.

By this time, the sun was already descending toward the western hills, however, and so Ajuna requested Kṛṣṇa to urge his horses on with greater speed. In response, Lord Kṛṣṇa began to drive so swiftly that the arrows which Arjuna released were seen to fall behind their speeding chariot. Thus, within a very short time, Jayadratha at last came into view in the distance, and upon seeing him, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna roared with great delight. In the meantime, however, Duryodhana, who was now clad in impenetrable armor, had passed Ajuna's chariot and then turned around to face him.

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Arjuna, Duryodhana has performed a wonderful feat by overtaking us like this. Now, the time has come for you to release your long-held wrath against the Kaurava king."

In response, Arjuna ordered Kṛṣṇa to take him toward Duryodhana. The two great heroes thus approached each other, and although they were both highly enraged, at the same time they were joyful to have received
the opportunity of combating each other. Arjuna and Duryodhana then blew upon their mighty conchshells, and after challenging his adversary, the Kaurava king began to release his arrows. One of these blazing shafts broke the whip which Lord Kṛṣṇa held and knocked it from his hand so that it fell upon the ground. Becoming furious, Arjuna retaliated by sending forth showers of arrows, and yet, instead of piercing Duryodhana, they were repelled by his impenetrable armor. Again and again Arjuna discharged streams of arrows, but all of them bounced off Duryodhana's armor, and upon seeing this, Lord Kṛṣṇa exclaimed, "O Arjuna, how wonderful it is that your arrows are being repelled like this! Is it possible that the Gāṇḍīva bow has lost its potency, or that your arms have now grown weak?"

Arjuna replied, "My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, You are the knower of everything, past, present and future. Therefore, why are You inquiring from me about the cause of my failure? In my opinion, Duryodhana must have received Droṇa's impenetrable armor, which is capable of repelling even Indra's thunderbolt. However, even if this be the case, it does not matter, for me Kaurava king certainly is no more capable of utilizing it properly than if it were being worn by a woman. O Kṛṣṇa, rest assured that I shall vanquish Duryodhana, in spite of his impenetrable armor."

After saying this, Arjuna empowered some arrows with a special mantra and then placed mem upon his bowstring. However, from a great distance, Açvatthāmā broke those arrows to pieces before Arjuna could even release them. Arjuna was highly amazed at this, and then he informed Kṛṣṇa, "O Lord, I cannot employ this weapon twice. If I were to do so, then it would destroy me instead of my adversary."

Meanwhile, as Duryodhana continued to fearlessly shower his arrows upon Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, the Kaurava warriors encouraged him by shouting with great joy. Arjuna then carefully scrutinized Duryodhana, and yet, he could not discern a single place on his body which was not protected by the impenetrable armor. Without becoming disheartened, however, Arjuna proceeded to kill Duryodhana's horses and driver, and then broke his bow and at last cut off the leather glove protecting his hand. Thereafter Arjuna began to smash Duryodhana's chariot into small fragments with his arrows while at the same time piercing the Kaurava king's unprotected palm. Many Kaurava soldiers then came
rushing to aid their beleaguered king, but Arjuna slaughtered them by the hundreds. Lord Krṣṇa then said, "O son of Kuntī, continue to release your arrows while I blow upon My Pāñcajanya conchshell."

Thereafter, as Lord Krṣṇa blew upon His conchshell, its sound combined with the twanging of the Gāṇḍīva bow, and the vibration became so forceful that many great warriors fell down onto the battlefield. Indeed, the entire Kaurava army was thrown into confusion on account of that terrible sound, and thus Arjuna was easily able to approach Jayadratha. Bhūriśravas, Śala, Kārṇa, Vṛṣasena, Kṛpa, Śalya, and Aśvatthāmā then advanced to check Arjuna, and as the battle raged, Duryodhana joined them. The fighting thus became extremely fierce, and when Arjuna broke Śalya's bow twice, Bhūriśravas retaliated by breaking the goad which Lord Krṣṇa carried in His lotus-like hand.

Meanwhile, the Pāṇḍava and Pañcāla armies, headed by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, fought furiously with Droṇa and his army so that it appeared as if the preceptor was the stake in a gambling match. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira rushed at Droṇa, and when the preceptor cut off his bow and covered him with thousands of arrows, everyone thought that the Pāṇḍava king would be slain. However, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira took up a stronger bow and broke to pieces all of Droṇa's arrows, thus amazing those who watched the magnificent duel. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then roared loudly as he hurled a blazing dart with a golden shaft. Droṇa invoked a brahmāstra which reduced that dart to ashes, and as that powerful weapon continued toward his chariot, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira neutralized it with his own brahmāstra. The Pāṇḍava king then pierced Droṇa with five arrows and cut off his large bow. Throwing aside that broken bow, Droṇa picked up a mace and hurled it, but Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira hurled his own mace so that the two crashed together and fell to the ground. Droṇa became highly enraged upon seeing this, and he quickly killed Yudhiṣṭhira's horses with four arrows. Droṇa then broke Yudhiṣṭhira's bow, knocked down his royal standard, and then pierced him with three more arrows. Being weaponless, Yudhiṣṭhira jumped down from his disabled chariot and then stood upon the ground with upraised arms. The preceptor then rushed forward to make good his vow while showering his arrows in order to drive away the Pāṇḍava warrior. However, before Droṇa could reach him, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira
was taken up onto Sahadeva's chariot and carried far away from the scene of battle.

Alambuṣa's brother, Baka, had formerly been slain by Bhīma, and so, with the desire to gain revenge, the Rākṣasa challenged him with harsh words and then assumed a very terrible form. Alambuṣa then rushed forward and pierced Bhīma so severely with his arrows that he fainted onto the floor of his chariot. Bhīma soon recovered himself, however, and in a fit of rage, he covered the Rākṣasa's entire body with arrows. Alambuṣa then made himself invisible and continued to shower his arrows upon Bhīma from the sky. However, the heroic son of Vāyu retaliated by discharging arrows into the sky so forcefully that soon the Rākṣasa was forced to reappear, riding upon his chariot. Thereafter, Alambuṣa assumed various forms, one after another, so that sometimes he appeared to be entering into the earth, and then again he would be seen soaring through the sky, showering down his weapons and slaughtering the Pāṇḍava warriors. This magical display made the Kaurava warriors shout with delight, and being unable to tolerate this, Bhīma's eyes burned with rage. Bhīma then invoked a Tvaṣṭā weapon which shot forth thousands of arrows. This wonderful weapon not only slaughtered numerous Kaurava warriors, but also dispelled all of Alambuṣa's illusions and wounded him severely. With his body pierced all over with arrows, the Rākṣasa quickly retreated to the shelter of Droṇa, while the Pāṇḍava soldiers shouted victoriously.

However, a short while later, Alambuṣa appeared at another place on the battlefield, and once again he began to slaughter the Pāṇḍava soldiers. Ghaṭotkaca then rushed at Alambuṣa so that a very fierce duel took place as the two Rākṣasas showered upon each other their arrows. Both of them created illusions during the course of this battle, but each was able to destroy the other's display of mystic power with his own. As a result, neither Ghaṭotkaca, nor Alambuṣa could gain the upper hand. Bhīma then led many other Pāṇḍava warriors in an attack upon Alambuṣa, and although the Rākṣasa countered them heroically, he soon became surrounded on all sides and wounded by countless arrows. Seeing that his enemy had weakened, Ghaṭotkaca made up his mind to kill him without delay and then jumped down from his chariot. Rushing forward, Ghaṭotkaca dragged Alambuṣa down from his chariot, picked him up
over his head, and then, after whirling him around again and again, the son of Bhīma smashed him onto the ground so that all of his limbs and bones were crushed as he gave up his life. Upon witnessing the death of this terrible Rākṣasa who had oppressed them so greatly, the Pāṇḍava warriors shouted with joy and waved their garments while heartily congratulating Bhīma's heroic Rākṣasa son.

Meanwhile, Droṇa and Sātyaki had been battling one another. However, due to the preceptor's incessant stream of arrows, the Yadu hero finally became so afflicted that he lost heart and became confused about what to do next. While the Kaurava warriors roared with delight, Dhrṣṭadyumna and Bhīma led the Pāṇḍava army in an assault on Droṇa in order to rescue Sātyaki. The preceptor faced them all cheerfully, however, just like a pious householder receiving guests, and in the great fight which followed, he killed 25 mahārathas among the Paṇcālas.

Indeed, Droṇa fought so fiercely while engaged in slaughtering countless enemy soldiers that no one dared to approach him.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then heard the blare of Lord Kṛṣṇa's Pāṇcājaneya conchshell. However, since he was unable to hear the twang of the Gāṇḍiva bow and because the shouts of the Kaurava warriors were distinctly audible, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra practically fainted, thinking that Arjuna must have met with some grave danger. Thus, he went to Sātyaki and implored, "O Yuyudhāna, next to Lord Kṛṣṇa, you are our greatest refuge. Therefore, I beg you to go and rescue Arjuna. You are our sincerest well-wisher, and you are Arjuna's dearest disciple. Indeed, you are practically equal to him in terms of skill and prowess, and thus I see no one else who can be entrusted with this great responsibility."

Sātyaki replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhīra, I am always ready to execute your order, and I would do anything for Arjuna's sake. However, you must consider that I was ordered by Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna to protect you at all costs. Indeed, it was only with that assurance that they were willing to leave you aside in order to slay Jayadratha. My dear king, do not imagine that Arjuna is in serious difficulty, for he would be able to combat all of the combined moving and nonmoving entities within the universe if they were to attack him."

Still, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra felt very uneasy at heart, and so he insisted that Sātyaki go to Arjuna's aid, assuring him that Bhīma and the others
would be sufficient to protect him from Droṇa. Sātyaki then considered how even Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna would follow Yudhiṣṭhira’s commands, and thus at last, he reluctantly agreed to depart. Sātyaki first of all ordered his driver, the younger brother of Dāruka, to prepare his chariot and refresh his horses. Then, as Sātyaki set out, advancing toward the Kaurava ranks, Droṇa came to check him. The preceptor challenged, "O Yuyudhāna, you will surely be slain if you do not avoid fighting with me like your guru, Arjuna did."

Sātyaki replied, "O Droṇa, instead of wasting my time by fighting with you, I shall obey Yudhiṣṭhira’s command. I will follow the course taken by Arjuna, for it is the duty of a disciple to traverse the path which the guru has chalked out."

After saying this, Sātyaki avoided Droṇa and continued to penetrate the Kaurava army. Kṛtavarmā next confronted Sātyaki, and after piercing him very deeply, he broke his bow in half. Sātyaki calmly took up another bow, however, and beheaded Kṛtavarmā’s driver so that the unguided horses carried him wildly away from the scene of battle. Kṛtavarmā finally managed to grab the reins and bring the horses under control, but by that time Sātyaki had already proceeded on. Meanwhile, Droṇa chased Sātyaki from behind, and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma advanced with the Pāṇḍava forces in order to check him. Kṛtavarmā then gave up the idea of fighting with Sātyaki in order to oppose the onrushing Pāṇḍavas. Thus, a fierce battle ensued and Kṛtavarmā soon broke Bhīma’s bow and then wounded him so severely that he began to tremble violently while standing on his chariot. Yudhiṣṭhira then urged his army to protect Bhīma by attacking Kṛtavarmā, and as numerous warriors thus rushed at him the Bhoja hero pierced them all and broke Śikhanḍi’s bow. In retaliation, Śikhanḍi took out his sword and impetuously threw it, slicing Kṛtavarmā’s bow in half. However, Kṛtavarmā took up another bow and rushed at Śikhanḍi, and after a short but fierce duel, he pierced the Paṇcāla prince so deeply that he fainted away, dropping his bow and arrows. Then, as Śikhanḍi was hastily taken off the battlefield by his driver, Kṛtavarmā continued to slaughter the Pāṇḍava soldiers. Being unable to tolerate this, Sātyaki turned back to face Kṛtavarmā, and after a fierce duel, he broke his bow and killed his horses.
Sātyaki then proceeded on, and he soon came up against a large division of elephants. Thereafter, as Sātyaki massacred these huge beasts while breaking through their ranks, Jalasandha, the king of the Māgadhas, rushed at him, riding upon his colossal elephant. During that fierce attack, Jalasandha pierced Sātyaki deeply and then broke his bow. However, Sātyaki calmly took up another bow and retaliated by piercing Jalasandha deeply and cutting his bow to pieces. Jalasandha then hurled a lance which pierced right through Sātyaki's left arm. Becoming highly enraged, Sātyaki released showers of arrows, but then Jalasandha hurled a sword which sliced his bow in half. Sātyaki took up another bow, and this time he cut off both of Jalasandha's arms and then severed his head. When they saw that their leader had been slain, the Māgadha warriors panicked, fleeing in all directions, so that Sātyaki was free to proceed onward.

The Dhātarāṣṭras, led by Droṇa, then caught up with Sātyaki so that a fierce battle ensued. After rushing at Duryodhana, Sātyaki broke his bow twice and then killed his horses and beheaded his charioteer. As Duryodhana escaped by getting up on Citrasena's chariot, Kṛtvārma rushed at Sātyaki, but he became so afflicted that he soon fainted onto the floor. Being very eager to catch a sight of Arjuna, Sātyaki desisted from further fighting, but as he proceeded on, Droṇa once again came to check him. Soon, Sātyaki's driver became so severely wounded that he fell to the floor unconscious. Being undaunted, Sātyaki took up the reins, and as he simultaneously continued to fight, he killed Droṇa's charioteer so that the unguided horses wildly carried the preceptor away.

In the meantime, Sātyaki's driver recovered, and as the Yadu hero continued on, he next encountered the Kāmbhojas, as well as the Mlecchas, Śakas, and other uncivilized warrior tribes. Sātyaki quickly routed them, but then he saw that Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, and other Dhṛtarāṣṭras were trying to overtake him from the rear. Sātyaki thus instructed his driver to slow down so that he could encounter the onrushing foe.

Thereafter, when the Kaurava army attacked, Sātyaki quickly killed 300 horse-soldiers, 400 elephants, and numerous foot-soldiers. Indeed, Sātyaki's slaughter of the enemy was even greater than that which had been accomplished by Arjuna when he had passed that way. In that
encounter, Sātyaki cut off Śakuni's bow after a brief exchange of arrows, and then he killed Duryodhana's driver, causing the unmanaged horses to carry the Kaurava king away. When the other Kaurava warriors saw Duryodhana's plight, they discontinued fighting, and so once again Sātyaki proceeded toward Arjuna.

Next, at Duryodhana's command, thousands of Samsaptakas attacked, but Sātyaki slaughtered them all in a matter of moments. Duḥśāsana then ordered some mountain warriors who fought only with stones to attack Sātyaki, and he encouraged them by saying that the Yādava hero was not familiar with this mode of warfare. However, when these mountaineers surrounded him with their upraised stones, Sātyaki not only smashed all their rocks to pieces with his arrows, but he severed their limbs so that at least 500 fell down dead, some of whom were crushed by their own boulders. Then, as the remaining mountaineers tied in fear, Sātyaki slew them by the thousands while simultaneously cutting off in the air any stones which they attempted to hurl at him.

After watching Sātyaki route the Kaurava army, Droṇa wondered whether he should continue to follow the Yadu hero or else go back to where the Pāṇḍava and Paṅcāla warriors were assailing his army. Indeed, while Droṇa was thinking in this way, Sātyaki came into view as he gave chase to the retreating Kauravas. Then, when he saw Duḥśāsana fleeing in fear after the defeat of his elder brother, Droṇa began to chastise him very harshly as follows, in the hopes of making him rally the Kaurava army: "O Hero, previously you had addressed Draupadī very cruelly by saying, 'Princess of Paṅcāla, now that they have lost at dice, your husbands are as good as dead. Therefore, without hesitation, you should renounce them along with your chastity and become a serving-maid of Duryodhana.' O Duḥśāsana, after uttering such bold words in the presence of the Pāṇḍavas, why are you now fleeing from merely Sātyaki? If you want to avoid fighting, then you should surrender unto the Pāṇḍavas and return to them their kingdom after establishing peaceful relations."

Duḥśāsana pretended not to hear the preceptor's words. Without uttering any reply, he rallied his army and then proceeded to where Sātyaki was staying. Droṇa then confronted the Paṅcālas, and as he began to slaughter many of their leading warriors, Dhṛṣṭadyumna rushed
to check him. Indeed, with great rage, he pierced Droṇa so severely that
the preceptor fainted onto the floor of his chariot. Then, in the hopes of
taking full advantage of this golden opportunity, Dhṛṣṭadyumna put
aside his bow, and after taking out his sword, he jumped down from his
chariot and hastily leapt onto Droṇa’s. However, the preceptor had
already recovered, and he attacked his assailant with steady streams of
arrows.
Finding himself to be overwhelmed by this attack, Dhṛṣṭadyumna
quickly jumped down from Droṇa’s chariot and remounted his own.
Then, during the very fierce duel which ensued between the two, Droṇa
cut off the head of Dhṛṣṭadyumna’s driver so that the unguided horses
wildly carried him away from the battlefield.
Meanwhile, at Droṇa’s urging, Duḥṣāsana had launched an attack upon
Sātyaki, followed by a large number of supporting warriors. Sātyaki
quickly scattered the Kaurava forces with incessant showers of arrows so
that Duḥṣāsana alone stood firm, piercing the Yadu hero in return.
Sātyaki was a much more powerful warrior, however, and thus
Duḥṣāsana soon became very afflicted. Seeing this, Duryodhana sent
3,000 Trigarta charioteers to assist his younger brother, but when
Sātyaki quickly slaughtered 500 of these Samsaptakas, the rest fled
toward Droṇa. Sātyaki then proceeded toward Arjuna, but when
Duḥṣāsana persisted in attacking him, he once again turned back to face
him. As Duḥṣāsana continued to approach him, Sātyaki first of all killed
his driver and horses, and then knocked down his royal emblem, and at
last pierced him very severely in the chest. Duḥṣāsana got down from his
disabled chariot and was taken up by one of the Trigartas. At this time
Sātyaki could have easily slain him, but he did not do so, remembering
Bhima’s vow to kill all of the Dhṛtarāṣṭras.
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, and Dhṛṣṭadyumna then led a massive
attack on the Kaurava army with the idea of taking some pressure off
Sātyaki and Arjuna. Duryodhana rushed to check their assault, and after
penetrating the Pāṇḍava ranks, he fearlessly began slaughtering the
enemy soldiers with great vengeance. Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, and many
other warriors tried to repulse Duryodhana, but the Kaurava king
valiantly pierced them all with his arrows while simultaneously slaying
hundreds of Pāṇḍava soldiers. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then managed to
break Duryodhana's bow, but when he proceeded to strike the Kaurava king with his arrows, he found that they were futile against his impenetrable armor. With irresistible energy, Droṇa then flared up and came to Duryodhana's aid, and indeed, the 85 year-old preceptor maneuvered over the battlefield just like a 16-year-old youth, and while doing so, he killed Śiśupāla's son Dhṛṣṭaketu, Jarāsandha's son Sahadeva, and Dhṛṣṭadyumna's son Kṣatradharman.

While the battle raged between Droṇa and the Pāṇḍava army, Mahārāja Yudhīśṭhira became very afraid for the lives of Arjuna and Śātvyaki. Not only had he been unable to see the two heroes for such a long time, but he could no longer hear the twanging of the Gāṇḍiva bow. Mahārāja Yudhīśṭhira especially felt responsible for Śātvyaki, because he had sent him off without any support. Fearing criticism for this rash act, the king went to Bhīma and expressed his fears. Bhīma could see that the king was very much disturbed, and so in order to pacify him, Bhīma assured his elder brother that he was ready to execute his every command. Mahārāja Yudhīśṭhira then said, "My dear Bhīma, you must go and search for Arjuna and Śātvyaki, and if you find that they are still alive, signal me by roaring loudly."

Just then, Mahārāja Yudhīśṭhira could hear the blaring of the Pāṇcajanya conchshell, and so he exclaimed, "Surely Lord Kṛṣṇa has now taken up His weapons after the death of Arjuna!"

Bhīma tried to assure Yudhīśṭhira that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna could not be in serious danger. But then, seeing that the king could not be pacified with words, he promised to search for them as ordered. After putting his elder brother in the care of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Bhīma started out, and while going, he felt auspicious breezes blowing which indicated his success. Thus, it was with great confidence that he approached Droṇa, who was stationed at the head of the Kaurava army. Droṇa assumed that Bhīma would offer him respect just as Arjuna had done. Still, as a matter of course, he challenged, "O Bhīma, your brother Arjuna had penetrated the Kaurava army with my permission. However, even though you may consider yourself to be a great hero, you shall never be able to do so."

The enraged Bhīma responded, "You wretch of a brāhmaṇa, although I formerly respected you like a father, I shall now treat you as an enemy!"

After saying this, Bhīma violently hurled his mace and indeed, Droṇa
had to quickly jump to safety in order to save himself from being smashed along with his chariot, horses, and driver. Then, as Bhīma proceeded to inflict heavy casualties upon the Kaurava army, Droṇa then mounted upon another chariot. The Dhṛtarāṣṭras came and surrounded Bhīma, and while rushing forward, Duḥśāsana hurled a fierce dart. Bhīma easily baffled that dart and then retaliated by slaying seven of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons. The remaining Dhṛtarāṣṭras continued to send forth showers of arrows, but when Bhīma killed four more Dhṛtarāṣṭras, the rest panicked and fled. At this, the entire Kaurava army began to retreat, and while giving chase, Bhīma continued to slaughter numerous enemy soldiers. Droṇa then returned in order to intercept Bhīma, and as these two unrivaled heroes fought, the preceptor killed hundreds of Pāṇḍava warriors. Being unable to tolerate this, Bhīma suddenly jumped down from his chariot, and while closing his eyes in order to bear Droṇa's onslaught of arrows, he rushed at the preceptor. Droṇa feverishly tried to repulse Bhīma, but the valiant son of Vāyu was able to come right up and grab onto his chariot while tolerating the attack. Then, as Droṇa fearfully jumped to safety, Bhīma threw the preceptor's chariot to the ground with great force, smashing it into fragments. Droṇa then sped away on another chariot, and so Bhīma remounted his own and continued toward Arjuna, passing quite easily through the armies of the Kauravas, the Bhōjas, the Kāmbhojas, and the Mlecchas. Finally, Bhīma caught sight of Śātyaki, causing his desire to see Arjuna increase unlimitedly. Then, when Bhīma suddenly saw Arjuna engaged in battle, he let out a loud roar, and upon hearing it, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna roared in return, hoping to catch sight of him. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could hear Bhīma and Arjuna's shouts, and thus his grief was immediately dispelled. Indeed, within himself, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to express his gratitude by offering heart-felt prayers unto his eternal master and protector, Lord Kṛṣṇa. On the other hand, Karṇa could not tolerate Bhīma's exuberant roar, and so he furiously rushed forward. In the fierce duel that ensued, Bhīma and Karṇa pierced each other with numerous arrows. Then, twice, Bhīma broke Karṇa's bow, and thereafter, he killed his driver and horses. At this, Karṇa jumped to the ground and got up onto Vṛṣasena's chariot, causing Bhīma
to roar victoriously.
Upon hearing that loud roar, all of the Pāṇḍava warriors blew triumphantly upon their conchshells and shouted with joy. Duryodhana then went to Droṇa on a swift chariot and with great anger said, "O Preceptor, Arjuna, Sātyaki, and Bhīma have all approached Jayadratha after having vanquished our soldiers. How could you let them defeat you and then pass right through your army? Do you not know that all of our warriors are now criticizing you greatly for this grievous lapse? Anyway, let us forget what has passed. Now, please instruct me about what should be done for Jayadratha's protection."
Droṇa replied, "O King, the protection of Jayadratha is certainly our foremost duty. However, I wish to remind you that all of our present sufferings have been brought about because you made Ākuni challenge Yudhīśṭhira to gamble at the dice board. That dice game was the preliminary contest, but this war is the real gambling match wherein Jayadratha has become the stake, and deadly arrows are the dice. Go now, my dear Duryodhana, and with the other warriors, protect Jayadratha as best as you can. I shall remain here in order to ward off the Pāṇḍavas and the Paṅcālas."
After departing, Duryodhana came upon Yudhāmanyu and Uttamaujā, who had been protecting Arjuna's chariot-wheels but had been unable to keep up with him. These Paṅcāla princes were proceeding to Arjuna's aid, but when they saw Duryodhana, they rushed at him while releasing volumes of arrows. In retaliation, Duryodhana killed Yudhāmanyu's charioteer, but in turn, Uttamaujā killed the Kaurava king's driver. Remaining undaunted, Duryodhana killed Uttamaujā's driver and horses, but then, after getting onto his brother's chariot, Uttamaujā killed the Kaurava king's horses, broke his bow, and cut off his leather hand guard. Duryodhana then picked up his mace, and after jumping down from his chariot, he rushed impetuously at the two princes. However, Yudhāmanyu and Uttamaujā managed to jump to safety while Duryodhana got onto Śalya's chariot. Yudhāmanyu and Uttamaujā mounted two chariots which had been sent for them, and after doing so, they once again proceeded toward Arjuna.
Meanwhile, Karṇa had returned in order to continue fighting with Bhīma. Remembering Karṇa's former offenses, Bhīma fought fiercely
whereas Karṇa appeared to be fighting mildly, although he soon covered his adversary all over with arrows, making him look like a porcupine. Bhīma then killed Karṇa's horses and driver and after doing so, he pierced him deeply in the chest, giving him great pain. Karṇa then ascended another chariot, and this time, when he returned to fight with Bhīma, he was highly excited with rage. Bhīma then thought of how Karṇa had insulted Draupadī, and how he had derided him and his brothers as they were about to depart for the forest. Indeed these memories caused Bhīma to become so agitated that he fought recklessly, without any consideration of protecting his life.

Thereafter, as Bhīma and Karṇa showered each other with arrows, the warriors who stood surrounding them as spectators could not distinguish any difference in their prowess and skill. However, Bhīma at last broke the deadlock by smashing Karṇa's bow and killing his driver. Karṇa then made a desperate attempt to slay Bhīma by hurling a fierce dart, but the son of Vāyu cut it to pieces as it sailed through the air. Karṇa then picked up another bow, and as they continued to discharge their arrows, the two heroes sometimes laughed at each other and sometimes roared. Sometimes they rebuked each other with harsh words, and sometimes they blew loudly upon their conchshells. Then, Bhīma once again broke Karṇa's bow and killed his driver and horses. Karṇa had also become somewhat dazed by Bhīma's incessant onslaught of arrows, and at this crucial moment, he became confused and could not decide what to do next.

Duryodhana could understand this, and so he ordered his brother, Durjaya, to quickly go to Karṇa's rescue. However, as Durjaya rushed forward while showering his arrows, Bhīma effortlessly killed him along with his driver and horses. While weeping on account of grief, Karṇa respectfully circumambulated Durjaya's dead body and then mounted upon another chariot which had been sent for him. Having regained his composure, Karṇa once again attacked Bhīma, deeply piercing him with his onslaught of arrows. Bhīma then suddenly hurled his mace, slaying Karṇa's horses, and then he knocked down Karṇa's emblem and killed his charioteer. Thus, Karṇa had to abandon his chariot, and after getting down, he stood upon the ground, bow in hand. Seeing that Karṇa was once again in a vulnerable position, Duryodhana sent his brother,
Durmukha, to go and take him onto his chariot. However, when Bhīma saw Dunnukha coming to rescue Karna, he rushed to meet him and then, with nine arrows, sent him to the abode of Yamarāja. The grief-stricken Karna got up onto Durmukha's chariot, and as tears came to his eyes, he momentarily refrained from fighting. Bhīma took advantage of this and began to pierce Karna deeply with his arrows, and so the sūta warrior once again took up his bow. However, Bhīma continued to strike Karna so forcibly that he soon fled from the battle, having become extremely deeply wounded and exceedingly distressed at heart as well. As Sañjaya related to Dhṛtarāṣṭra all that had taken place at Kurukṣetra, the old king would interrupt him frequently in order to inquire about various details.

When Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard how Karna, Droṇa, and the other great Kuru heroes had been repeatedly vanquished by the Pāṇḍavas and their allies, he again and again exclaimed, "O Sañjaya, it appears to me that the Pāṇḍavas are invincible! I am convinced that Destiny will destroy all of my sons in this great war! Alas! My son Duryodhana was a great fool for having bragged so much about Karna's prowess! Now, I hear how the sūta's son has been repeatedly vanquished by Bhīma."

Sañjaya replied, "O King, even though you are lamenting bitterly about your son's actions, it is you alone who is the root-cause of this great damage. It was you, as the head of the family, who sanctioned all of Duryodhana's evil plans instead of restraining him."

Meanwhile, Karna returned to fight and then five sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra rushed at Bhīma. All of these Dhṛtarāṣṭras were slain by Bhīma as he simultaneously contended with Karna. Thus, Karna became exceedingly depressed because this slaughter had taken place in his presence and thus he considered himself to be responsible for the deaths of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons. Although cheerless, Karna continued to fight as Bhīma relentlessly pierced him with numerous arrows. Thereafter, Bhīma once again broke Karna's bow and killed his horses and driver, and after doing so, he laughed victoriously. Karna then got down from his chariot and hurled a mace, but Bhīma shattered it to pieces with his arrows and then continued piercing his adversary. From the ground, Karna began to exert himself heroically and he managed to break off Bhīma's armor. Becoming almost frenzied with rage, however, Bhīma
retaliated by showering his arrows so impetuously that Karṇa had to turn his back and run away from the fight. Duryodhana then ordered six more of his brothers to come to Karṇa's rescue, but as they rushed at him, Bhīma killed each one with a single arrow. After witnessing this massacre, Karṇa remorsefully remembered the advice of Vidura but still, he got up onto another chariot in order to continue fighting with Bhīma. Bhīma then proceeded to cut off Karṇa's armor with his arrows, and thus both warriors faced each other unclad and covered with blood. Everyone had stopped fighting in order to watch this wonderful duel, including Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Bhūriṣravas, and as Bhīma continued to successfully counter Karṇa's arrows, they applauded him enthusiastically. Duryodhana then ordered seven more of his brothers to come to Karṇa's aid, including Vikarṇa and Citrasena, and thus they soon surrounded Bhīma. However, Bhīma quickly released seven arrows which pierced right through the hearts of these Dhṛtarāṣṭras and then continued flying through the air after having taken away their lives. Actually, Bhīma was very aggrieved that he had to slay Vikarṇa, for the pious son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra had been very dear to him. Nevertheless, Bhīma had vowed to kill all 100 Dhṛtarāṣṭras, and thus he had not hesitated to do so, and after accomplishing this wonderful feat, he let out a loud roar. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira heard this tumultuous sound, and it gave him great joy for he understood that his brother had been victorious. On the other side, however, Duryodhana became very aggrieved that 31 of his brothers had already been slain by Bhīma, and with great remorse he also began to remember the words of Vidura. Bhīma resumed fighting with Karṇa, and because numerous Kaurava soldiers had been slaughtered in that terrible battle, the rest of them retreated beyond the reach of the Pāṇḍava's arrows in order to become spectators. Thereafter, Bhīma knocked off Karṇa's effulgent earring with an arrow, and then pierced him deeply in the forehead and chest. Karṇa closed his eyes as he began to lose consciousness, and he clutched at the railing of his chariot. Karṇa quickly recovered, however, and then rushed at Bhīma with vengeance. Bhīma broke Karṇa's bow as he charged forward. However, after picking up another bow, Karṇa began showering his arrows through the sky like dense swarms of locusts. Still,
Bhima not only cut off all these arrows, but he attacked Karna with his own, and from the sky, the demigods showered flowers down upon the two heroes, for they were highly gratified to witness this spectacular duel.

Karna then struck down Bhima's two quivers and broke his bowstring. Thereafter, with Bhima in this helpless condition, Karna killed his horses and then wounded his charioteer so severely that the driver deserted his master out of fear and got up onto Yudhäményu's chariot. Next, Karna knocked down Bhima's emblem and flag. Bhima retaliated by hurling a dart, but Karna broke it into fragments as it sailed through the air. Bhima then took up his sword and shield and jumped down from his disabled chariot, desiring to immediately gain victory or else die. Bhima was now highly excited with anger and so when Karna broke his shield to pieces, he violently hurled his sword, cutting off the sūta's bow. Karna picked up a stronger bow and released thousands of arrows, but then, all of a sudden, Bhima leapt high into the air while roaring ferociously. This frightened Karna so much that he quickly went and hid himself at the back of his chariot, and upon seeing this, Bhima rushed forward. After grabbing onto the railing of Karna's chariot, Bhima waited for him to come out of hiding. Then, Karna suddenly rushed out with a vengeance, bow in hand. Because he was without my weapons, Bhima beat a hasty retreat, taking shelter amongst heaps of elephants which had been slain by Arjuna. Since Karna's chariot could not enter there, Bhima then picked up one of the dead elephants and held it over his head so that he looked like Hanumān, holding up a peak of the Gandhamādana Mountain. However, Karna broke that elephant into pieces with his arrows and in retaliation, Bhima hurled at him whatever part of the elephant's body remained in his hands.

Thereafter, as Bhima proceeded to hurl broken chariot-wheels, dead horses, and whatever else he could find lying around, Karna cut all of these missiles to pieces. Thus, at last, out of frustration, Bhima prepared to rush at Karna in order to slay him with his clenched fists. However, Bhima remembered how Arjuna had vowed to kill Karna, and so he desisted, and similarly, Karna remembered his promise to Kuntīdevī. Having decided to spare Bhima's life, Karna then ran forward very quickly and touched the son of Kuntī with the end of his bow.
Bhīma angrily grabbed the bow out of Karṇa's hand and then severely struck him over the head with it. At this, the enraged Karṇa laughed derisively and said, "You beardless, gluttonous eunuch! You should have gone to where profuse food and drink is available, rather than the battlefield!"

Bhīma had been greatly weakened by the fight and so, after saying this, Karṇa was able to grab back his bow. He then touched Bhīma with it once again while continuing to speak harshly. However, Bhīma also laughed with great disdain and challenged, "O Karṇa, since I am now bereft of weapons, fight me with your bare arms instead of with strong words."

Karṇa fearfully declined this offer, and meanwhile, Lord Kṛṣṇa had urged Arjuna to come to his brother's rescue. Thus, by piercing Karṇa with his arrows, Arjuna was able to drive him away from Bhīma. As Karṇa ran toward his chariot, Arjuna continued to attack him with arrows, but then Aśvatthāmā intervened and broke them all to pieces. Becoming enraged, Arjuna turned toward Droṇa's son and attacked him so severely that he had to retreat out of fear.

Previous to this, when Lord Kṛṣṇa had pointed out Sātyaki, who was penetrating the Kaurava army, Arjuna became displeased that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra had been left unprotected. Sātyaki had become exhausted due to fighting numerous battles. Now when Arjuna saw the unexhausted Bhūriśravas attack Sātyaki, he became very anxious and said, "O Kṛṣṇa, I think that Yudhiṣṭhīra has made a great mistake by sending Sātyaki here to help us."

Bhūriśravas and Sātyaki had challenged each other with very abusive language and thereafter, a fierce duel took place between them. Sātyaki and Bhūriśravas soon killed each other's horses and broke each other's bows, so that next, they fought with swords. Then, after breaking each other's swords and shields to pieces, the two heroes at last resorted to wrestling with bare arms. While watching this terrible fight, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "My dear Arjuna, by no means should you allow Sātyaki to battle Bhūriśravas unaided. Your disciple has penetrated the entire Kaurava army just for your sake, and now, although exhausted, he is contending with the mighty Bhūriśravas, who has fought little this day." While Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were thus talking, Bhūriśravas threw Sātyaki onto the
ground and then, after grabbing him by the hair, he began to drag him. Then, while continuing to hold Sātyaki by the hair Bhūriśravas drew his sword and violently kicked him in the chest. Then, as Sātyaki attempted to free himself by frantically whirling his head around along with the arm which was holding it, Bhūriśravas raised his sword. Lord Kṛṣṇa then urgently exclaimed, "O Arjuna, you must come to your disciple's aid!"

Arjuna first of all mentally honored Bhūriśravas for only dragging Sātyaki and not killing him. Then, he replied, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, I was watching Jayadratha and thus I was not aware of Satyaki's precarious condition. Now watch as I accomplish a wonderful feat."

After saying this, Arjuna fixed an arrow upon his bowstring, and then, after drawing it back to his ear, he released it. After flying through the air, that arrow cut off Bhūriśravas' right arm as well as the sword that it gripped. After his arm had fallen to the ground, Bhūriśravas chastised Arjuna by saying, "O descendent of Bhārata, how could you be so shameless? How could you dare to cut off the arm of someone whom you were not directly engaged in fighting with? How shall you be able to explain this ignoble act to Yudhiṣṭhira? Is this something which you had learned from Drona while receiving instructions in the science of weapons?"

Then, addressing Lord Kṛṣṇa, Bhūriśravas said, "O Yādava, it must have been You who encouraged Arjuna to perform this dastardly act!"

Then, once again addressing Arjuna, Bhūriśravas questioned, "O son of Pāṇḍu, why do you allow yourself to be guided by a despicable person like Kṛṣṇa?"

Arjuna replied, "O Bhūriśravas, you are unnecessarily criticizing us. My action is fully justifiable because, while fighting, one necessarily depends upon the strength of his allies. Indeed, if I had stood by passively, allowing Sātyaki to be slain in my presence, it would have been most sinful and abominable on my part. Your present plight is your own doing, for you carelessly left yourself open to the attack of others."

After hearing this, Bhūriśravas spread a bed of arrows upon the ground with his left hand. Then, desiring to give up his life by following the vow known as prāya (fasting until death), Bhūriśravas sat down and began to fix his mind upon the Supreme Brahmān while observing a vow of silence. Upon seeing this noble act, all of the Kauravas began to praise
Bhūriśravas and condemn Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. However, Arjuna could not tolerate hearing the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra speak like this, and so he responded by saying, "Do you not remember how I had vowed not to allow any of the principal Pāṇḍava warriors to die in my presence? Why don't you also consider how you had killed Abhimanyu after he was deprived of his armor and surrounded on all sides?"

When Bhūriśravas heard these words, he shamefully hung his head down. Lord Kṛṣṇa then gave the son of Somadatta His blessings by saying, "O great hero, you may now give up your material body without remorse. I guarantee that after your death, you shall attain My transcendental abode, being carried there upon the back of Garuḍa."

Meanwhile, Sātyaki had slowly lifted himself up from the ground and then had picked up his sword, which was lying nearby. Sātyaki then walked toward Bhūriśravas with the intention of killing him, and when all of the warriors on both sides saw this, they began to condemn him very harshly. Indeed, when they understood Sātyaki's intention, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, Bhīma, Kṛpa, Karṇa, and many others implored him not to perform this abominable act. However, Sātyaki had become practically deprived of his reason due to intense rage which he had felt while fighting. Thus, ignoring all those who forbade him, Sātyaki raised up his sword and then swiftly brought it down, slicing off Bhūriśravas' head. At this, all of the Kauravas harshly rebuked him, but Sātyaki replied, "O wicked sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you are all hypocrites and false moralists. Do you not remember how you had mercilessly killed Abhimanyu after he had become deprived of his chariot and weapons? Besides, once, long ago, I had made the vow to kill anyone who would kick me after throwing me down to the ground while fighting. The great sage Vālmīki has said, 'In battle, anything may be done which gives pain to the enemy.' Thus, all of you are criticizing me without reason, being ignorant of kṣatriya behavior."

Although no one on the Pāṇḍava or Kaurava sides replied, everyone mentally gave respect to Bhūriśravas and censored Sātyaki. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then inquired, "O Sañjaya, how is it that the incomparably heroic Sātyaki, after having vanquished Droṇa, Karṇa, and many other great heroes, could have been thrown down and dragged by Bhūriśravas, a much lesser warrior?"
Sañjaya replied, "O King, I shall explain how this came to be. Soma was the son of Atri Muni, and Soma's son was Budha. The son of Budha was Purūravā, and his son was Āyu. The son of Āyu was Nāhuṣa, and his son was Yayāti. Through Devayānī, Yayāti begot Yadu, and his descendent is Śūrasenā, the father of Vasudeva. Śini was also Śūrasenā's son, and when King Devaka held a svayamvara for his daughter Devakī, Śini forcibly took her away on his chariot with the intention of handing her over to Vasudeva. Somadatta could not tolerate this, however and so he fought with Śini. Finally, after half of the day had passed in battle, Śini threw Somadatta down to the ground while wrestling. Then, as he held Somadatta by the hair, Śini drew his sword and kicked him in the head while thousands of kings watched as spectators. Śini then released Somadatta out of compassion, but thereafter, Somadatta sought revenge by taking to the worship of Lord Śiva. Lord Śiva became pleased and thus appeared before Somadatta in order to award him a benediction. Somadatta then begged Lord Śiva to grant him a son who would one day throw down and then kick in the head a descendent of Śini's in the midst of thousands of kings. Lord Śiva granted this boon and then disappeared from sight and thereafter, Somadatta begot Bhūrisravas, who was predestined to throw down the grandson of Śini while engaged in battle. Thus, even though Sātyaki is otherwise unconquerable, on this occasion, he had been put into an exceedingly precarious situation."

Thereafter, Arjuna once again urged Lord Kṛṣṇa to take him toward Jayadratha, for the sun was quickly descending toward the western horizon. However, as Arjuna rushed toward Jayadratha, numerous enemy warriors advanced to oppose him. At this time, Duryodhana went to Karna and urged, "O my friend, the time has now come for you to exhibit your full prowess. If Arjuna fails to fulfill his vow and thus gives up his life by entering fire, it will certainly mean victory for us."

Karna replied, "My dear Duryodhana, I am deeply pained and fatigued after fighting with Bhīma. However, since I have already dedicated my life for your sake, I shall fight to the best of my capacity. In any case, victory will be determined by Destiny, and not merely by anyone's personal endeavor."

Meanwhile, with the support of Bhīma and Sātyaki, Arjuna slaughtered many Kaurava soldiers while proceeding toward Jayadratha. However,
Duryodhana, Karṇa, Kṛpa, Śalya, Aśvatthāmā, and many other great warriors then came and surrounded Arjuna as the sun assumed a very reddish hue. At this time, Karṇa fought so furiously that he was able to check the progress of Arjuna, Bhīma, and Sātyaki. Arjuna then killed Karṇa's horses and driver, however, so that Aśvatthāmā had to come and take the sūta up onto his chariot. Many great warriors then rushed at Arjuna from all sides, and so he invoked an Aindra weapon which caused thousands of splendid arrows to fill the entire sky, making it very difficult to gaze at. Indeed, it appeared as if the sky had become filled with innumerable blazing meteors, and due to this assault of this wonderful weapon, a great number of Kaurava warriors were slain. Arjuna then continued toward Jayadratha while piercing Aśvatthāmā, Karṇa, Kṛpa, and the others. Indeed, Arjuna very soon came close enough to begin showering his arrows upon the king of the Sindhus. At this, Jayadratha became highly enraged, and he rushed forward to meet his assailant, greeting him with his sharp arrows. With his adversary now close at hand, Arjuna swelled up with uncheckable prowess, and he quickly cut off the head of Jayadratha's driver and then knocked down his royal emblem. The sun was just about to set, however, and so Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "My dear Arjuna, you will never be able to kill Jayadratha without first of all vanquishing the six warriors who are protecting him. Now, because there is no time for this, I shall utilize My Yogamāyā potency in order to cover the sun. This will cause everyone to think that the sun has already set. Thus, Jayadratha will become overjoyed and will no longer conceal himself behind his protectors. At that time, when Jayadratha is off guard, you must kill him, knowing that the sun has not actually set." Arjuna replied, "My dear Lord, I will execute whatever it is that You order me to do." Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is also called Yogeśvara (the Lord of all mystic powers), then created darkness prematurely by covering the sun with His Yogamāyā potency. Thus, everyone thought that the sun had already set, and the Kaurava warriors became overjoyed, assuming that Arjuna would now have to give up his life by entering fire. Lord Kṛṣṇa then pointed out Jayadratha, who was happily looking toward where the sun had supposedly set. The Lord then urged, "Now, Arjuna, quickly cut off
the head of the wicked Sindhu ruler with your arrow!"
First of all, Arjuna pierced all of the surrounding Kaurava warriors with numerous arrows, and then he rushed at Jayadratha. At this, Jayadratha's protectors became momentarily puzzled, but then, after realizing what was happening, they began to shower their arrows upon Arjuna in the hopes of checking him. At this time Arjuna blazed up with incredible energy and displayed superhuman skill, slaying thousands of Kaurava warriors within a few moments. In a state of panic, the Kaurava army abandoned Jayadratha as Arjuna proceeded to break Karna's bow, kill Šalya's driver, deeply wound Kṛpa and Aśvatthāmā, and pierce Duryodhana and Vṛṣasena. Arjuna then took up a wonderfully powerful arrow which had been worshipped by him with great offerings of incense and flower garlands for a long time. Then, as Arjuna placed that arrow on the string of his Gāṇḍiva bow, Lord Kṛṣṇa urged, "O son of Kunti, quickly cut off Jayadratha's head, for the sun is about to set!"
Lord Kṛṣṇa then revealed the secret of Jayadratha's birth as follows to Arjuna: "My dear Arjuna, the father of Jayadratha is named Vṛddhakṣatra. When Jayadratha was born, a voice from the sky had announced, 'O King, this boy will become a great kṣatriya who is worthy of your dynasty. However, an illustrious hero will one day cut off your son's head while he is engaged in battle.' After hearing this prophecy, Vṛddhakṣatra became very aggrieved. Then, after thinking the matter over very deeply for some time, he summoned all of his relatives and made the following proclamation: 'Whoever causes my son's head to fall upon the ground while he is engaged in battle, will find that his own head will break into 100 pieces!' After saying this, Vṛddhakṣatra installed the infant Jayadratha upon the royal throne, and then immediately retired to the forest in order to perform austerities. My dear Arjuna, Vṛddhakṣatra is still undergoing penances not far from this battlefield, by the side of the Samanta-pancaka lakes. Therefore, after cutting off Jayadratha's head, you must employ celestial arrows that will project it onto his father's lap. If you do not perform this wonderful feat, then as soon as Jayadratha's head touches the ground, your head will surely burst into 100 fragments."
Arjuna then released the dazzling arrow which he had placed upon his
bowstring. After sailing magnificently through the air, that arrow plucked off the head of Jayadratha. Then, before the severed head could fall to the ground, Arjuna released a steady stream of arrows which caused it to course through the sky, beyond the Samanta-pañcaka lakes. At this time, Vṛddhakṣatra was engaged in saying his evening prayers, and thus he was sitting peacefully with his eyes closed in meditation. Then, all of a sudden, Jayadratha's head fell onto his lap. However, due to Lord Kṛṣṇa's mystic potency, Vṛddhakṣatra was so absorbed in meditation that he did not feel anything. Thus, when he finished his prayers, Vṛddhakṣatra stood up as usual, causing his son's head to immediately fall to the ground. And, as soon as Jayadratha's head touched the earth, Vṛddhakṣatra's head burst into 100 pieces, by the strength of his own austerities.

Lord Kṛṣṇa then withdrew His Yogamāyā potency, and thus the darkness was suddenly dispelled, the setting sun becoming again visible. Lord Kṛṣṇa then jubilantly blew upon His Pāñcajanya conchshell, and when the Dhrātarāṣṭras realized that Jayadratha had been slain with the aid of the Lord's mystic power, they began to utter exclamations of dismay, while shedding tears of grief. Arjuna then sounded his mighty Devadatta conchshell, and Bhīma let out a loud roar in order to inform Yudhiṣṭhira of Arjuna's victory. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira heard all of these combined sounds, he could understand that Arjuna had succeeded in slaying Jayadratha, and thus he became overwhelmed with joy. Indeed, the entire Pāṇḍava army became practically intoxicated while celebrating Arjuna's triumph, and in that exuberant state, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira decided to lead an attack upon Droṇa although the sun had already set.

Meanwhile, the Kaurava warriors became highly enraged after witnessing Jayadratha's death, and when Arjuna continued attacking their army, Kṛpa and Aśvatthāmā came to oppose him. Arjuna did not want to slay his former preceptor and the son of his other preceptor, and thus he released his arrows rather mildly. Still, Kṛpa became so covered by Arjuna's arrows that he soon lost his strength and fainted onto the floor of his chariot. Thinking that his master had been slain, Kṛpa's charioteer quickly took him away from the battlefield, and so Aśvatthāmā also desisted fighting out of fear. When Arjuna saw how
Kṛpa had fallen down on his chariot, tears came to his eyes, and he exclaimed, "O Kṛṣṇa, to hell with the life of a kṣatriya which forces one to fight with a brāhmaṇa and his own guru! Just as good disciples reward their preceptors and thus attain to an exalted destination, wretched persons like myself who assault their guru must certainly go to hell!"

While Arjuna was lamenting like this, Karṇa began to rush toward him from a distance, and so Sātyaki, Yudhāmanya, and Uttamaujā intercepted him. Arjuna then ordered, "O Kṛṣṇa, please take me quickly to Karṇa, so that I can assist Sātyaki."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Arjuna, Sātyaki is a sufficient match for Karṇa. Besides, now is not the time for you to fight with Karṇa, for he possesses the invincible dart of Indra. O son of Kuntī, Karṇa has worshipped that weapon for a long time in the hopes of slaying you. Still, I can assure you that the time will soon come when you shall face Karṇa fearlessly."

Being omniscient, Lord Kṛṣṇa had known that Sātyaki would have to face a grave trial, and it was for this reason that He had ordered Dāruka to keep the Lord's chariot ready. Now, as Karṇa prepared to battle with Sātyaki, Lord Kṛṣṇa loudly sounded the Rṣabha note on His Pāṇcajanya conchshell. In response, Dāruka quickly appeared before Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thereafter, Sātyaki mounted upon Lord Kṛṣṇa's chariot and then rushed to encounter Karṇa, and when this great duel commenced, all of the other warriors abstained from fighting in order to stand aside as spectators.

Thereafter, as they witnessed the wonderful skill which Dāruka displayed while maneuvering Sātyaki's chariot, even the demigods and ṛṣis in the heavens became spellbound with wonder. Finally, after a violent exchange of arrows, Sātyaki killed Karṇa's driver and horses. Then, with 100 arrows, he shattered Karṇa's emblem into 100 fragments. At this, Vṛṣasena (Karṇa's son), Śalya, and Aśvatthāmā surrounded Sātyaki while Karṇa got onto Duryodhana's chariot. However, Sātyaki did not want to kill either Karṇa or Duryodhana so that Arjuna's and Bhīma's vows could be kept intact. Instead, he encountered all those who had come to attack him, and soon afterwards, deprived them of their chariots.

At this time, Dāruka's younger brother brought Sātyaki his own chariot,
and so Dāruka returned to Kṛṣṇa's side.
Sañjaya then exclaimed, "O King, there are only three foremost of bowmen in this world: Kṛṣṇa, Śātyaki, and Arjuna, and there is no fourth rival!"

After Bhīma had been defeated and insulted by Karna, he went to Arjuna and requested him to fulfill his vow to kill the sūta's son. Now, Arjuna approached Karna, who was mounted upon a new chariot, and while staying at some distance, he said, "O wretch, why have you acted so basely by abusing Bhīma after defeating him? Just prior to that, you had been vanquished by Bhīma, and yet you did not utter any harsh words. While Abhimanyu was engaged in fighting with numerous warriors, you had broken his bow, enabling him to be unfairly killed. I hereby vow to avenge this act by slaying your dear son, Vṛṣasena, while he is in your very presence!"

After saying this, Arjuna departed, and as he went along, Lord Kṛṣṇa praised him very highly for his heroic fighting that day. Lord Kṛṣṇa pointed out the huge piles of dead bodies, broken chariots, and shattered weapons, and then said, "My dear Arjuna, you have performed a superhuman task by accomplishing such a great massacre!"

Arjuna then replied, "My dear Lord, I know that whatever has been done is by Your mercy, for we, the Pāṇḍavas, are Your eternal servants." Lord Kṛṣṇa then had Arjuna return to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira.

Thereafter, when the king directly heard about the killing of Jayadratha, he joyfully descended from his chariot and embraced the two Kṛṣṇas again and again. Then, with a voice that faltered due to great ecstasy, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to glorify the Lord with very excellent prayers, and at this time, Bhīma and Śātyaki also arrived there. Being exceedingly glad to see them alive and well, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira went and embraced them both while tears of joy streamed down his cheeks.

Meanwhile, Duryodhana was emerged in an ocean of grief while thinking about how not even Droṇa nor Karna could match Arjuna in battle. The Kaurava king then approached Droṇa and said, "O Preceptor, Arjuna alone has slaughtered seven akṣauhinīs of my army! As a result, I feel a terrible guilt at having caused so many warriors to lay down their lives for my sake. I can now realize that this great carnage is the outcome of my insatiable greed and hatred toward those who are
virtuous. Indeed, I am so ashamed that I wish the earth would open up so that I could enter within it and then not have to face the consequences of my wicked deeds. O Droña, I have decided to exert myself fully now so that either I will pay back all these dead warriors by killing the Pāṇḍavas and Paṇcālas, or else have myself lie down upon the battlefield, slain. I can see that victory or defeat will have to depend upon me alone, for your leniency has already led to this great disaster!" Droña replied, "O King, you should not blame me for your losses. The real cause of your defeat is that you ignored the good advice which had been given to you by your superiors, especially Vidura. As soon as Bhīṣma fell down from his chariot, I knew that the Kaurava army was doomed. You are now criticizing me, but it was in your presence, not mine, that Jayadratha was slain. My dear Duryodhana, you can rest assured that I shall fight to the best of my ability. Now, since the Kauravas' anger has been aroused by the killing of the Sindhu king, I suggest that we continue to fight into the night in hopes that we can turn the tide against the Pāṇḍavas."

Thereafter, a great conflict took place as Duryodhana, who was determined to fight to death, penetrated the Pāṇḍava ranks and began to create a great massacre. Soon, the Pāṇḍava soldiers began fleeing in fear, and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira released two arrows which broke Duryodhana's bow into three pieces, and he then pierced the Kaurava king very deeply. Then, by discharging a very fierce arrow, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira made Duryodhana sit down upon his chariot, bereft of consciousness. Upon seeing this, the Pāṇḍava soldiers shouted with joy, but then, Duryodhana recovered and once again rushed at Yudhiṣṭhira while Droña came to support him. The sun had set long ago, and in the darkness, Droña blazed up so fiercely that no one dared to face him in battle. Thus, Droña ravaged the Pāṇḍava army that night, killing the Kaikeyas, the sons of Dhrṣṭadyumna, tens of thousands of chariot-warriors, thousands of elephants and many millions of cavalry and infantry.

At the same time, Bhīma created a great slaughter amongst the Kauravas while traversing the battlefield on foot. Then, when the two sons of Dhrṣṭarāṣṭra, Durmada and Duśkara rushed at him, Bhīma first of all killed Durmada's horses and driver. Durmada got up on Duśkara's
chariot, and then the two brothers rushed at Bhīma. And yet, amazingly enough, simply by stamping it with his foot, Bhīma made the chariot sink into the earth, and as Karna and many other Kaurava warriors looked on, he angrily pounded the two Dhṛtarāṣṭras to death with his fists.

Somadatta had become highly enraged after the death of his son Bhūriśravas, and so he angrily challenged Śātyaki by vowing to kill him that very night without fail. Śātyaki returned the challenge, and at that time, Duryodhana and Śakuni arrived with a large army to support Somadatta. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then came with his army to aid Śātyaki, and thus a very fierce battle ensued. After a short time, however, Śātyaki was able to overwhelm Somadatta with his showers of arrows, making him fall down unconscious onto the floor of his chariot. Then, as Somadatta's driver took him away to safety, Droṇa rushed at Śātyaki, and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and others came to his aid.

Droṇa quickly scattered the Pāṇḍava army, and so Arjuna rushed forward to contend with the preceptor. Because of this, the Pāṇḍava forces rallied, but Droṇa proceeded to fight so vigorously that he once again routed the entire Pāṇḍava army, right in the presence of Arjuna. Bhīma, Arjuna, and Śātyaki then rushed at Droṇa all at once, followed by other leading Pāṇḍava warriors. Aśvatthāmā then attacked Śātyaki, and in turn, Ghaṭotkaca charged toward Droṇa's son while riding upon his gigantic eight-wheeled chariot and surrounded by one aksauhini of Rākṣasas. When the Kaurava soldiers saw these fierce Rākṣasas coming toward them, they trembled with fear. Then, when the Rākṣasas began to shower huge rocks and many other weapons from the sky, the entire Kaurava army, including the Dhṛtarāṣṭras and Karna, panicked, scattering in all directions.

Only Aśvatthāmā remained firm, and within a moment, he dispelled all of the Rākṣasa's illusions. Ghaṭotkaca then rushed forward to attack Aśvatthāmā, but the son of Droṇa drove him back with his forceful streams of arrows. The son of Ghaṭotkaca named Aṇjanāparvaṇ then joined the fray and began to shower his arrows upon Aśvatthāmā. However, the son of Droṇa quickly retaliated by knocking down Aṇjanāparvaṇ's standard, killing his two drivers, breaking his bow, and at last, slaying his horses. Aṇjanāparvaṇ then flew up into the sky and
began to shower trees upon Áśvatthámá, but in retaliation, the son of Droṇa afflicted him so severely with his arrows that the Rākṣasa soon had to return to the shelter of his chariot. Áśvatthámá then discharged a fierce arrow that deprived Anjanāparvaṇ of his life, and thereafter, he went on to slaughter many other Pāṇḍava warriors.

Ghaṭotkaca became exceedingly aggrieved and enraged upon seeing the death of his son, and so he rushed toward Áśvatthámá while challenging him. In the spectacular duel that followed, the entire sky became wonderfully lit up by sparks which were produced as the countless arrows collided with each other in the course of their flight. Ghaṭotkaca then began to assume various forms, such as a huge mountain, and then a thundering cloud which showered down big stones. However, Áśvatthámá fearlessly destroyed all of these illusory displays with his celestial weapons, and while doing so, he exterminated an incredible number of soldiers, including 100,000 chariot-warriors.

Thereafter, when Ghaṭotkaca once again rushed forward along with his vast army of Rākṣasas, he pierced Áśvatthámá deeply, making him tremble, and then he broke the son of Droṇa's bow. Áśvatthámá quickly took up another bow, however, and then commenced a great slaughter of the entire Rākṣasa army. The enraged Ghaṭotkaca then hurled an effulgent Aśani weapon at Áśvatthámá, but the son of Droṇa quickly got down from his chariot, and after seizing the weapon as it approached him, he hurled it back toward Ghaṭotkaca. Bhīma's son quickly jumped to safety, but that fiery weapon reduced his chariot, horses, and driver to a pile of ashes. Ghaṭotkaca then got up onto Dhṛṣṭadyumna's chariot, and together, the two continued to fight with Áśvatthámā.

Bhīma also joined in the attack, but the irrepressible brāhmaṇa's son could not be checked as he finished slaying the entire army of Rākṣasas right in their presence. Áśvatthámá then went on to kill the son of Drupada named Suratha and his seven younger brothers. Then, with ten arrows, Áśvatthámá killed the ten sons of Kuntibhoja. Taking up a mighty arrow, Áśvatthámá next pierced Ghaṭotkaca so severely in the chest that the Rākṣasa hero fell down to the floor of his chariot. Then, as Dhṛṣṭadyumna had Ghaṭotkaca placed upon another chariot, the entire Pāṇḍava army fled, and so Áśvatthámá let out a tremendous victory roar.
Meanwhile, after recovering, Somadatta once again caught sight of Sātyaki and so rushed forward to attack him. Bhīma came to intercept Somadatta, and as he released a great Parigha weapon, Sātyaki discharged a powerful arrow at his adversary's chest. Both weapons struck Somadatta simultaneously, making him fall down to the floor of his chariot. When he saw this, Somadatta's father, Bahlīka, who was Pratīpa's son, and thus Śantana's brother, rushed forward, and after showering his arrows upon Sātyaki, he struck Bhīma with a blazing dart, making him faint onto the floor of his chariot. Bhīma quickly recovered, however, and when he angrily retaliated by hurling his mace, that weapon struck off Bahlīka's head. Ten Dhṛtarāṣṭras then rushed at Bhīma, but they were immediately dispatched to the abode of Yamarāja by ten powerful arrows.

Meanwhile, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira fought very heroically, slaying a great number of warriors in Droṇa's army. Duryodhana then urged Droṇa to attack Yudhiṣṭhira, and so the preceptor discharged a Vāyavya weapon at the Pāṇḍava king. However, Yudhiṣṭhira neutralized this weapon with a similar weapon, and at this, the enraged Droṇa began to employ numerous celestial weapons, one after another, in the hopes of slaying him. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira deftly neutralized all of these celestial weapons, and at last, Droṇa invoked the brahmāstra. Then, when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira successfully neutralized this supreme weapon with his own brahmāstra, Droṇa gave up fighting with him and instead rushed at the army of Pāṇcālas, making them flee like deer from the attack of a lion.

Soon thereafter, Bhīma and Arjuna rallied the Pāṇcālas and mounted a great assault upon Droṇa's army. This time, the Pāṇḍavas began to slaughter the Kaurava warriors with such vengeance that the entire army began to flee, in spite of Droṇa's presence. Indeed, there was nothing that the preceptor could do to rally them, and so Duryodhana went to Karna and pleaded with him to save the situation. Karna then replied, "My dear king, I shall now employ my infallible dart in order to kill Arjuna, and thereafter, it will be easy for me to vanquish the rest of the Pāṇḍavas."

Kṛpa was staying nearby, and when he heard this, he smilingly said, "O Karna, if words were sufficient, then Duryodhana would have a very
able protector. However, it is practically seen that every time you fight with the Pāṇḍavas you are defeated. Thus, it has already been proven that you are no match for them. Indeed, my dear Kṛṣṇa, you brag too much, although this also is done only when Arjuna is absent!"

Kṛṣṇa angrily replied, "O Preceptor, you should know that great heroes naturally boast while making a great vow. Such boasting is never fruitless, and so I once again declare that very soon I shall bestow the kingdom of the earth upon Duryodhana after having slain all of the Pāṇḍavas!"

Kṛpa then derisively exclaimed, "O Kṛṣṇa, you are speaking deliriously! He who has Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on his side will certainly come out victorious."

At this, Kṛṣṇa smilingly replied, "O Kṛpa, I agree with you that Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are ordinarily incapable of being vanquished. However, with the help of Indra's invincible dart, I know that I will be able to slay Arjuna, and it is for this reason alone that I am bragging so much. Now, let me warn you; do not try to insult me once again because of your partiality toward the Pāṇḍavas. If you dare to address me harshly again, I will cut out your tongue with my sword!"

When Aśvatthāmā heard his maternal uncle being insulted like this, he angrily unsheathed his sword, and while rushing at Kṛṣṇa, he declared, "O vile sūta, because of your excessive pride and impudence, I will now sever your head from your body!"

While Kṛpa and Duryodhana quickly restrained Aśvatthāmā, Kṛṣṇa urged them to let Droṇa's son go so that they could fight. Aśvatthāmā finally became pacified, however, and along with Kṛpa, he forgave Kṛṣṇa while at the same time assuring him that Arjuna would be the one to cut down his swelling pride.

Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa began to rout the Pāṇḍava forces, and so Arjuna rushed to check him. As the two arch-rivals fought, Arjuna pierced Kṛṣṇa in the left wrist, causing his bow to drop from his hand. Kṛṣṇa quickly picked up his bow and resumed fighting, but Arjuna broke it in half at the handle. Thereafter, Arjuna killed his horses and beheaded his charioteer, and so Kṛṣṇa jumped down and mounted upon Kṛpa's chariot. The Kaurava soldiers then became very fearful, but as they began to retreat, Duryodhana restored their confidence by assuring
them that he would personally lead them to battle. However, as Duryodhana proceeded toward Arjuna, Kṛpa ordered Āśvatṛṭāmā to go and restrain him, for he was afraid for the king’s life. Āśvatṛṭāmā thus intercepted Duryodhana and implored, "O King, it is not proper for you to fight with your enemies, as long as we, your protectors, are still alive. Do not worry, for I promise you that I shall check Arjuna from further slaughtering our warriors."

Duryodhana replied, "O Āśvatṛṭāmā, because of your affection for the Pāṇḍavas, you never fight wholeheartedly against them. Still, I know that you are the only one who is powerful enough to contend with Arjuna Therefore, I beg you to go now and lead us in a great victory over our enemies."

Āśvatṛṭāmā then said, "My dear Duryodhana, I can assure you that I am quite capable and also willing to vanquish the Pāṇḍava army. You doubt my sincerity only because you are too greedy and proud. Indeed, because of your sinful nature, you are suspicious of everyone."

After saying this, Āśvatṛṭāmā departed, and he soon commenced a great slaughter of the Pāṇḍāla warriors. Dhṛṣṭādyumna then confronted Āśvatṛṭāmā and challenged, "O son of Droṇa, I shall not slay you yet. Tomorrow, I am going to kill your father, and only after that will I send you to the abode of Yamaraja!"

A fierce duel then took place between the two warriors, and they fought equally for some time. Āśvatṛṭāmā then rushed at Dhṛṣṭādyumna, and after killing his horses and driver, he broke his bow and knocked down his royal umbrella and standard. With Dhṛṣṭādyumna out of the way, Āśvatṛṭāmā proceeded to rout the entire Pāṇḍāla army, killing hundreds of warriors in the process.

Meanwhile, elsewhere on the battlefield, Sātyaki and Somadatta fought it out, each determined to kill the other that very night. When Somadatta managed to break Sātyaki’s bow, the Yadu hero picked up another one and immediately retaliated by cutting down his adversary's royal emblem. Sātyaki then once again broke Somadatta's bow, and when he picked up another one, the Yādava broke it as well and then cut off his finger-guard. Sātyaki then easily killed Somadatta's horses and beheaded his driver and at last pierced him in the chest with a very fierce arrow. Indeed, that mighty arrow deprived Somadatta of his life,
and thus his slain body fell down from his chariot onto the ground. Meanwhile, Drona's forces had regrouped, but were once again routed by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and his army. Drona then rushed at Yudhiṣṭhira and immediately knocked down his royal standard and broke his bow. Yudhiṣṭhira quickly picked up another bow, however, and displayed wonderful prowess by rapidly discharging 1,000 arrows which severely wounded the preceptor, causing him to sit down in great pain upon the floor of his chariot. Then, after regaining his composure, Drona's wrath flared up, and he released a Vāyavya weapon. However, Yudhiṣṭhira skillfully neutralized this celestial weapon, and at the same time, he broke the preceptor's bow. When Drona picked up another bow, Yudhiṣṭhira again broke it to pieces, but then, from far away, Lord Kṛṣṇa ordered, "O King, stop attacking Drona, for the one who has been ordained to destroy the preceptor should be the one who slays him. A king should fight with an enemy king, and so I request you to now confront Duryodhana."

After momentarily thinking over these words, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira desisted from fighting with Drona and then went to where Bhima and Arjuna were engaged in battle with the Kaurava army. In the near total darkness, there was a great carnage on both sides, and because of the onslaughts of Bhima, Arjuna, Drona, and Karṇa, the soldiers of both armies were running away, helter-skelter, in all directions. With both armies routed, temporary lull in the fighting ensued, and when Duryodhana once again rallied his army, he ordered his soldiers to carry lamps. Thus, five oil lamps were placed on each chariot, three on each elephant, and one upon each horse. At this time, the demigods and ṛṣis who were stationed in the sky also lit dazzling lamps, and so the Kaurava army looked very beautiful as the combined light reflected off their shining armor, brilliant ornaments, and glittering weapons. Then, following the Kaurava example, the Pāṇḍavas placed ten lamps upon each chariot, seven on each elephant, two on the backs of the horses and the foot soldiers also carried a lamp in their hands. In this way, both armies became distinctly visible.

Thereafter, when the fighting resumed, Duryodhana, backed up by Drona, led an attack on Bhima. Bhima soon broke Duryodhana's bow and knocked down his royal insignia. But then, after taking up another
bow, the Kaurava king cut off Bhīma's bow. Again and again, Bhīma picked up one bow after another, but every time, Duryodhana immediately broke them. Becoming frustrated, Bhīma took up a dart and hurled it, but the Kaurava king expertly broke it into three pieces. Bhīma then threw a heavy mace, and while Duryodhana jumped down to the ground to safety, it completely smashed his chariot, horses, and driver. The petrified Duryodhana then hurriedly mounted upon Nandaka's chariot, but because of the darkness, Bhīma and the other Pāṇḍava warriors thought that he had been slain. Thus, they let out a chorus of mighty roars, and upon hearing these shouts, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra also considered that Duryodhana must have been slain. Because of this, the Pāṇḍava king decided to take advantage of the situation by leading a massive attack on Droṇa.

Thereafter, while numerous Pāṇḍava warriors rushed at the Kaurava commander-in-chief, Sahadeva was intercepted by Karṇa, who immediately broke his bow. Sahadeva picked up another bow, but before he could release any arrows, Karṇa was able to kill his horses and driver. Being bereft of his chariot, Sahadeva took up a sword and shield, but Karṇa immediately broke them into pieces as the son of Mādrī held them in his hands. Sahadeva then tried to retaliate by hurling a heavy mace, but Karṇa easily broke it into fragments as it soared through the air. Sahadeva next threw a dart, but when Karṇa foiled it, the son of Mādrī jumped down from his chariot and, as a last desperate attempt, he picked up one of its wheels and then threw it at his adversary. With thousands of arrows, Karṇa broke that wheel into small pieces, and so Sahadeva continued to hurl parts of his chariot until there were no more left. Thereafter, he began to pick up the limbs of dead elephants, horses, and human beings which were lying about. However, when Karṇa successfully deflected all of these missiles with his arrows, Sahadeva lost all hope and began to run away. Karṇa chased after him, and while smiling, he ridiculed Sahadeva by saying, "My dear boy, from now on you should only attempt to fight with those who are your equals."

After saying this, Karṇa touched the fleeing Sahadeva with the tip of his bow and said, "Now, you can go either to the shelter of Arjuna or else return home, as you desire."

Karṇa had remembered his promise to Kuntīdevī, and it was for this
reason that he was unwilling to kill Sahadeva. However, after being pierced by Karna's sharp words, Sahadeva became very depressed at heart, and thus he lost all interest in continuing his life. Finally, he got up onto the chariot of the Panchala prince, Janamejaya, and then departed.

Thereafter, as Dhrtadyumna fought against Droña, Karna, Asvatthama, Salya, and Duhsasana came and surrounded him. Sathyaki then rushed to Dhrtadyumna's aid, and so Karna left aside the Panchala prince in order to fight with him. Then, as Karna and Sathyaki exchanged arrows, Dhrtadyumna deeply pierced Karna's son, Vrsasena, by making him drop his bow and fall onto the floor of his chariot. Thinking that his son had been slain, Karna flared up with rage and became determined to kill Sathyaki. Thus, the duel became very intense, but then, when Karna saw Arjuna approaching in the distance, slaughtering the Kaurava army, he went to Duryodhana and said, "O King, you should order a great number of warriors to go and check Arjuna. With him out of the picture, we can do away with Sathyaki and Dhrtadyumna in the same way that we killed Abhimanyu."

In order to implement Karna's plan, Duryodhana ordered Sakuni and Duhsasana to lead a massive attack upon Arjuna, while Karna, Droña, and numerous other Kaurava warriors surrounded Sathyaki and Dhrtadyumna. Sathyaki fought fiercely, however, and as he began to consume all of the warriors who had attacked him, Duryodhana entered the fray. Sathyaki soon killed Duryodhana's horses and charioteer, and then he broke the Kaurava king's bow, thus forcing him to dismount and get up onto Krtavarmā's chariot. With Duryodhana out of the way, Sathyaki continued to consume the Kaurava army, and no one could check him.

Meanwhile, Sakuni had led his army in an attack upon Arjuna. However, Arjuna quickly broke Sakuni's bow and then killed his horses, and so the Gandhāra king got up onto Ulūka's chariot. Thereafter, the father and son continued fighting together, but Arjuna soon routed the entire Gandhāra army, in spite of Sakuni's presence. Arjuna then continued to proceed to where Dhrtadyumna and Sathyaki were contending with Droña, Duryodhana, and numerous other Kaurava warriors. In the meantime, Śikhandi, Bhīma, Nakula, and Sahadeva had
come to Dhṛṣṭadyumna's aid, and they oppressed Droṇa's army so severely that many of the Kaurava soldiers began to flee. Upon seeing this, Duryodhana went to Karṇa and Droṇa and complained, "O Commanders, this night-battle was initiated by us in the hopes of avenging the slaughter of Jayadratha. However, I now see that you both remain indifferent, even though my army is repeatedly being routed. Formerly, both of you had vowed to vanquish the Pāṇḍavas. On the other hand, it now appears that you have practically abandoned my cause. If this be the case, then you should have informed me of your intention at the very beginning, for then I never would have dared to initiate this great war. However if you still intend to support me, then I beg both of you to fight wholeheartedly now, exhibiting your full prowess."

Being goaded by Duryodhana's words, Droṇa and Karṇa once again rushed at Śātyaki and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and this time they fought so impetuously that the entire Pāṇḍava army was soon routed, without any hope of its being rallied. Upon seeing this, Bhima and Arjuna rushed to save the situation, and when the Pāṇḍava soldiers saw them, they gradually turned back in order to face that Kauravas. In the meantime, Karṇa had killed Dhṛṣṭadyumna's horses and driver, and then broke his bow with a well-aimed arrow. Taking up a mace, Dhṛṣṭadyumna jumped down from his chariot and began to run toward Karṇa, even though he was continually pierced by his adversary's sharp arrows. Then, coming right up to Karṇa's chariot, Dhṛṣṭadyumna smashed its horses to death and beat a hasty retreat. Arjuna then came nearby, and so Dhṛṣṭadyumna mounted onto his chariot, and indeed, the enraged Paṇcāla commander wanted to rush at Karṇa once again. However, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira managed to restrain Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and meanwhile Karṇa's driver yoked new horses onto his chariot as the Paṇcāla warriors rushed at him hoping to avenge the defeat of their leader. Karṇa severely massacred the onrushing Paṇcāla army, however, and as they retreated, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira fearfully pleaded, "O Arjuna, you must do something before Karṇa consumes our entire army!"

Arjuna then ordered, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, please take me quickly to where Karṇa is staying so that once and for all I may kill him or else lay down
my life upon the battlefield."
Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Arjuna, you must not fight with Karṇa now, for he has not yet employed his infallible dart. For the time being, we shall let Ghaṭotkaca check him."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then summoned Ghaṭotkaca and ordered him to utilize his full prowess while fighting with Karṇa. Thereafter, as Ghaṭotkaca proceeded toward Karṇa, another Rākṣasa named Alambuṣa approached Duryodhana. Because his father, Jaṭāsura, had previously been slain by the Pāṇḍavas, he requested permission from the Kaurava king to enter the battle in order to gain revenge. Duryodhana was watching Ghaṭotkaca rush toward Karṇa, and so he gladly took advantage of this opportunity by sending Alambuṣa to attack Bhīma's son. Then, as Alambuṣa rushed onto the battlefield, Ghaṭotkaca quickly smashed his chariot, driver, and weapons into fragments. Still, Alambuṣa continued to rush at Ghaṭotkaca until he came right up and struck him severely with his fists. Ghaṭotkaca momentarily trembled because of these blows, but then, he also smashed Alambuṣa with his fist, threw him down to the ground, and began to squeeze him with his knees. Alambuṣa squirmed free, however, and after grabbing hold of Ghaṭotkaca, he threw him down to the ground. An exceedingly gruesome duel then took place as both Rākṣasas began to utilize their mystic powers in order to assume various forms such as a fire, an ocean, a cloud, a raging storm, Garuḍa, Takṣaka, Rāhu, the sun, and many more. However, after this contest of form and counter-form had gone on for some time, Ghaṭotkaca suddenly grabbed Alambuṣa and once again threw him down to the ground. This time, however, Ghaṭotkaca quickly drew his sword and severed Alambuṣa's head from his body. Ghaṭotkaca then picked up that head, and while rushing forward, he threw it onto Duryodhana's chariot. The heroic son of Bhīma then roared ferociously and vowed, "O king of the Kauravas, watch as I next slay Karṇa!"
After saying this, Ghaṭotkaca rushed at Karṇa while sending forth showers of arrows. Indeed, Bhīma's son presented a very fearful sight, for his face had a coppery color, and the hair which covered his body stood up like stiff bristles. His ears were devilishly pointed, his broad mouth stretched from ear to ear, and from that fearful mouth, four large sharp teeth protruded over his lips. For a long while, the battle raged equally.
between Karna and Ghatotkaca; without either gaining the upper hand. Thus, considering Ghatotkaca incapable of being slain by conventional means, Karna began to invoke celestial weapons. In response, Ghatotkaca and his army employed their Rakhsa powers of illusion, and thus the battle became exceedingly fierce.

Thereafter, when the Rakhsasas began to shower torrential volleys of sharp-edged rocks upon the Kaurava soldiers, they deserted Karna and fled from the battlefield. Still, Karna quickly dispelled all of the Rakhsasas' illusions with his arrows, and then pierced Ghatotkaca very painfully with a fierce shaft. In retaliation, Ghatotkaca released a celestial cakra which was bedecked with valuable jewels and whose edge was as sharp as a razor. However, as the blazing cakra sailed through the air, Karna cut it to pieces, and so Ghatotkaca next hurled a mace. Karna cut down that weapon as well, and so Ghatotkaca next soared into the sky and began to shower down trees upon his adversary. Karna easily cut all of these trees to pieces with his arrows, however, and so Ghatotkaca resumed fighting on his chariot.

Karna then proceeded to simultaneously pierce the son of Bhima with numerous arrows, slay his horses, and break his chariot into 100 fragments. Indeed, at this time, Karna released his arrows so quickly that soon there was not a two-fingers' breadth anywhere on Ghatotkaca's body between the arrows which covered it. Although he thus appeared just like a gigantic porcupine, Ghatotkaca remained undaunted, and he thereafter continued to assume diverse forms while retaliating with his own arrows.

Ghatotkaca then once again made himself invisible and began to shower numerous weapons from the sky, causing terror to enter the hearts of the Kaurava warriors. Karna retaliated with celestial weapons, but in response, Ghatotkaca assumed a very ghastly form with many heads and proceeded to devour all of these missiles. Then, at the next moment Ghatotkaca appeared to be lying down fatally wounded upon the battlefield, and when they saw this, the Kaurava warriors began to shout with joy. However, immediately thereafter the son of Bhima was seen raging over the battlefield in a huge form having hundreds of heads and bellies. At one moment, he would come close to Karna and challenge him, and then immediately thereafter, he would be seen laughing.
grotesquely while soaring through the sky. Then, from above, Ghaṭotkaca began to shower his arrows upon Karṇa, but when these were all counteracted, he once more made himself invisible. Then, once again, Ghaṭotkaca suddenly appeared, and this time he had assumed the form of a gigantic mountain which poured forth streams of weapons. Karṇa was not in the least agitated, however, and with a celestial weapon he quickly destroyed that terrible mountain. Ghaṭotkaca next became a dark cloud and began to shower volleys of stones, but with a Vāyavya weapon, Karṇa dispersed that illusion. Then, having become highly enraged, Ghaṭotkaca suddenly rushed at Karṇa and broke his bow. However, after taking up another bow, Karṇa proceeded to slaughter the Rākṣasa army which supported Bhīma's son, so that the survivors quickly fled, deserting their leader. Ghaṭotkaca then utilized his mystic power to create a chariot drawn by asses, and after mounting upon it, he once again rushed at Karṇa and hurled a terrible Āsani weapon of Lord Śiva. Putting aside his bow, Karṇa quickly jumped down from his chariot, and after seizing the Āsani weapon as it soared toward him, he threw it back at Ghaṭotkaca. Bhīma's son had anticipated this, and so he jumped to safety as the Āsani weapon reduced his chariot to a pile of ashes and then entered the earth. Karṇa then remounted his chariot and continued to shower his arrows, and so Ghaṭotkaca once again made himself invisible. Then, after a brief lull, he reappeared, having divided himself into many forms, and by this exhibition of mystic power, he threw the entire Kaurava army into a state of confusion. Thereafter, Ghaṭotkaca created many illusory lions, tigers and other ferocious animals, as well as ghosts and spirits, all of whom rushed at Karṇa with gaping mouths in order to devour him. Karṇa destroyed all of these beasts and spirits with his arrows, however, and at this, Ghaṭotkaca came close by, threatening his adversary viciously, and then he suddenly disappeared. Meanwhile, a Rākṣasa named Alāyudha came to Duryodhana in order to engage in his service, and he was accompanied by a large army. His relatives, Baka and Kirmīra, as well as his friend, Hiḍimba, had formerly been slain by Bhīma, and thus Alāyudha presented himself before the Kaurava king, hoping to be given a chance to gain revenge. Duryodhana
happily accepted the Rākṣasa and then ordered him to proceed at once against Ghatotkaca so that Karna could be rescued. Bhima's son had been creating such fierce illusions that all of the Kaurava warriors were very afraid for Karna's life. At the same time, all of the Pāṇḍava warriors took great delight in seeing how Karna was being put into such a precarious position. Thereafter, when Alāyudha approached him, Ghaṭotkaca left aside fighting with Karna. However, Bhima had quickly come to aid his son, and so he was the first to confront the onrushing Rākṣasa. Ghaṭotkaca then resumed battling Karna as Bhima proceeded to drive away Alāyudha's army. Still, the Rākṣasas fought back so heroically that Bhima soon became greatly afflicted, and upon seeing this, his army rallied. Alāyudha then broke Bhima's bow and killed his horses and driver. After getting down from his disabled chariot, Bhima hurled a mace, but Alāyudha counteracted it with his own. A fierce hand-to-hand combat then ensued between Bhima and the Rākṣasas, and as they continued to battle each other, they wielded broken chariot-wheels, yokes, and whatever else they could find lying around. Lord Krṣṇa then instructed Ghaṭotkaca to help Bhima, and so, after leaving aside Karna, he rushed at Alāyudha. This left Karna free to slaughter the Paṇcāla warriors, however, and so, upon Ghaṭotkaca's arrival, Bhima left off fighting with Alāyudha in order to check the sīta's son. Sātyaki, Nakula, and Sahadeva had also been engaged in slaughtering Alāyudha's army, and they also left off fighting with the Rākṣasas in order to encounter Karna. Alāyudha struck Ghaṭotkaca on the head with a Parigha weapon, making him sit down dazed upon his chariot. After quickly recovering himself, Ghaṭotkaca hurled a giant mace which completely smashed Alāyudha's chariot. The Rākṣasa jumped to safety, however, and from the ground, he began to create showers of blood, stones, and weapons as well as other illusions. Ghaṭotkaca easily dispelled all of these, and thus, at last, the two Rākṣasas rushed at each other in a fit of rage. When they met, Ghaṭotkaca and Alāyudha grabbed each other by the hair, but since Bhima's son was stronger, he managed to pick up his adversary over his head. Then, after whirling Alāyudha around again and again, Ghaṭotkaca dashed him to the ground and quickly cut off his head. The
son of Bhīma then let out a terrible roar, as did the other Pāṇḍava warriors, and then, as previously, Ghatotkaca ran to Duryodhana and threw the severed head at his feet. Meanwhile, Karna had been routing the Pāṇḍava and Pañcāla armies, and so Ghaṭotkaca once again attacked him with great rage. In the battle that ensued, Karna and Ghatotkaca proceeded to shower their arrows upon each other with equal skill. Then, seeing that he could not gain an advantage in this way, Ghaṭotkaca suddenly hurled a fierce dart that killed Karna's horses and driver. Ghaṭotkaca then made himself invisible, and thus everyone expected him to reappear at any moment in order to kill Karna. Hoping to protect himself, Karna incessantly released torrents of arrows so that the entire sky became filled.

Then, a blazing mass of red clouds was seen to suddenly appear overhead, and from those clouds came showers of weapons such as cakras and thunderbolts. Karna tried to smash all of these weapons with his arrows, but was this time unsuccessful, and so a great massacre of the Kaurava army ensued. Then, as the oppressed Kaurava warriors gazed up into the sky, they saw innumerable fierce Rākṣasas. With blazing mouths and sharp teeth, those Rākṣasas were hurling showers of darts and other weapons down upon them, and thus they were being pierced and crushed on all sides. At last, all of the surviving Kaurava soldiers fled from the scene of battle, and so Karna was left alone in the midst of the shower of weapons.

Karna did not waver, however, and he continued to send a steady stream of arrows into the sky while fresh horses were yoked onto his chariot by a new driver. Ghaṭotkaca then hurled a Śataghnī weapon with wheels that killed these horses, and after getting down from his disabled chariot, Karna attempted to dispel the Rākṣasa's illusions by means of his celestial weapons. His attempts turned out to be futile, so Karna began to fearfully think about what he should do next. Upon seeing how their leader had become highly vulnerable while being severely assaulted by showers of weapons, the Kaurava warriors began to shout, "O Karna, now is the time for you to invoke the infallible dart of Indra! The sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and our entire army are about to be consumed by this terrible Rākṣasa! Therefore, please kill Ghaṭotkaca immediately so that the survivors can contend with the Pāṇḍava army tomorrow."
When Karṇa heard these anxious pleas and saw how Ghaṭotkaca's devastating attack was annihilating the Kaurava army, he made up his mind to employ Indra's infallible dart. Convinced that there was no other way to check the son of Bhīma, Karṇa invoked that blazing dart which he had worshipped for many years in the hopes of killing Arjuna. When Ghaṭotkaca saw Indra's dart in Karṇa's hand, he immediately assumed a gigantic form and began to fearfully run away from the battlefield at full speed. However, when Karṇa hurled that wonderful dart, it immediately dispelled all of Ghaṭotkaca's illusions, pierced him right through the chest and it then soared all the way up to heaven. Being fatally wounded, Ghaṭotkaca let out a terrible roar and then fell down dead upon the ground. And yet, even at the point of death, the heroic son of Bhīma wanted to do something to benefit the Pāṇḍavas. Thus, while falling, Ghaṭotkaca kept expanding his body and then purposely landed upon the most dense portion of the Kaurava army. In this way, Ghaṭotkaca crushed to death one full akṣauhinī while breathing his last.

In spite of this, all of the Kaurava warriors shouted with joy, for they had become highly relieved just to see how the terrible Rākṣasa had at last been slain. Meanwhile, Karṇa had ascended Duryodhana's chariot, and at this time, all of the Kaurava warriors came and worshipped him with great respect and gratitude.

On the other side, the Pāṇḍava warriors became very aggrieved, and their eyes filled up with tears. The only exception was Lord Kṛṣṇa, and although it seemed highly out of place, after the slaying of Bhīma's son, He laughed loudly with great joy. Indeed, after warmly embracing Arjuna, Lord Kṛṣṇa began to dance in ecstasy. Then, after once again embracing His dear friend, Kṛṣṇa stood up on the chariot and repeatedly uttered exclamations of jubilation. This incongruous sight only served to aggravate the grief of the Pāṇḍava warriors, and Arjuna, who was extremely morose, then said, "O Kṛṣṇa, such an exhibition of happiness on this sad occasion does not seem at all befitting to me. Still, there must be some very grave and inscrutable reason for Your jubilation, and so I request that You kindly disclose it."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Arjuna, listen to Me, for I shall immediately dispel your grief. The reason that I am so happy now is
because Karṇa has wasted his infallible dart! Don't you see? Now, you are free to fight with him without anxiety. Karṇa was the single greatest stumbling block on our path to victory. Indeed, if he were still in possession of his original celestial armor and earrings, then no one would have been able to vanquish him: neither all of the demigods, nor yourself with your Gāṇḍīva bow. Even now that Karṇa is bereft of his natural armor and earrings and his prowess is only mild in comparison with that which he originally possessed, he is still only capable of being killed by you and no one else. My dear Arjuna, there will soon arise a golden opportunity for killing Karṇa, when his chariot wheel sinks into some mud. Do not worry, for I will inform you when that time comes. O Arjuna, I want you to know that it is only for your sake that I had formerly killed many great demons who had posed themselves as kṣatriyas. And, even I had to accomplish such feats with the help of various contrivances."

Arjuna inquired, "My dear Lord, what do You mean by saying that You had kill all of these demoniac kings with the help of contrivances?"

Kṛṣṇa replied, "O son of Kuntī, if Jarāsandha, Śiśupāla and Ekalavya, the niṣāda prince, had not been slain by Me, then they would have become unbearably powerful, and they would have all aligned themselves with Duryodhana in order to fight against you in this great war. Therefore, I empowered Bhāma to kill Jarāsandha and then disclosed to him the secret of the Māgadha king's birth so that he could bifurcate him. From within his heart, I inspired Droṇa to arrange for the niṣāda prince's thumb to be cut off, and then later I killed him in battle. Thereafter, I caused the death of Śiśupāla by encouraging him to commit more and more offenses against Me. Similarly, I arranged for Ghaṭotkaca's death just so that Karṇa's infallible dart would be utilized. My dear Arjuna, if Karṇa had not employed that dart to slay Ghaṭotkaca, then I would have killed Bhāma's son Myself, for it is My eternal vow to destroy anyone who disrupts the path of virtue. Indeed, it is only because I know that Ghaṭotkaca had destroyed sacrifices on numerous occasions and thus he truly deserved to be killed. My dear Arjuna, please rest assured that you shall be able to slay Karṇa just as Bhāma will certainly kill Duryodhana. Now, just see how Droṇa is engaged in slaughtering the soldiers of the Pāṇḍava army. Therefore, you must give up your grief and quickly go to
where the preceptor is staying in order to resume fighting."
 Dhṛtarāṣṭra inquired, "O Sañjaya, since Karna possessed Indra's
 invincible dart, why did he never use it to kill Arjuna, for this would
 surely have caused the defeat of the Pāṇḍavas? I think that this must
 also have somehow been the arrangement of the supremely intelligent
 Lord Kṛṣṇa. Kindly enlighten me on this matter if you are able to."
 Sañjaya replied, "O King, what you are thinking is quite correct. Lord
 Kṛṣṇa had ordered Ghatotkaca to fight with Karṇa, just so that he would
 be forced to waste Indra's infallible dart."
 Dhṛtarāṣṭra then asked, "O Sañjaya, did not Duryodhana's advisors urge
 Karna to challenge Arjuna from the very beginning and then use the
 infallible dart to slay him?"
 Sañjaya replied, "My dear king, every night, when the Kaurava leaders
 would assemble together in order to discuss their strategy, one of the
 major decisions which was always made was that Karna should challenge
 Arjuna the next day and then slay him with Indra's infallible dart. Some
 even dared to suggest that the dart should be used against Lord Kṛṣṇa,
 considering Him to be the actual root of the Pāṇḍava tree. Actually, it is
 a fact. Lord Kṛṣṇa is like the root of a great tree and Arjuna is the main
 trunk. The other four Pāṇḍavas are the branches and the various
 Pañcāla warriors are the leaves. Every morning, the Kaurava leaders
 would wake up, having made the firm resolution that either Lord Kṛṣṇa
 or Arjuna should be killed with Karna's dart. However, at the time of
 battle, they would always forget this resolution due to the influence of
 Lord Kṛṣṇa's illusory potency. My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Sātyaki had asked
 this same question to Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself: 'Since Karna had repeatedly
 made up his mind to kill Arjuna with the infallible dart which he had
 obtained from Indra, why did he never actually hurl it at Kunti's son?'
 Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, 'My dear Sātyaki, again and again Duryodhana,
 Duḥśāsana, and Śakuni discussed this matter, and each time they urged
 Karna to quickly employ the dart against Arjuna. Indeed, Karna would
 always agree to do so, because the hope of killing Arjuna is forever
 prominent in his heart. However, by dint of My Yogamāyā potency, I
 repeatedly made Karna forget to use that invincible weapon. O Sātyaki,
 for as long as Karna had possessed the means for killing Arjuna, I could
 never sleep properly at night, nor could I enjoy anything peacefully. I do
not even consider the lives of My mother, My father, My brother, or even My own life to be as worthy of protection as that of Arjuna. Indeed, I could not even think of enjoying the kingdom of the three worlds without the association of Arjuna. Therefore, I was overjoyed when Ghațotkaca was slain by Indra's infallible dart, and it was for Arjuna's sake alone that I had sent the Rākṣasa against Karṇa."

After the death of Ghațotkaca, the Kaurava warriors had roared with great delight and then rushed at the Pāṇḍava army, creating a great slaughter. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira saw that his army was being massacred, he became very depressed and ordered Bhīma to drive back the enemy. Then, after Bhīma had departed, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira sat down morosely upon his chariot, and his eyes became filled with tears. Lord Kṛṣṇa then came to him and said, "My dear king, please give up your grief, for it is very detrimental to our cause."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, I had more affection for Ghațotkaca than my own brothers because he had unflinchingly rendered service to us during our exile. Day after day, he used to willingly carry us on his back through inaccessible regions. First, Abhimanyu was killed after all of us were checked, and now, Ghațotkaca has been slain in the presence of Arjuna. It was a big mistake to have made such a great endeavor to kill Jayadratha. Our real business should be to slay Drona and Karṇa. They are the big stumbling blocks, and if we had attacked them in one combined effort, I am sure that Ghațotkaca would still be alive."

As he continued to lament very bitterly, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gradually worked himself up into a fit of rage. Then, with great agitation, he vowed, "I will go now and personally slay Karṇa!"

After saying this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira blew upon his mighty conchshell and then set out on his chariot. Śiśuṭāti followed Yudhiṣṭhira with an army of Pāṇcāla warriors, and Lord Kṛṣṇa urged Arjuna to also go and help the king, knowing him to be an unsuitable match for Karṇa. Then, as Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was going along, Śrīla Vyāsadeva suddenly appeared to him and said, "My dear grandson, you should not lament for the death of Ghațotkaca. If he had not been slain by Karṇa's invincible dart, then you would have had to lament much more after the death of Arjuna. Do not become discouraged, for I can
assure you that on the fifth day from today, you will finally regain your lost kingdom."
After saying this, Śrīla Vyāsadeva disappeared from view, and after hearing these words, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gave up the determination to personally kill Karna. Instead, he ordered his army to launch a massive attack upon Droṇa in order to give support to Bhīma. Thereafter, when the Pāṇḍavas and their allies rushed at Droṇa, Duryodhana stood ready with the Kaurava army in order to protect the preceptor, and thus a very fierce battle took place at midnight. By this time, many of the soldiers had become overwhelmed by drowsiness, and thus they were easily slain by those who were alert. Other soldiers, in a half-awake, half-dreaming state, killed their own comrades, and upon seeing this, Arjuna loudly announced to both sides, "O commanders of the armies, let us rest for some time upon the battlefield. Then, when the moon rises, we can continue fighting with renewed strength."
The Kuruś agreed to this suggestion, and so the fighting was suspended for some time. Indeed, even the Kaurava warriors praised Arjuna for this merciful gesture as they lay down upon the backs of their horses, on their elephants, or upon the bare ground. Some of the horses and elephants also laid down to sleep, and then, after some time, the moon rose, brightly illuminating all directions. As the warriors awoke, Duryodhana approached Droṇa with the intention of provoking him to fight more wrathfully. The Kaurava king then said, "O Preceptor, it was a big mistake for you to allow the Pāṇḍavas to refresh themselves like this. Of course, such an act is typical of your leniency toward them."
Droṇa replied, "My dear Duryodhana, Arjuna’s noble suggestion was quite befitting the character of a true hero, and so I was quite happy to honor it."
However, this statement only irritated the Kaurava king, and with great agitation, he swore, "O Preceptor, without your assistance, Duḥṣāsana, Karna, Śakuni, and myself will slay Arjuna in battle tomorrow!"
Upon hearing these boasting words, Droṇa laughed out loud and then said, "My dear Duryodhana, only fools would even think of uttering such words! O King, you are always ready to rebuke everyone else. Therefore, I think that your idea of personally fighting with Arjuna is a very good one. After all, this great battle is being fought just for your sake.
Previously, when Vidura and others had advised you to make peace, you repeatedly boasted in the assembly of Kurus about how you and Karṇa would together slay all of the Pāṇḍavas. Now, why don't you make good those words and thus prove yourself to be more than just a heroic talker?"

After three-fourths of the night had passed, fighting resumed. Then, when the light of the dawn appeared, all of the warriors on both sides once again suspended the battle in order to offer their morning prayers.

After the fighting had resumed, Droṇa quickly killed three grandsons of Drupada while battling with the Paṇcālas. Next, Droṇa proceeded to ravage the matsya army, and so Drupada and Virāṭa advanced to check him. Droṇa immediately broke both of these venerable king's bows, and thereafter, as Drupada and Virāṭa proceeded to hurl lances and darts, the preceptor not only broke those weapons to pieces with his arrows, but he took away their lives as well. After witnessing the death of his father, Dhṛṣṭadyumna solemnly vowed to kill Droṇa that very day, and then he rushed against the preceptor with a large army. However, because Droṇa was surrounded by Duryodhana, Karṇa, and many other powerful Kaurava warriors, Dhṛṣṭadyumna could not even approach him. Upon seeing this, Bhīma became very angry at Dhṛṣṭadyumna and so chastised him by saying, "O Prince, how can you just stand there passively after having seen your father slain? If you are such an impotent eunuch, then stand aside while I attack Droṇa!"

After saying this, Bhīma began to penetrate the Kaurava army, and so Dhṛṣṭadyumna followed him. During the exceedingly gruesome battle that ensued, the entire battlefield began to look like one vast crematorium. Only Droṇa and Arjuna remained unshaken in that tempest, and thus they became the shelters of all the warriors in their respective armies. As Duryodhana fought with Nakula, Duḥṣāsana rushed at Sahadeva, and his driver was soon beheaded by the son of Mādri. Duḥṣāsana himself picked up the reins, however, and then he continued to fight while simultaneously guiding his horses. When he saw Duḥṣāsana in this disadvantageous condition, Karṇa rushed to his aid, but then Bhīma intercepted him. Thereafter, as these two incomparable heroes battled fiercely, they came
so close to each other while riding upon their chariots, that it became
difficult for them to continue releasing their arrows. Bhīma and Karṇa
thus quickly took up their clubs. Karṇa was the first to hurl his mace, but
Bhīma knocked it down with his own, and then threw his club in
retaliation. Meanwhile, Karṇa had picked up his bow, and he expertly
repelled Bhīma's mace right back at him with a steady stream of arrows.
That boomeranging mace knocked down Bhīma's standard and then his
driver, making him fall unconscious. In a fit of rage, Bhīma picked up his
bow and quickly broke Karṇa's bow, knocked down his standard, and
then cut off his finger-guard. Karṇa picked up another bow and killed
Bhīma's horses and driver, forcing the Pāṇḍava hero to dismount and
then get up onto Nakula's chariot.
Meanwhile, Droṇa and Arjuna waged an incomparable duel, and so all
of the other warriors stopped fighting in order to stand aside as
spectators. After some time, Droṇa began to employ his celestial
weapons. However, Arjuna skillfully destroyed all of these celestial
weapons as soon as they were released from Droṇa's bow, and so the
wonder-struck preceptor began to mentally applaud his favorite disciple.
Indeed, overhead, the demigods, ṛṣis, Gandharvas, Siddhas, Apsarās,
Yakṣas, and Rākṣasas could be heard exclaiming, "This battle is
unmatched in the history of fighting, and it is being conducted on the
basis of spiritual prowess!"
At last, Droṇa invoked a brahmāstra, causing the earth to tremble, the
seas to swell with great agitation, and fierce winds to blow. In response,
Arjuna fearlessly invoked his own brahmāstra, and when the two
weapons neutralized each other, all became calm once again. When the
Pāṇḍava and Kaurava warriors saw that neither Arjuna nor Droṇa could
gain the upper hand, they resumed fighting.
Dhṛṣṭadyumna then rushed toward Droṇa and so Duryodhana tried to
intercept him. However, Sātyaki came between Dhṛṣṭadyumna and
Duryodhana, and at this time, the Kaurava king addressed the Yadu
hero by saying, "My dear childhood friend, do you remember how we
used to play together? Indeed, we were practically inseparable! Where
are those childhood pastimes now, since we are ready to pierce each
other in battle? How abominable kṣatriya life is, and how despicable is
my insatiable greed for wealth and power which has caused this horrible
massacre!"
In reply, Sātyaki encouraged Duryodhana to fight by saying, "My dear
king, even if you die while fighting with me, it will be your great fortune.
Not only will you ascend to heaven, but you will not have to witness the
remainder of this detestable conflict."
After saying this, Sātyaki rushed at Duryodhana, and as they proceeded
to fight very fiercely, they afflicted one another greatly with their
arrows. Duryodhana then managed to break Sātyaki's bow. However,
when the Yadu hero took up another bow, he proceeded to wound the
Kaurava king so severely that he had to get up onto another chariot and
then rest awhile. Duryodhana soon returned to the fight, however, and
then Karna rushed to his aid, considering him to be no match for
Sātyaki. Bhīma could not tolerate Karna's interference, however, and so
he intercepted the sūta. Karna then easily broke Bhīma's bow and killed
his driver, and so the Pāṇḍava hero angrily took up his mace. Getting
down from his chariot, Bhīma rushed at Karna and then smashed to
pieces his bow, standard, and driver, and also broke one of his chariot-
wheels. In spite of this, Karna continued to maneuver on one wheel, and
thus it appeared as if he was riding upon the single-wheeled chariot of
Sūrya.
Meanwhile, Droṇa continued to slaughter the Pāṇḍava army so brutally
that its warriors finally lost all hope, considering the preceptor to be
invincible. When Lord Kṛṣṇa thus saw how the Pāṇḍavas had given up
all hope for victory, He said, "My dear Arjuna, it is a fact that Droṇa is
unconquerable. However, if for some reason he were to lay aside his
weapons, then he could be killed without difficulty. Now is the time for
you and your brothers to discard all worldly conceptions of morality and
think of some devious means for slaying the preceptor. In My opinion, if
Droṇa were to hear that his son Aśvatthāmā had been slain, then he
would immediately put down his weapons and stop fighting. Therefore,
someone should boldly lie to the preceptor by falsely informing him of
his son's death."
Many of the Pāṇḍava warriors who heard Lord Kṛṣṇa's idea liked it, but
Arjuna emphatically disapproved. The obedient Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira
hesitated momentarily but then he reluctantly agreed to execute Lord
Kṛṣṇa's plan. Then, while others were engaged in discussing the matter,
Bhīma suddenly took up his mace and killed a giant elephant named Aśvatthāmā that belonged to the Mālava king, Indravarman, who fought on the Pāṇḍava side. Then, after approaching Droṇa somewhat bashfully, Bhīma thought of that slain elephant and loudly exclaimed, "Aśvatthāmā has been killed!"

When Droṇa heard this shocking news, he stopped fighting and his face became very pale while his heart sank due to intense grief. However, after carefully considering his son's incomparable prowess, Droṇa concluded that Bhīma's words must certainly have been false. Thus, after regaining his composure, the preceptor once again rushed at Dhṛṣṭadyumna and the Pañcālas.

Twenty thousand Pañcāla chariot-warriors had amassed to attack Droṇa, but when they showered forth their arrows, the preceptor neutralized them all with a brahmāstra, and then proceeded to exterminate everyone who had opposed him. Droṇa then quickly slaughtered 500 mātsya chariot-warriors, as well as 6,000 elephants, and 10,000 horse-soldiers.

After witnessing this great annihilation of the kṣatriyas, the brahmārṣis Viśvāmitra, Jamadagni, Bhāradvāja, Gautama, Kaśyapa, Vasiṣṭha, and Atri came before Droṇa, desiring to take him to Brahmāloka. The saptarṣis then said, "O son of Bhāradvāja, this great slaughter does not become a brāhmaṇa like you. Therefore, you should now lay aside your weapons. You have burnt to death many innocent persons with your brahmāstra. And, since your allotted period of stay on the earth has now come to an end, you should stop this sinful fighting in order to concentrate upon achieving your eternal destination."

After hearing the brahmārṣis' words, Droṇa remembered Bhīma's statement, and at the same time he observed how Dhṛṣṭadyumna was quickly advancing with great determination to fight. Becoming very depressed at heart, the preceptor saw Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira stationed nearby, and so he anxiously questioned, "O King, has my son actually been killed or not? Please tell me the truth." Droṇa had implicit faith that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira would never tell a lie, even to regain his kingdom, or for that matter, the entire three worlds. Lord Kṛṣṇa had been very distressed the whole day, for He knew that Droṇa was capable of single-handedly annihilating the Pāṇḍavas along with their entire army. Being right by Yudhiṣṭhira's side, Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O King, if
Drona puts his mind to it, he can exterminate your entire army in just half a day. Therefore, in this exceedingly dangerous situation, it is better for you to lie than to tell the truth. It is not sinful to lie in order to save one's own life, or the life of a king or a brahma. Similarly, there is no sin involved in lying to a woman, especially for achieving her hand in marriage.

Upon hearing this, Bhima next urged, "My dear brother, please take Lord Krsna's advice, for Drona did not believe my words." Because he was urged on by Lord Krsna and Bhima, Maharaja Yudhishtira considered himself forced into this situation by the unavoidable will of Destiny. Therefore, he finally made up his mind to tell the lie, although at heart he was afraid to do so. The king was very anxious to achieve victory and please Lord Krsna as well. Therefore, after mustering up his courage, he solemnly and distinctly said, "O Preceptor, Asvatthama is indeed dead."

In this statement, Maharaja Yudhishtira had inaudibly inserted the words, "the elephant" after the word "Asvatthama". Before he had given this testimony, Maharaja Yudhishtira's chariot had remained four-fingers' breadth off the ground throughout the entire battle. However, as soon as he told this lie, the pious king's chariot-wheels immediately touched the earth. Actually, Maharaja Yudhishtira's chariot-wheels touched the ground because he did not implicitly follow Lord Krsna's order. In spite of lying, Maharaja Yudhishtira thought that he could maintain his vow of truthfulness by duplicitously adding "the elephant," and for this deviation from both material and spiritual truthfulness, he was punished.

After hearing Maharaja Yudhishtira's testimony, Drona gave way to complete despondency and lost practically all desire to continue fighting. Dhristadyumna could see how Drona was overwhelmed by lamentation, and so he rushed forward impetuously while fixing a fierce arrow upon his celestial bow. When Drona saw this arrow, he considered that his final hour had arrived, and, amazingly enough, when the preceptor tried to invoke his celestial weapons to counteract it, they failed to respond to his command, for this is what happens when one is about to die. Still, Drona managed to release an arrow that broke Dhristadyumna's bow. Without wavering, Dhristadyumna then picked up
another bow and deeply pierced Droṇa in the chest. However, once again, Droṇa broke Dhṛṣṭadyumna's bow, and thereafter, as the Pañcāla prince proceeded to hurl varieties of weapons, the preceptor cut them all to pieces.

Then, even though he had only a club and a sword remaining, Dhṛṣṭadyumna rushed forward with abandon, and when the two warriors' chariots came together, their horses became entangled. At this tense moment, Dhṛṣṭadyumna grabbed for his mace, but then, just as he was about to hurl it, Droṇa cut it to pieces with his arrow. Finally, as a last resort, Dhṛṣṭadyumna picked up his sword and shield and proceeded to dart here and there, sometimes jumping onto Droṇa's chariot, and sometimes coming back to his own by climbing over the horses. Indeed, because Dhṛṣṭadyumna maneuvered so rapidly, Dona did not get a single opportunity to strike him with his arrows. Therefore, the preceptor instead hurled a dart which killed Dhṛṣṭadyumna's horses, thus disentangling his own. In retaliation, Dhṛṣṭadyumna sprang at Droṇa while magnificently brandishing his sword, but with 1,000 arrows, the preceptor quickly cut his assailant's sword and shield to pieces. Then, desiring to kill his disciple, Droṇa fixed a powerful arrow upon his bowstring, but Sātyaki quickly broke it by releasing ten arrows.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then organized a massive attack upon Droṇa, and so the preceptor left off fighting with Dhṛṣṭadyumna in order to meet the onrushing foe. At this time, Droṇa began to see many inauspicious omens, and his left eye and left hand began to twitch. While remembering the words of the sapta-ṛṣis and seeing how Dhṛṣṭadyumna was still eager for battle, Droṇa finally decided to lay down his life upon the battlefield. He had already killed 24,000 warriors during the first one-third of the day, and now, during the fierce battle which ensued as the Pāṇḍava army attacked him, the preceptor proceeded to slay 100,000 more. Then, at last, with the intention of exterminating the remainder of the Pāṇḍava army, Droṇa began to invoke his brahmāstra.

In the meantime, Bhīma had taken Dhṛṣṭadyumna onto his chariot and was urging him to kill Droṇa without further delay. Then, when Dhṛṣṭadyumna saw the impending danger of Droṇa's brahmāstra, he invoked his own brahmāstra, and thus the two weapons came together and neutralized each other. Thereafter, as Dhṛṣṭadyumna continued to
shower his arrows, Droṇa fearlessly came close by, and after cutting the Pañcāla prince's bow, he pierced him deeply, giving him great pain. However, Bhīma managed to grab hold of Droṇa's chariot, and he then harshly declared, "O Preceptor, if wretched brāhmaṇas like you would have stuck to their own occupation, which is centered around nonviolence, then this great slaughter of kṣatriyas would never have taken place! Why are you still fighting? The only person whom you had to live for was your dear son Aśvatthāmā, and he is now dead!"

After hearing this, Droṇa emphatically cast aside his bow and then declared to Duryodhana, "O King, you and your other commanders must now take up the burden of fighting, for I have laid aside my weapons for good!"

Then, after painfully crying out, "Oh, my son Aśvatthāmā!" Droṇa sat down on the floor of his chariot in a yogic posture. Taking this to be a golden opportunity, Dhṛṣṭadyumna quickly threw aside his bow, grabbed his sword, and jumped down from his chariot. Then, as Dhṛṣṭadyumna proceeded to rush toward the venerable preceptor, everyone who was watching the drama called out for him to give up his sinful intention. Droṇa himself was very peaceful, however, for his mind had already become fully fixed upon the transcendental form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Viṣṇu. With his eyes closed and his head bent slightly downward, Droṇa was engaged in softly repeating the sacred syllable "Oṁ". Then, as Dhṛṣṭadyumna came right up to Droṇa, five persons could perceive that Droṇa had already given up his body in a trance of mystic yoga. These persons were Saṅjaya, Arjuna, Aśvatthāmā, Lord Kṛṣṇa, and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra. Indeed, as his eternal self proceeded back home, back to Godhead, it illuminated the sky like a second sun. This was seen by the demigods and rṣis, and so they began to proclaim Droṇa's good fortune with great joy.

All this was unknown to Dhṛṣṭadyumna, however, and so he grabbed Droṇa's lifeless body by the hair and began to drag it along the ground. Then, as everyone tried to forbid Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Arjuna ordered, "Do not kill the preceptor! Instead bring him to us alive!"

Disregarding Arjuna's plea, however, Dhṛṣṭadyumna raised his sword into the air and severed Droṇa's head. Dhṛṣṭadyumna then shouted wildly with joy while brandishing his sword about victoriously. Covered
all over with blood, Dhṛṣṭadyumna then picked up the severed head and threw it toward the Kaurava soldiers. Then, as the Kauravas fearfully fled from this ghastly scene, Bhīma came and embraced Dhṛṣṭadyumna while saying, "O Prince, I shall embrace you again when Karna and Duryodhana are slain!"

Bhīma then roared like a mighty lion, causing the terrified Kaurava soldiers to retreat to the shelter of Duryodhana. However, the Kaurava king was highly mortified and fearful after witnessing the death of Droṇa, and so he also began to leave the battlefield. All of the great Kaurava commanders retreated, including Karna, Kṛpa, Śalya, Suśarmā, Śakuni and Duḥśasana, and their armies followed them. Indeed, as the Pāṇḍava warriors watched this mass exodus, it appeared to them as if the Kauravas were vanquished for good. Even those Kauravas who pretended to be great heroes by calling out, "Wait, wait, do not run away!" were themselves seen to be flying away at a great speed. Aśvatthāmā had been creating a great massacre of the Pāṇḍava army at a distant place in the battlefield. Then, when he saw this massive retreat of the Kaurava army, he could intuit that his father had been slain. In order to confirm his doubts, Aśvatthāmā very anxiously went to Duryodhana and inquired from him about the Kaurava army's withdrawal. The Kaurava king could not bear to tell the heart-breaking news to Aśvatthāmā, however, and so with his head lowered due to shame, and his face bathed with tears, he requested Kṛpa to reply. Kṛpa then said, "My dear Aśvatthāmā, your father has been slain by Dhṛṣṭadyumna. Knowing Droṇa to be invincible as long as he would wield his weapons, Lord Kṛṣṇa had ordered Yudhiṣṭhira to falsely inform him of your death. When your father heard this unpalatable news, he put down his weapons, and at this, Dhṛṣṭadyumna rushed at him with an upraised sword. All of the Pāṇḍava warriors forbade Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and Arjuna went so far as to rush toward him with upraised arms, pleading, 'Do not slay the preceptor, but bring him to us alive.' And yet, in spite of this, Dhṛṣṭadyumna beheaded Droṇa as he sat in meditation."

After hearing this, Aśvatthāmā became highly enraged. While squeezing his hands together and grinding his teeth, he told Duryodhana, "O King, no one should lament for my father's death, for he has certainly attained a very exalted destination. However, I cannot tolerate the fact that
Dhṛṣṭadyumna had seized my father by the hair. Therefore, I hereby vow to destroy the entire Pāṇḍava army this very day with my Nārāyana weapon, which is unknown to them. Once, long ago, Lord Nārāyana offered my father a benediction, and so he asked for the Lord's special Nārāyana weapon, which is supreme over all others. After handing the weapon over to my father, Lord Nārāyana explained, 'O brāhmaṇa, even those who are otherwise unslayable can be killed by this invincible weapon. However, if it is used without proper justification, then it will return to afflict the person who had employed it.'

Upon hearing Aśvatthāma's terrible vow, the Kaurava warriors became very eager to resume fighting, and they roared with great exuberance. When the Pāṇḍavas heard the Kaurava's bold shouts, they began to speculate among themselves about the cause. Meanwhile, Aśvatthāma touched water for purification and then invoked the Nārāyana weapon. Immediately, violent winds began to blow, the entire earth trembled, and the seas swelled with agitation. Darkness then set in, causing everyone to become very fearful. In this state of affairs, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra saw the Kaurava army suddenly rush forward and resume fighting, even though they had just previously panicked and fled upon seeing Droṇa's death. Being very puzzled, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra inquired from Arjuna, "My dear Arjuna, who is it that has miraculously rallied the Kaurava army like this?"

Arjuna replied, "My dear brother, you can be certain that this is an being done by Aśvatthāma in retaliation for Dhṛṣṭadyumna's cruel act of mercilessly killing his preceptor. The highly enraged son of Droṇa will certainly avenge your act of sinfully lying to your guru for the sake of gaining a worldly kingdom. Indeed, this cowardly act of yours will surely earn you eternal infamy, just like Rāmacandra's killing of Vali. Of course, you must now try to protect Dhṛṣṭadyumna, but in my opinion, Aśvatthāma will annihilate us all. Although Dhṛṣṭadyumna has acted most abominably, the blame really rests squarely upon your shoulders, for it was you who convinced Droṇa to lay aside his weapons. Of course, the preceptor always had implicit faith that I would sacrifice everything for his sake. Therefore, I am also to be greatly condemned for having allowed him to be slain in my presence. As a result of my negligence, I shall no doubt have to suffer for many years in hell. Indeed, due to being
implicated in the sinful killing of my brāhmaṇa preceptor, I would rather
give up my life now, rather than to go on living as a wretch!"
After hearing Arjuna's statement, no one dared to reply at first, either
for or against. Then after having briefly considered the matter, Bhīma
angrily rebuked Arjuna by saying, "My dear brother, it is the highest
duty of a kṣatriya to give protection at all costs. Your speech is more
befitting a brāhmaṇa. It is you who are at fault, because you are not
exerting yourself fully, and thus, you are failing to keep your former
promise to avenge all of the insults which we had received from the
Kauravas. How can you dare to criticize our brother-in-law and best ally
after he has so heroically risked his life for our sake?"
Dhrṣṭadyumna then said, "O Arjuna, you should not criticize me for
killing Droṇa, for I was created by the demigods and had appeared from
the sacrificial fire specifically for this purpose. Droṇa killed my father
and many other relatives. How can you expect that I would just sit by
and tolerate this? Didn't you kill your own grandfather, Bhīṣma, and the
venerable Bhagadatta?"
As Arjuna silently glared at Dhrṣṭadyumna with great reproach,
everyone also remained momentarily silent. Sātyaki then angrily
declared, "Dhrṣṭadyumna, you should be killed for slaying your preceptor
and then praising yourself for having done so! Indeed, if you say one
more offensive word, then I will instantly crush you to death with my
mace!"
Dhrṣṭadyumna heatedly replied, "How can a sinful person like yourself
dare to rebuke one who is righteous? What about your abominable
killing of Bhūriśravas? Have you already forgotten about this? If you go
on criticizing me like this, then I shall immediately send you to the
abode of Yamarāja. It is highly unjust that I am being condemned,
because greatly unrighteous acts have been resorted to frequently by
both sides."
Upon hearing this, Sātyaki began to tremble with rage, and his eyes
became exceedingly reddish. After hastily grabbing his mace, he
impetuously rushed toward Dhrṣṭadyumna while saying, "I am not going
to waste any more harsh words on you, but will smash your head
instead!"
At Lord Kṛṣṇa's urging, Bhīma quickly jumped down from his chariot
and forcibly seized Sātyaki. Still, the powerful Vṛṣṇi hero forcibly dragged Bhīma some distance until the latter firmly planted his feet upon the ground. In this way, Bhīma managed to stop Sātyaki at the sixth step. Sahadeva had also jumped down from his chariot, and he tried to pacify Sātyaki by reminding him of the friendly ties existing between the Pāṇḍavas, Pañcālas, and Vṛṣṇis. At this same time, Dhṛṣṭadyumna implored Bhīma to let Sātyaki go so that they could fight. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira then intervened, and they were finally able to bring the situation under control by pacifying Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Sātyaki.

Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas proceeded to the battlefield in order to confront the onrushing Kaurava army. The Nārāyaṇa weapon then proceeded to fill the entire sky with hundreds of thousands of arrows, and thereafter, innumerable maces, iron balls, razor-sharp discs, and other weapons also appeared. Terrified by this onslaught, the entire Pāṇḍava army panicked and fled, and within moments, countless soldiers were slaughtered. While watching his fearstruck soldiers running in all directions, Yudhiṣṭhira actually became somewhat delirious on account of shock and fear, and in that state he sarcastically shouted, "O Sātyaki because the killing of Droṇa was so sinful, victory and life itself no longer have any meaning for us. Thus, we should not lament that you are now fleeing along with your army, thus giving Duryodhana his desired triumph! Certainly, the killing of Droṇa was very abominable, for who else but he was such a dear friend? Just think of all that he did for us! He aided the Kurus in the slaughter of Abhimanyu, and he killed so many innocent persons with his brahmāstra. He refused to answer Draupadi when she appealed for justice in the royal court of the Kurus. And, when we were deceitfully exiled to the forest, he willingly gave us permission to depart, although our numerous well-wishers had implored him not to."

After Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira finished speaking, Lord Kṛṣṇa signaled by waving His arms that the Pāṇḍavas should not retreat any further. At the same time, He ordered, "Everyone must immediately put down your weapons, for this is the means of neutralizing the nārāyanāstra which has been ordained by Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself. I warn you that if anyone ignores My instruction and tries to continue fighting, or even resist the
Nārāyaṇa weapon within his mind, then its energy will increase."

Although everyone else followed Lord Kṛṣṇa’s command by putting down their weapons and driving out from their hearts all desire for battle, Bhīma responded by boasting, "Just watch now as I display my full prowess! After destroying the nārāyaṇāstra I shall vanquish Aśvatthāmā!"

Bhīma then said to Arjuna, "My dear brother, do not lay aside your Gāṇḍīva bow for this will indelibly stain your good reputation."

Arjuna replied, "O Bhīma, I had formerly vowed never to use my bow against the Nārāyaṇa weapon, cows, or brāhmaṇas."

After hearing this, Bhīma proceeded to rush toward Aśvatthāmā while sending forth showers of arrows. As a result, however, the Nārāyaṇa weapon became more powerful and directed itself against Bhīma. Then, as all of the Pāṇḍava warriors uttered exclamations of woe, Arjuna quickly covered his brother with a Varuṇa weapon in the hopes of protecting him, and just then, the nārāyaṇāstra fell upon Bhīma's head. Because of the intense glare created by the Nārāyaṇa weapon, no one could see what Arjuna had done. And, in spite of the covering effect of the Varuṇa weapon, the nārāyaṇāstra continued to enter Bhīma's body just as stars rush toward the western horizon at the close of night, or as the fire of devastation finally enters into the mouth of the Lord after destroying the entire universe.

Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then suddenly jumped down from their chariot, and after rushing toward Bhīma, they dove into the powerful effulgence of the Nārāyaṇa weapon. Due to their having laid aside their weapons, and because of the presence of the Varuṇa weapon, and by dint of their prowess, the two Kṛṣṇas were not affected by the nārāyaṇāstra while they forcibly dragged Bhīma. Bhīma resisted, however, and roared with rage, and so the energy of the Nārāyaṇa weapon continued increasing.

Lord Kṛṣṇa then angrily said, "Bhīma! Why didn't you throw down your weapons when I had ordered everyone to do so? I can assure you that this is the only way to counteract this foremost of all weapons."

Although Bhīma's rage could not be subdued very much, Lord Kṛṣṇa managed to drag him down from his chariot and then convince him to lay down his weapons. As soon as this was done, the nārāyaṇāstra became pacified, and soon thereafter, all directions became calm, and a
gentle, fragrant breeze began to blow through the crisp autumn air. When the Pāṇḍava warriors saw that the Nārāyaṇa weapon had been neutralized, they once again took up their weapons in order to resume fighting. At this time, Duryodhana urged Aśvatthāma to invoke the Nārāyaṇa weapon once more, but the son of Drona replied, "O King, if I attempt to employ the nārāyaṇāstra once more, then I will be destroyed instead of the enemy."

Thereafter, Aśvatthāma rushed toward Dhṛṣṭadyumna, desiring to avenge the death of his father. The two infuriated warriors fought fiercely for awhile and then Aśvatthāma killed Dhṛṣṭadyumna's horses and driver. The Pañcāla soldiers then fearfully fled from their endangered leader and so Aśvatthāma continued to greatly afflict Dhṛṣṭadyumna with his arrows. Sātyaki then rushed forward and unleashed such a violent attack upon Drona's son that soon he completely dismantled his chariot, killed his horses and broke his bow. Sātyaki then continued to pierce Aśvatthāma very deeply, and at last, the brāhmaṇa's son became dazed and confused about what to do next. Upon seeing this, Duryodhana, Karṇa and Kṛpa rushed to Aśvatthāma's rescue while showering their arrows upon Sātyaki. However, the Yadu hero became so highly excited with rage that he soon deprived all three of their chariots, thus forcing them to quickly flee from the scene of battle.

Meanwhile, Aśvatthāma regained his composure and after mounting another chariot he returned to fight with Sātyaki. However, the Yādava hero once again smashed his chariot, and when they saw Aśvatthāma turn his back and flee, the Pāṇḍava warriors shouted with joy and loudly blew upon their conchshells. With Aśvatthāma out of the way, Sātyaki turned upon the army of Vṛṣasena and quickly killed 3,000 of its chariot-warriors. Then, attacking Kṛpa's army, he killed 15,000 elephants and thereafter he slaughtered 50,000 horse-warriors belonging to Çakuni. This time, the Yadu commander pierced Aśvatthāma even more deeply than before, but still, Drona's son challenged, "O Sātyaki, I shall never have peace of mind until I slay all of the Pañcālas, and you will never be able to stop me from accomplishing this!"

After saying this, Aśvatthāma released a fierce arrow which passed right through Sātyaki's armor and body. Then, as the wounded Yadu hero
dropped his bow and sat down upon his chariot, covered with blood, his
driver quickly took him away from the battlefield. Aśvatthāmā next
released an arrow at Dhṛṣṭadyumna, piercing him between the eyebrows,
and causing him to grab onto his flagpole for support while losing
consciousness. Bhīma, Arjuna, and other Pāṇḍava warriors then came
and surrounded Aśvatthāmā. However, the undaunted son of Droṇa
quickly broke Bhīma's bow and beheaded three young princes. Becoming
enraged, Bhīma picked up another bow, and while rushing toward
Aśvatthāmā, he broke his bow, and then deeply pierced him in the
shoulder. Because of extreme pain, Aśvatthāmā closed his eyes and
grabbed onto his flagpole, but then, the next moment, he regained his
composure and angrily rushed at Bhīma. When Aśvatthāmā once again
broke his bow, Bhīma took up another one and continued to release his
arrows. Then, when Droṇa's son once more cut off his bow, Bhīma
impetuously hurled a dart. However, Aśvatthāmā cut that dart to pieces,
and as Bhīma took up another bow, the son of Droṇa deeply pierced his
driver in the forehead, making him fall down onto the floor of the
chariot. As the unguided horses carried Bhīma away from the battlefield,
Aśvatthāmā triumphantly blew upon his conchshell, and thereafter, he
proceeded to slaughter the fleeing Paṇcāla soldiers in great numbers.
Arjuna had gone to another part of the battlefield while Bhīma fought
with Aśvatthāmā. Now, as Arjuna hastily returned to check the son of
Droṇa, the Paṇcāla soldiers rallied. Formerly, Arjuna had always shown
the highest regard for his preceptor's son, but now he challenged him
with harsh words, as an unprecedented anger swelled up in his heart. In
response, Aśvatthāmā also became highly enraged, and he released a
very special and irresistibly powerful Āgneya weapon. As a result, a
thick gloom began to envelop the entire Pāṇḍava army while showers of
arrows fell from the sky. A scorching heat was also created by the
Āgneya weapon, so that the entire universe appeared to be on fire. Due
to the combined effect of the intense heat and the sharp arrows,
thousands upon thousands of warriors fell dead upon the battlefield and
countless chariots were reduced to ashes. In the dense darkness, as the
Kaurava warriors were heard shouting with joy, Arjuna invoked a
brahmāstra which immediately began to counteract Aśvatthāmā's
weapon. Then, as the darkness was gradually dispelled, the light of day
revealed that one full akṣauhinī of Pāṇḍava soldiers had been slain. Indeed, it was an exceedingly ghastly scene to behold because their bodies had been almost completely burnt by the Āgneya weapon so that their identities could no longer be easily distinguished. Āsvatthāmā had assumed that Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna would also perish, and so, when he saw that they were alive and unharmed, he became exceedingly depressed. Indeed, when he understood that Arjuna had counteracted his ultimate weapon, Āsvatthāmā threw down his bow in disgust, and after getting down from his chariot, he began to run away from the battlefield. Āsvatthāmā then happened to meet Śrīla Vyāsadeva, and with a voice that was choked up with grief, he inquired, "O foremost of ṛṣis, O supreme knower of past, present, and future, my infallible weapon was supposed to be capable of destroying all at whom it was directed. How then could it have been neutralized after having killed only one akṣauhinī, leaving Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna unharmed?"

Vyāsadeva replied, "My dear Āsvatthāmā, long ago, the Supreme Lord of all creatures, Nārāyaṇa, had appeared upon the earth as Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, the son of Dharma. Thereafter, on the slopes of the Himavat, He performed very severe austerities for 66,000 years while living only upon air and keeping His arms upraised. After that, Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi performed more austerities for 132,000 years, causing the entire space between heaven and earth to become filled with His energy. Lord Śiva then appeared before Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, and after offering suitable prayers in order to worship Lord Mahādeva, the son of Dharma asked for benedictions. Lord Śiva was very pleased with Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, and so he gave Him a benediction by saying, "You will never be pained by any weapon. Indeed, even if You were to fight with me, You will be able to exhibit superior prowess and thus remain undefeated."

"My dear son of Droṇa, you should know that this same Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi has now appeared as Lord Kṛṣṇa, and Arjuna is His eternal associate, Nara. Being manifested from Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi's ascetic merit, Nara is practically equal to Him in all respects. These two supreme personalities appear within this world during every yuga in order to act for the benefit of the universe. My dear Āsvatthāmā, you are an expanded portion of Lord Śiva and you have attained this exalted position as a result of your past austerities. And yet, in spite of your having worshipped Lord Śiva,
birth after birth, Lord Kṛṣṇa is even more dear to Mahādeva than you." Aśvatthāmā was not only a devotee of Lord Śiva, but Śiva's empowered incarnation as well, and thus Śrīla Vyāsadeva had spoken to him in such a way as not to disturb his faith. Still, after hearing the son of Parāśara's words, Aśvatthāmā began to consider Lord Kṛṣṇa to be worthy of his worship, just as much as Lord Śiva. Thus, we see here a wonderful example of preaching according to time and circumstance to someone who cannot immediately and directly take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Aśvatthāmā then offered his obeisances unto Vyāsadeva and thereafter, he returned to the battlefield. Since the sun was setting, Aśvatthāmā had the Kaurava army withdraw for the night, and when they saw this, the Pāṇḍava army also retired to their camp.

That evening, Śrīla Vyāsadeva visited the Pāṇḍava camp, and Arjuna took the opportunity to question him as follows: "My dear grandfather, while engaged in fighting, I see a very effulgent personality holding an uplifted lance who precedes my chariot. Because of him, whoever I approach is immediately routed. Although everyone assumes that it is I who has vanquished my enemies, I alone can see that it is really this wonderful person who holds a lance. His feet do not touch the ground, nor does he have to actually hurl that lance, because from out of that weapon thousands of lances emanate. I am very curious to know who that great personality is, and so, kindly enlighten me if you think that I am worthy."

Śrīla Vyāsadeva replied, "My dear Arjuna, the person who you see is Lord Śiva, and because he stays in front of your chariot, no one can face you in battle. Lord Śiva is to be considered almost as good as a personal expansion of Lord Viṣṇu. It is because of his contact with material nature that he is not in the category of Viṣṇu-tattva, however. Still, he is unlimitedly superior to all of the jīva-tattvas (ordinary living entities), and thus he is known as the best of all Vaiṣṇavas, or devotees of the Supreme Lord, Viṣṇu. My dear grandson, do not be afraid because there is no doubt that your victory is absolutely assured. Sometimes, Lord Kṛṣṇa may display some apparent imperfection, like an ordinary human being, but you should understand that this is simply His lilā. Factually, He is the unlimited, omnipotent and omniscient supreme controller of all potencies, and thus, He is situated far beyond the influence of the
material nature."

After the death of Karṇa, Saṅjaya hurried back to Hastināpura in order to inform Dhṛtarāṣṭra of all that had happened. Saṅjaya first of all bowed down before his master. Then, after hearing the old, blind king's anxious inquiries, Saṅjaya briefly described how Karṇa and Duḥśāsana had been slain. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard this most unpleasant news, he became extremely pained at heart, and as he began to lose consciousness, he suddenly fell onto the ground in a swoon. At this, the palace ladies cried out loudly, and when Gāndhāri rushed forward to lift up her husband, she also fainted away. Saṅjaya then comforted the aggrieved ladies while Vidura tended to Dhṛtarāṣṭra by sprinkling water over his body and fanning him. Thereafter, when the old king finally regained his senses, he anxiously inquired, "O Saṅjaya, please tell me truthfully, is Duryodhana still alive or not? Tell me exactly who has been slain and who still survives on both the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava sides."

In response, Saṅjaya gave a long list of those who had been killed, and then he told Dhṛtarāṣṭra, "O King, this is the harvest of fruits which has resulted from all of the evil deeds that were performed in the past."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra could understand that only a small portion of his army still remained, and so he became very aggrieved. Indeed, as he continued to lament very bitterly, the blind king once again lost consciousness and fell to the ground. Then, after some time, when he came to his senses, Dhṛtarāṣṭra continued to lament over the death of Karṇa, and he said, "O Saṅjaya, my grief is so unbearable that only by taking poison or jumping from a mountain shall I gain relief. Alas! I have fallen into a most horrible condition of life, for I am now bereft of my kingdom, relatives, and friends. My dear Saṅjaya, please now describe to me in detail all that had taken place upon the battlefield of Kurukṣetra."

As the armies withdrew at the end of the fifteenth day, the Kaurava warriors returned to their camp in a dejected state. Indeed, a very heavy gloom pervaded the Kaurava camp that evening, but then, Aśvatthāmā came and addressed the assembled warriors with great confidence. He said, "O Kings, now we should install Karṇa as the commander-in-chief of our army, for with him at the helm there is still great hope for crushing the enemy and attaining victory."
Duryodhana then became a little cheered as Aśvatthāmā continued to glorify the sūta hero, and he then said, "O Karna, due to affection, Bhīṣma and Droṇa were both lenient toward the Pāṇḍavas, and, in addition, they both knew that they would be giving up their lives on the battlefield. My dear Karna, you have no such weaknesses, and thus I have much more confidence in your ability to kill the Pāṇḍavas. Now, please take command of my army, and lead us to victory."

Karna happily agreed to accept the exalted post offered by Duryodhana, and after doing so, he once again boasted that he would kill the Pāṇḍavas along with all of their relatives, including Lord Kṛṣṇa. The installation rituals were then performed with great pomp, and after being bathed in the abhiṣeka ceremony, Karna distributed vast amounts of wealth to the brāhmaṇas while having them pronounce benedictions upon him.

After the sun had risen, Karna arranged the Kaurava army in a makara formation. While gazing upon the enemy array, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then said, "My dear Arjuna, the depleted Kaurava army has only one supremely great warrior, Karna. If he can be somehow killed, then victory will surely be ours."

Arjuna counter-arrayed the Pāṇḍava army in a half-moon formation, and as the two forces joyfully rushed at each other, fierce fighting resumed. While riding upon an elephant, Bhīma inflicted the Kaurava army with heavy losses, and at the same time, Karna slaughtered innumerable Pāṇḍava soldiers. Aśvatthāmā then rushed to confront Bhīma, and as they proceeded to fight furiously, neither could gain the upper hand. Indeed, as those two heroes battled, it appeared that two great masses of clouds were pouring forth torrents of rain upon each other. Then, desirous of slaying one another, both Bhīma and Aśvatthāmā took up very powerful arrows and drew their bowstrings back to their ears. After being discharged, these two arrows struck their targets simultaneously, causing both Bhīma and Aśvatthāmā to sink down to the floor of their conveyances bereft of consciousness.

Meanwhile, as Bhīma and Aśvatthāmā were whisked away by their drivers, Arjuna was engaged elsewhere, slaughtering the Samsaptakas. Indeed, while admiring the great exhibition of prowess which he
exhibited, the demigods and ṛṣīs showered flowers upon Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, and an unseen voice exclaimed, "These two supremely heroic warriors are none other than Nara and Nārāyaṇa ṛṣīs!"

Āsvatthāmā had recovered in the meantime, and being unable to tolerate the honor which was given to Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, he rushed at them while challenging Arjuna to fight. Arjuna then asked Kṛṣṇa whether he should accept the challenge or continue fighting with the Samsaptakas, and in response, Lord Kṛṣṇa took him to Droṇa's son. From a distance, Arjuna broke Āsvatthāmā's bow. Then, after taking up a stronger bow, the son of Droṇa began to shower millions of arrows upon Arjuna. Indeed, due to Āsvatthāmā's inconceivable prowess, arrows were emanating from all over his body, as well as from his armor and chariot. Still, Arjuna dexterously cut every arrow into three pieces and then discharged torrents of arrows at the Samsaptakas, slaughtering them from a distance of two miles. Āsvatthāmā then pierced Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna very deeply with five arrows each. At this, Lord Kṛṣṇa asked, "Arjuna, why are you fighting so indifferently with Āsvatthāmā? Like an untreated disease, if the son of Droṇa is left unvanquished, he will go on to consume our entire army."

At hearing these words, Arjuna began to pierce Āsvatthāmā all over his body, and he then suddenly cut off his reins. Thereafter, as Arjuna continued to severely pierce Āsvatthāmā's horses, these afflicted steeds carried the son of Droṇa far away from the battlefield. Indeed, Āsvatthāmā himself had also become very deeply wounded. Having become hopeless of victory, the son of Droṇa left off fighting with Arjuna and went to the shelter of Karṇa.

Arjuna then once again proceeded against the Samsaptakas. However, while on the way, Lord Kṛṣṇa noticed how the Māgadha king, Daṇḍadhara, was creating a massacre of the Pāṇḍava army while riding upon his gigantic elephant. Kṛṣṇa therefore ordered Arjuna to first of all contend with Daṇḍadhara, and as Arjuna approached, the Māgadha ruler turned to face them while sending forth showers of arrows. Arjuna quickly retaliated by cutting Daṇḍadhara's bow, and the Māgadha king angrily urged his elephant toward his assailant. However, as Daṇḍadhara rushed forward, Arjuna cut off his arms and then severed his head. In retaliation, Daṇḍadhara's brother, Daṇḍa, attacked Arjuna, but in a
similar way, he became deprived of his limbs and head. Thereafter, when Arjuna encountered the Samsaptakas, he proceeded to slay them very easily. However, Kṛṣṇa then urged, "O son of Kuntī, do not engage in sport. Make short work of the Samsaptakas so that you can get down to the real business of killing Karna."

Being so ordered, Arjuna quickly slaughtered the remnants of the Samsaptakas who faced him, and at this time, even Lord Kṛṣṇa was amazed at how wonderfully the son of Kuntī incessantly released his arrows. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then proceeded toward Karna, and as they approached, a loud roar of anguish could be heard coming from the Kaurava ranks. Then, when Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna saw how the Pāṇḍava warrior, Pāṇḍya, was creating an unprecedented massacre of the Kaurava soldiers, they became highly amazed while witnessing his prowess.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, "My dear Sañjaya, there are certainly many great warriors fighting on both sides. However, the name of Pāṇḍya has never been mentioned among the foremost."

Sañjaya replied, "O King, although Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, Karna, Aśvatthāmā, Arjuna, and Kṛṣṇa are regarded by everyone as being the foremost of chariot-warriors, Pāṇḍya considered himself to be superior to them all."

As Pāṇḍya continued to slaughter the Kaurava soldiers, Aśvatthāmā came forward and challenged him. During the battle that ensued, Pāṇḍya fought heroically, and at last, he managed to slay Aśvatthāmā's horses. Then, after having fresh horses yoked onto his chariot, Droṇa's son continued to discharge so many arrows during the next three hours that it must have taken eight large carts, pulled by eight bullocks each, to transport them to Kurukṣetra. And yet, in spite of that terrible onslaught, Pāṇḍya managed to cut off all of Aśvatthāmā's arrows by utilizing his celestial weapons. Then, Aśvatthāmā finally began to overpower his adversary, and within a short time, he killed Pāṇḍya's horses and broke his chariot to pieces. Aśvatthāmā could have slain Pāṇḍya at this time, but because he wanted to continue fighting, he refrained from doing so. Pāṇḍya then saw a riderless elephant running wildly nearby, and so he quickly mounted upon it and then hurled a lance that knocked off Aśvatthāmā's crown. This made the son of Droṇa
highly enraged, and he retaliated by releasing six very powerful arrows. Two of these arrows cut off the elephant's feet and one severed its trunk. Two more arrows cut off Pāṇḍya's arms, and the last one tore off his head.

Meanwhile, Karna was routing the Pāṇḍava army, and so Lord Kṛṣṇa urged Arjuna to go and rally his soldiers. When Arjuna appeared on the scene, many of the great Pāṇḍava warriors came to support him, and in response, the Kauravas rushed to Karna's aid. A very fierce battle ensued, and at that time, there was a long, grueling duel between Sahadeva and Duḥśāsana. Finally, Mādrī's son managed to pierce Duḥśāsana with a fierce arrow, making him faint onto the floor of his chariot. Then, as Duḥśāsana's driver carried him away from the battlefield, Karna confronted Nakula, who was engaged in routing a section of the Kaurava army. After an exchange of harsh challenges, Karna broke Nakula's bow. Nakula then angrily picked up another bow, and as he continued to release a steady stream of arrows, he broke Karna's bow and pierced him with 300 arrows. Then, when Karna took up another bow, Nakula immediately broke it to pieces as well. After Karna had taken up still another bow, the two warriors proceeded to violently shower their arrows upon each other. As a result, numerous soldiers on both sides were slain while the rest retreated out of range in order to become spectators. Although this duel was fiercely fought, Karna smiled all the while, and at last, he broke Nakula's bow and then killed his driver and horses. Thereafter, Karna proceeded to break Nakula's chariot, armor and all of his weapons into small fragments. The son of Mādrī was then forced to stand upon the ground with only a spike bludgeon in hand. However, that was also soon smashed to pieces by Karna's arrows, and so Nakula then began to fearfully run away on foot. While laughing derisively, Karna chased after Nakula. Then, when he caught up to him, Karna placed his bow over Nakula's head and said, "My dear boy, do not ever again attempt to fight with your superiors. Now, go back to the shelter of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. Or, if you are too ashamed, then return home to your mother."

Due to remembering his promise to Mother Kuntīdevī, Karna did not slay Nakula, who thereafter returned to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira with great shame. Thereafter, as Karna proceeded to massacre the Pañcāla
warriors, Arjuna went to fight with the Nārāyaṇas, Trigartas, and other Samsaptakas. Then, as Arjuna was engaged in slaughtering the enemy, Satyasena hurled a lance which pierced right through Lord Kṛṣṇa's left arm, causing the whip and reins to fall from His hands. However, Lord Kṛṣṇa quickly picked up the reins and then drove Arjuna's chariot toward Satyasena. In retaliation, Arjuna immediately severed the warrior's head. Thereafter, he attacked Suśarmā, violently piercing him in the shoulder. Coming to the aid of their leader, the entire army of Samsaptakes soon surrounded Arjuna while showering upon him their arrows. Being hard pressed, Arjuna invoked the Aindra weapon, and as a consequence, many, many thousands of arrows issued forth from his bow in continuous streams. Thus, the entire battlefield soon became strewn with countless līrṇbs, dead bodies, smashed chariots, and broken weapons. Becoming exceedingly afraid of this ghastly carnage, the remainder of the Samsaptakas then fled from Arjuna.

Elsewhere, Duryodhana rushed at Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, but the Pāṇḍava king soon released five arrows which killed his four horses and beheaded his driver. Then, with the sixth arrow, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira knocked down Duryodhana's royal emblem, and with the seventh, he broke his bow. With his eighth arrow, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira cut in half the sword which Duryodhana attempted to unsheathe, and then with five more, he deeply pierced the Kaurava king. Thus, Duryodhana was forced to stand upon the ground in a very precarious condition, and so Aśvatthāmā, Kṛpa and Karṇa rushed to his rescue. Numerous Pāṇḍava warriors then came to support Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and so a very fierce battle ensued just as the sun crossed the meridian.

Duryodhana got up onto another chariot, and when he once again rushed at Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, he managed to break the Pāṇḍava king's bow. However, after picking up another bow, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira cut down Duryodhana's royal insignia and then once more broke his bow. Duryodhana hastily picked up a new bow, and thereafter, the two kings continued to pierce each other again and again with their arrows. Finally, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira discharged a very powerful arrow which deeply wounded Duryodhana, causing him to become momentarily dazed. Then, after recovering his senses, Duryodhana grabbed his mace and rushed toward Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, hoping to
end the battle once and for all. However, Mahârâja Yudhiñôhira hurled a mighty dart that violently pierced the onrushing Kaurava king in the chest and making him fall down unconscious onto the floor of his chariot. Bhîma had been eagerly watching this duel, and at this point he reminded Mahârâja Yudhiñôhira, "My dear brother, please keep in mind my vow to exterminate all of the Dhåtarâñöras, and thus refrain from killing Duryodhana."

Respecting Bhîma's words, Mahârâja Yudhiñôhira put down his bow, although he certainly could have given Duryodhana a finishing blow. Thereafter, the Kaurava king was carried away from the battlefield by his charioteer. In the afternoon, fierce fighting continued. Having recovered from his injury, Duryodhana re-entered the battlefield and single-handedly attacked Arjuna. Within a moment, however, Arjuna broke the Kaurava king's bow, knocked down his royal emblem and umbrella, and then killed his horses and driver. Leaving aside Duryodhana, Arjuna proceeded to attack the other Kaurava warriors, and while doing so, he killed Aśvatthâmâ's horses and broke his bow. Arjuna then broke Kîpa's bow and then broke Kṛtavarmâ's bow and killed his horses. Finally, after breaking Duḥśâsana's bow, Arjuna proceeded on toward Karnâ, who then turned to face his life long rival. Other Pâṇḍava warriors then came to support Arjuna, being determined to either slay Karna or else die in the attempt. However, in spite of being attacked from all sides, Karna fearlessly unleashed showers of arrows which beat back to a great distance the entire Pâṇḍava army. Being unable to tolerate this, Arjuna blazed up like ghee-fed fire and retaliated by slaughtering a great number of Kaurava soldiers. Indeed, as Arjuna continued to completely route the Kaurava army, the sun sank below the western horizon. Being afraid of another ghastly night-battle, the Kauravas ordered their army to retire, and so the Pâṇḍavas cheerfully followed suit.

After the departure of the two armies, the battlefield became a feasting ground for Râkṣasas and ghosts, as well as numerous varieties of carnivorous birds and animals. Indeed, the entire scene appeared like the playground of Lord Śiva and his hideous associates. Back in the Kaurava camp, all of the leading warriors were oppressed with grief due to their defeat at the hands of Arjuna. Thus, with great rage, all of them
swore to kill him the next day without fail. At dawn the next morning, Karṇa went to Duryodhana and vowed, "O King, today I shall either kill Arjuna or else be killed by him. Arjuna is not at all my equal in terms of strength, skill, or courage, and my Vijaya bow is the foremost of its kind. This bow was made by Viśvakarmā specifically for King Indra, and with it, he was able to vanquish the demons. Thereafter, Indra gave the Vijaya bow to Paraśurāma, and after using it to annihilate the kṣatriyas twenty-one times, the great warrior-brāhmaṇa handed it over to me. "O King, my bow is superior to the Gāṇḍiva, and thus I can assure you that I shall soon vanquish the Pāṇḍavas and then hand over the kingdom of the earth for you to enjoy without rival. Arjuna's only superiority over me is his two inexhaustible quivers and his indestructible chariot, his celestial bow-string, his wonderful flag upon which Hanumān sits, and his superior chariot-driver. However, Śalya is equal to Krṣṇa, and thus, if he were to become my driver, then our victory would be assured. O Duryodhana, let Śalya take up my reins today and let numerous other chariots follow mine, stacked high with arrows. In this way, I will gain an advantage and thus fulfill my vow to slay Arjuna."

Duryodhana readily agreed to fulfill Karṇa's requests. Then, he went to Śalya, and with great humility he begged, "O ruler of the Madrakas, please become Karṇa's charioteer today so that he may easily defeat our enemies."

Although Duryodhana had very humbly implored Śalya and while doing so he had praised him excessively, the Madras king responded by becoming highly excited with anger. Being very proud of his royal lineage, Śalya replied, "My dear Duryodhana, this is a great insult, for I do not regard Karṇa to be at all superior to me. Indeed, because of Karṇa's low birth, it would be highly deprecating for me to take the role of his chariot-driver. The sūtas are supposed to be the servants of the kṣatriyas and not vice-versa. Therefore, instead of accepting this humiliating position, I beg you to give me permission so that I can return home!"

After saying this, Śalya got up from his seat and prepared to storm out of the assembly. Duryodhana hastily went and restrained him, however, while saying, "My dear Śalya, I can assure you that I do not consider
Karna to be at all superior to you. Karna is superior to Arjuna in terms of fighting with weapons, and you are superior to Krṣṇa in the art of managing horses. Therefore, I consider your combination to be the best means for slaying the Pāṇḍavas."

When Śalya heard himself being praised so highly, he finally became pacified. He then said, "My dear Duryodhana, I agree to take up the reins of Karna's chariot, but only on one condition. While driving the sūta's chariot, I must be allowed to speak freely whatever I may choose." Duryodhana and Karna readily gave their consent, and thus, the contract was sealed. The Kaurava king then began to narrate to Śalya the following story which he had previously heard from Mārkaṇḍeya Rṣi:

Once, long ago, the demons were defeated by the demigods and so three sons of Tāraka, Tārakākṣa, Kamalākṣa, and Vidyumnālin, decided to engage themselves in very severe austerities. Finally, after a long time, Lord Brahmā became pleased with these three asuras, and so he appeared before them in order to offer benedictions. Speaking with one voice, the three demons then requested, "O Grand sire, kindly grant that we may become immune to death at the hands of all creatures for all time."

Lord Brahmā replied, "My dear sons of Tāraka, this is absolutely impossible and therefore you should ask me for something else."

At last, after consulting with one another for quite some time, the three brothers requested, "O Lord, kindly let us be given three cities which are joined together as one, and which can travel anywhere at our will. In addition, let these cities remain indestructible and unassailable until that time when the best of demigods can pierce them with a single arrow which is powerful enough to encompass their destruction."

Lord Brahmā granted these wishes and then returned to his own abode. Tārakākṣa, Kamalākṣa, and Vidyumnālin then approached Maya Dānava and asked him to construct the aerial cities which they desired. Thereafter, Maya Dānava built one city out of gold, one of silver, and one of iron. Then, by utilizing his mystic powers, Maya Dānava placed the golden city in heaven, the silver city in the space between heaven and earth, and the iron city upon the earth. Each of the three cities was 100 yojanas in diameter, and contained innumerable lofty palaces, spacious avenues and strongly-built walls. Tārakākṣa became the king of
the golden city, Kamalākṣa became the lord of the silver city, and Vidyumnālin ruled over the iron city. Thereafter, millions of Daityas and Dānavas who had previously been defeated by the demigods took shelter in these three cities, and Maya Dānava supplied all of their necessities of life by dint of his mystic power. Tārakākṣa had a very powerful son named Hari, and he also was able to please Lord Brahmā by dint of his severe austerities. As a result, he received the benediction that a magical lake would be constructed within his city. Thus, when the demons were slain by weapons, they could be thrown into the waters of this lake and immediately emerge with re-doubled strength. Because of this ability to revive the dead, the demons became very confident and so, thereafter, they began to afflict the entire three worlds. Because of their previous austerities, the demons had become very powerful. And because of that excessive prowess, they became mad with pride and greed and thus they began to destroy the kingdoms of rulers all over the universe. At last, Indra tried to attack the three cities of the demons which were known as Tripura, but he found them to be impenetrable. Thus, along with the other demigods, he fearfully ran to the shelter of Lord Brahmā. After bowing down his head before the grandsire, Indra described his plight and then requested him to provide the means for Tripura's destruction. After hearing Indra's anxious plea, Lord Brahmā replied, "O King, as the original progenitor of all the living entities within the universe, I am certainly impartial. Still, it is a fact that the unrighteous should be slain for the benefit of all others. My dear demigods, the Tripura can be destroyed only by a single arrow which, in and of itself is powerful enough to accomplish the task. Therefore, come with me now and we shall approach one who is capable of such a feat." After saying this, Lord Brahmā took the demigods to Lord Śiva. While standing before Lord Saṅkara with folded hands, all of the demigods praised him by chanting the appropriate hymns from the Vedas. Lord Śiva then smilingly welcomed the demigods and inquired about the object of their visit. Finally, after once again adoring Lord Śiva at great length, Lord Brahmā explained, "O best of all universal controllers, previously I awarded many benedictions to the Dānavas. Now, however,
because of their acquired prowess, the demons have become very puffed-up and wicked, and thus they should be destroyed for the benefit of the universe."
In this way, Lord Brahmä requested Lord Śiva to slay all of the Dānavas. However, Rudra replied, "It is a fact that the demons have now become extraordinarily powerful. Therefore, I suggest that all of the demigods combine together in order to fight with them. Rest assured that as soon as you enter the battlefield, I will empower you with one-half of my energy and thus you will surely come out victorious."
The demigods then pleaded, "My dear lord, we are not able to bear half of your energy. Therefore, please take half of our energy instead, in order to slay the demons."
Lord Śiva gave his consent and thereafter, when the demigods imparted unto him half of their prowess, he became the most powerful being within the universe, and indeed, it is ever since that time that he has been referred to as Mahādeva. Lord Śiva then requested the demigods to give him a suitable chariot, bow, and arrow, so that he could contend with the mighty demons. In turn, the demigods commissioned Viśvakarmā to construct a very large and wonderful chariot which would utilize portions of the most illustrious personalities within the universe. Thus it came to be that this extraordinary chariot was put together as follows: The body of the vehicle was made from Mother Earth and Mount Mandara was utilized for constructing the axle. Kṛta-yuga became the yoke, and the Udaya and Aṣṭa mountains, from where the sun rises and sets, became the wheels. The saptā-ṛṣis were the protectors of the wheels of this incomparable chariot, and the Lokapālas Indra, Varuṇa, Yamarāja, and Kuvera, became the horses. Mount Meru was used to make the flagstaff, and a special coat of armor was constructed from the kāla-cakra (the wheel of time). Other parts of the chariot were created by utilizing the Gaṅgā and other sacred rivers, the Gāyatrī mantra, the Ocean, and numerous other powerful personalities. Thereafter, when the demigods beheld this effulgent chariot, having flashes of lightning as its banners, they became struck with wonder, for indeed, it had been created by uniting all of the diverse energies within the universe. The demigods presented the wonderful chariot to Lord Śiva, who then loaded it up with his personal weapons. Lord Śiva then
yoked his bull carrier onto that chariot, and the Ṛg and Sāma Vedas, as well as the Purāṇas protected the front. The Yajur Veda protected the rear, and "Oṃ" stood in the center. The Year measurement of time became Lord Śiva's bow, and the bowstring was made of Lord Śiva's shadow, which is called kāla-rātri (death-night). The special arrow required for destroying Tripura was constructed from the combined energy of Soma and Agni, and the supreme energy of Viṣṇu, who is the Supersoul of Lord Śiva, became its sharp point. After encasing himself in armor and taking up his bow and arrow, Lord Śiva mounted upon his chariot, while the great rṣis, Gandharvas, and Apsarās worshipped him with great respect. Lord Śiva then smilingly inquired, "My dear demigods, who will become the driver of my chariot?" The demigods replied, "My lord, whoever you appoint shall become your driver."

Lord Śiva then requested, "I wish that you would appoint as my driver someone who is superior to me."

Upon hearing this, the demigods went to Lord Brahmā and said, "O Grand sire, we have made all of the necessary preparations for destroying the asuras, except a suitable charioteer is lacking. O Lord, because we see no one else who is superior to Lord Śiva, we request you to become his driver."

At the demigods' urging, Lord Brahmā accepted the role of Lord Śiva's charioteer, and after he had taken up the reins, Lord Śiva departed for conquering over the demons. He was accompanied by many demigods, Gandharvas, and rṣis, who played upon musical instruments and offered benedictions for his victory. While rushing forward, Lord Śiva fixed his special arrow upon his bowstring and aimed it at the cities of the demons. However, due to the great weight of Lord Viṣṇu, Soma, Agni, the bow, Lord Brahmā, and Lord Śiva, the chariot suddenly began to sink into the ground. Lord Viṣṇu then came out from the tip of the arrow, and after assuming the form of a bull, He raised up the chariot. Thereafter, the enraged Lord Śiva surveyed Tripura while standing upon the backs of his horses and bull carrier, and at that time, he cut off the horses' breasts and slit the hooves of the bull. For this reason, ever since that time, horses have been without breasts and bulls have had cloven hooves. Then, as Lord Śiva placed the strength of his pāśupata weapon
into his arrow, the three cities of the demons joined together to become one, and upon seeing this, all of the demigods and ṛṣis shouted, "Jaya, Jaya!" Then, as the Dānavas came close by, Lord Śiva released his arrow, and when it pierced Tripura, the entire city, with all of its inhabitants, became engulfed in flames and fell down into the Western Ocean.

Thus, the universe became restored to its normal, peaceful condition, and with heart-felt gratitude, the demigods glorified Lord Śiva for his victory. Then, finally, after taking permission from Mahādeva, Lord Brahmā and the other demigods returned to their respective abodes.

Duryodhana then said, "My dear Śalya, I humbly beg you to take up the reins of Karna's chariot, just as Lord Brahmā did for the sake of Lord Śiva. Do not think that I consider you to be inferior to Karna, Arjuna or Kṛṣṇa. Now, please allow me to tell a story which I had once heard a brāhmaṇa relate to my father."

In the line of Bhṛgu appeared Parāśurāma, the son of Jamadagni. This warrior incarnation of Godhead practiced very severe austerities, and upon becoming pleased, Lord Śiva appeared before him and said, "O Rāma, I can understand your heart's desire. Therefore, I shall deliver all of my weapons unto you, but only after you have fully purified yourself. One who is not competent to possess these weapons is burned to ashes if he attempts to utilize them."

Thereafter, Parāśurāma continued to worship Lord Śiva while executing austerities for many, many years. Meanwhile, the Daityas had become very powerful, and as a result, they began to greatly afflict their eternal enemies, the demigods. In spite of uniting together, the demigods could not defeat the demons, and so, at last, they approached Lord Śiva, begging him to slay their tormentors. After giving the demigods assurances, Lord Śiva summoned Parāśurāma and requested him to kill the Daityas. The son of Jamadagni then said, "My dear lord, without proper weapons, what power do I have to slay all of the powerful demons?"

Lord Śiva assured Parāśurāma of his success, however, and so the brāhmaṇa-warrior immediately went and challenged the asuras. Parāśurāma then proceeded to vanquish all of the demons, and after doing so, he returned to the presence of Lord Śiva with wounds all over his body. Lord Śiva then mercifully touched Parāśurāma, and as a result,
his wounds became immediately healed. Therefore, Lord Śiva expressed his great pleasure and delivered unto Paraśurāma all of his celestial weapons, and also gave him many benedictions. Finally, after bowing down to Lord Śiva with great reverence and gratitude, Paraśurāma returned home.

Duryodhana then concluded by saying, "My dear Śalya, later on, Paraśurāma delivered the entire science of weapons unto Karṇa. Therefore, we must intelligently conclude that Karṇa cannot really be a sūta's son. He must be the offspring of a demigod who was born in a kṣatriya family and then abandoned at infancy. Otherwise, why would Paraśurāma agree to instruct him in the complete use of weapons?"

Śalya replied, "O Duryodhana, I had already heard on numerous occasions the story of how Lord Brahmā became Lord Śiva's chariot-driver. My dear king, you should not place so much faith in your plans, because even if Arjuna is slain, Lord Kṛṣṇa will exterminate the entire Kaurava army in a fit of rage."

Duryodhana then said, "O Śalya, whatever you may say, I still have complete faith in Karṇa. And, besides, even if Karṇa were slain, couldn't you protect our army just as Kṛṣṇa is now protecting the Pāṇḍavas?"

Śalya replied, "My dear king, I am very flattered that you consider me to be even greater than Lord Kṛṣṇa, and indeed, it is for this reason alone that I am willing to drive Karṇa's chariot. However, let me remind you that I must be permitted to say whatever I please while engaged in this service."

Duryodhana and Karṇa once again assured Śalya of this, and then the Kaurava king joyfully embraced the ruler of the Madrakas, thinking that his victory was now assured. However, the clever Karṇa could understand that Śalya had not really wholeheartedly accepted the proposal. Therefore, he took Duryodhana aside and requested him to once again solicit Śalya's assurances of full participation. Thus, Duryodhana once more went to Śalya, and this time the ruler of the Madrakas happily embraced him and said, "O King, you can rest assured of my complete cooperation in this matter. My only request is that Karṇa should always pardon me if I happen to say anything which he many find to be disagreeable."
Karna then requested Salya to bring his chariot after fully equipping it with weapons. Thereafter, when Salya returned with the chariot, Karṇa first of all worshipped Sūrya and then mounted upon it. At this time, Duryodhana approached him and requested, "My dear friend, I beg you to accomplish today that which I had always hoped Bhīṣma and Droṇa would do. I beg you to either slay Bhīma and Arjuna or else capture Yudhiṣṭhira alive."

Karna then urged, "O Salya, quickly go to where Arjuna is staying so that I can begin my slaughter of the Pāṇḍavas."

However, instead of submissively obeying this command, Salya impudently replied, "O Karṇa, you will not brag like this when you hear the twanging of the Gāṇḍiva bow!"

Salya went on to praise the Pāṇḍavas at length but Karṇa tolerated his speech and thus the two proceeded onto the battlefield. The soldiers of the Kaurava army felt great confidence and joy upon seeing Karṇa set out, but then many inauspicious omens became manifest. Suddenly, Karṇa's horses stumbled and fell onto the ground. A frightening shower of bones rained down from the sky and all of the Kauravas' animals were seen shedding tears. However, because the Kaurava warriors were already in the grips of Destiny, they ignored these fearful signs and continued to proceed cheerfully, confident that Karṇa would lead them to victory. Karṇa then began to praise himself once more by saying, "O Salya, now that Bhīṣma and Droṇa are gone, I am the only one who remains that is competent to fearlessly face Arjuna in battle."

In response, Salya simply laughed. Then, in order to curb Karṇa's swelling pride, he replied, "O sūta's son, Arjuna is far superior to you and the proof is the innumerable heroic deeds which he has performed. Indeed, you can rest assured that this present battle has been arranged just for your destruction."

This time, Karṇa became enraged upon hearing Salya's insults, and when he saw this, the king of the Madrakas thought it best to leave well enough alone for the time being. Thereafter, Karṇa proceeded to slaughter innumerable Pāṇḍava soldiers while ranging over the battlefield in search of Arjuna. Karṇa then addressed all those whom he saw before him as follows: "O warriors of the Pāṇḍava army, I will reward with immense wealth anyone who points out Arjuna to me so that I can
slay him this very day. Indeed, I am prepared to give gold, jewels, villages, servants, wives, chariots, elephants, horses, and whatever else may be imagined to anyone who tells me where I can find my life-long enemy."

After saying this, Karna impetuously blew upon his conchshell, giving great joy to Duryodhana and the other Kaurava warriors. However, Salya laughed scornfully and said, "O Karna, you should save your wealth because even if you do not search him out, Arjuna will soon enough come to you of his own accord. How can you dare speak so boastfully? Have you ever before heard of a fox who was able to kill two lions? Your attempt to slay the PANDAVAS can be likened to a man who tries to swim across the ocean after having tied a heavy stone around his neck."

Karna replied, "Salya, I can now understand that you are actually an enemy who has disguised himself as a friend. I do not mind, however, because all of your attempts to frighten me will be fruitless. Therefore, you had better stop wasting your valuable breath."

In spite of Karna's suggestion, Salya desired to provoke Karna even further, and so he next spoke as follows: "O Sūta's son, I can assure you that you will soon lament very bitterly after having been pierced by Arjuna's arrows. Therefore, take my good advice and so do not challenge Arjuna alone and thus meet with certain destruction. Indeed, your rushing toward Arjuna is something like a snake trying to challenge Garuḍa. Your foolish attempts to compare yourself with Arjuna are like trying to claim that a jackal is equal to a lion, a rabbit is equal to an elephant, or nectar is the same as poison."

Upon hearing these intolerable insults, Karna harshly replied, "O Salya, my claims are factual because I have a special arrow which I have been worshipping for many years. After killing Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna with that arrow, I shall take great pleasure in slaying you along with all of your relatives! Why do you take such pride in yourself, thinking that you come from a very royal family? Your subjects, the Madrakas, have habits like those of the Mlecchas, and you yourself are the son of such a Madraka woman. Everyone knows how the Madraka women become intoxicated with liquor and then take of their clothes and dance about madly. They have sexual intercourse with whomever they please,
without restriction, and they pass stool and urine just like the animals. However, in spite of your harsh words, I will not kill you just now, for I wish to avoid blame and the chance of displeasing Duryodhana. Still, if you continue to anger me with your insulting words, I shall certainly crush you to death with my mace!"

In spite of this warning, Śalya next said, "O Karṇa, you are speaking like a madman. Therefore, just to benefit you, I will now give you some further instruction. O Śūta, contrary to your opinion, my dynasty is among the most exalted of kṣatriya lines. Indeed, just to act in such a way as is befitting my aristocratic lineage, I shall continue to drive your chariot and thus keep my promise intact, in spite of your cruel words. Now; please listen to me attentively as I narrate to you a very interesting story."

On the other side of the ocean there lived a pious vaiśya who was very wealthy. He performed many sacrifices and he gave generously in charity and thus he was very pure, peaceful, and contented. This vaiśya had many sons who were also very pious and kind to all living creatures, and the kingdom wherein he resided was ruled over by a very righteous monarch. It so happened that there was one particular crow who used to maintain himself by eating the food remnants which were left upon the vaiśya's children's' plates. However, because of being fed so sumptuously in this way, the crow became very puffed-up, and as a result, he began to act arrogantly toward those who were his equals and superiors. One day, some great white swans who were practically equal to Garuḍa in terms of speed and range of flight came to the shore of the ocean. When the sons of the vaiśya saw the wonderful swans, they jokingly said, "My dear crow, you are superior to these big birds."

Due to his inflated ego, the crow actually accepted these words to be factual. He therefore went to the flock of swans, and after alighting amongst them, he asked, "Who is your leader? Kindly point him out to me."

Then, when the proud crow was led to the chief swan, he arrogantly challenged him to a flying competition. Upon hearing this, all of the swans laughed heartily and then said, "O Crow, we are residents of the Mānasa lake and we can fly at will. Therefore, how can you even imagine that you are capable of flying with us?"
The foolish crow replied, "O Swan, first of all I will display before you 101 varieties of flying patterns. Then, you can choose any pattern which you like and we shall compete by flying in that way."

At this, the king of the swans said, "My dear crow, I only know one kind of flying method. Therefore, I shall fly in that way while you fly as you choose."

Many crows had assembled in the meantime, and upon hearing this, they all began to laugh, thinking that the swan would never be a match for their brother. Thereafter, the swan and the crow flew up into the air. As the swan soared through the sky with his single graceful motion, the crow began to display all 101 of his flying tricks, one after another. Then, as the swan proceeded to slowly fly out to sea, the crow followed while artfully exhibiting his skill in executing many fancy maneuvers. As they watched the fancy flying show which was put on by their brother, all of the assembled crows began to caw very loudly, thinking him to be victorious. However, the swans laughed derisively as their leader picked up speed, leading the foolish crow further on out to sea.

Finally, the crow became very tired and because he could not see any island within the ocean, he became exceedingly afraid. Meanwhile, the swan continued to fly effortlessly, but he then slowed down so that the crow could catch up with him. Being exceedingly fatigued and short of breath, and seeing no place to land, the crow desperately came alongside the swan. The pious swan actually intended to save the floundering crow's life. However, upon seeing that the crow was just about to sink into the water, the swan asked, "My dear sir, what wonderful flying skill are you now displaying so to make your wings repeatedly touch the tips of the waves?"

Being on the verge of collapse, the crow begged, "O king of the swans, please rescue me and bring me back to the land."

Indeed, after saying this, the crow suddenly fell down into the water, and upon seeing him on the very verge of death, the swan said, "My dear friend, just before you were boasting about your flying ability. If you are actually so superior, then why have you now fallen into the water?"

The crow then admitted, "O Swan, I was falsely proud. However, if you kindly save me, then I promise to never again disregard or insult any other creature throughout my entire life."
Upon hearing this, the swan picked up the crow by his feet, and then, after placing him upon his back, he returned to where all of the other swans and crows were waiting. After putting the crow upon the dry ground, the swan departed along with his flock. Thereafter, that defeated crow began to live a very humble and peaceful life.

Śalya then said, "O Karṇa, the crow had become very puffed up, thinking himself to be superior due to being fed the remnants from the vaiśya's children's plates. Similarly, you consider yourself to be superior due to receiving remnants from the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Don't you remember how you were vanquished by Arjuna at the kingdom of Virā? Have you forgotten how you were the first to run away from the battlefield when the Gandharvas attacked the Kurus? Knowing that Arjuna will very soon quell your false pride once and for all, you should desist from boasting any further."

Karṇa was not about to give up his great pride after hearing Śalya's words, but they did make him somewhat thoughtful. Karṇa then confided to Śalya a great fear which he had never before expressed to anyone. "O King," he said, "once, long ago, I approached Paraśurāma in the guise of a brāhmaṇa in the hopes of acquiring his celestial weapons. For this purpose, I remained with the son of Jamadagni for some time, serving him like a humble disciple. Then, one day, Paraśurāma took some rest after having placed his head upon my thigh. At that time, Indra took the form of a worm and began to eat right through my leg. Even though I felt excruciating pain, and blood flowed from the wound, I was determined not to disturb my preceptor, and thus I did not move an inch. Finally, when Paraśurāma awakened and saw the wonderful patience which I had exhibited, he declared, 'O Disciple, you cannot actually be a brāhmaṇa! I therefore demand that you immediately disclose your real identity!'"

"Upon being so challenged, I fearfully admitted that I was in reality the son of a sūta, and when he heard this, Paraśurāma became highly enraged. The son of Jamadagni then cursed me by saying, 'O wretch! Due to your act of duplicity, the time will come when you will be unable to remember the mantras for invoking the brahmāstra while facing an extreme danger upon the battlefield. Indeed, because of this lapse of memory, you shall be slain!'"
"O Śalya, I am still confident that Arjuna will not be able to escape my irresistible brahmāstra arrow. If the time predicted by Paraśurāma is not yet destined to arrive, then I should be able to strike off his head this very day! However, there is something else which I fear even more than the son of Jamadagni's curse: that my chariot wheels may sink into the mud. Once, long ago, while roaming about in the forest, practicing with my Vijaya bow, I mistakenly killed a calf which belonged to a brāhmaṇa. When he found out what had happened, the brāhmaṇa became highly aggrieved, and with great anger, he cursed me by saying" "O killer of cows, one day you will experience a great fear upon the battlefield when one of your chariot wheels sinks into the earth.'

"O Śalya, I tried to induce that brāhmaṇa to retract his curse by offering him thousands of cows and vast amounts of wealth. However, he refused all of my gifts and then replied, 'I am unwilling to allow my words to ever prove false. By suffering the consequence of my curse, you shall properly atone for the sinful act of killing my calf.'

"O King, in spite of your having criticized me so harshly, I have disclosed all of this to you as an expression of friendship. Because your words can never frighten me, I am willing to forgive you for speaking so harshly."

And yet, in spite of Karna's conciliatory speech, Śalya continued to abuse him. Finally, losing all patience, Karna interrupted and said, "O King, once, at Dhṛtarāṣṭra's palace, I overheard a brāhmaṇa who was engaged in describing the despicable qualities of the Madrakas. Since you are the ruler of these abominable people, you will have to share one sixth of their sinful reactions."

Karna then proceeded to go on a long tirade about the low qualities of the Madrakas. Then, as Śalya began to heatedly refute Karna's statements, Duryodhana appeared upon the scene in order to intervene. After stopping their argument, Duryodhana begged Karna and Śalya to cooperate for his sake, and so, once again, the two great heroes proceeded onto the battlefield. Then, while going along, Śalya suddenly pointed out Arjuna's wonderful chariot, and he next described the inauspicious omens which had become manifest. Śalya then said, "O Karna, just see how your emblem is trembling and your horses are shaking with fear. This indicates that very soon you shall meet defeat at the hands of your enemy."
As Śalya proceeded to glorify Arjuna, the remaining 34,000 Samsaptakas prepared to attack the Pāṇḍava hero. Arjuna thus turned away from Karna in order to meet them, and thereafter, a terrible massacre of the Samsaptakas took place. At the same time, Karna, surrounded by his sons, continued to slaughter the Pāṇḍava and Pañcāla warriors, and so Bhīma, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Śikhaṇḍi, Sātyaki, and Draupādi's sons all came and surrounded him. Bhīma killed Karna's son Bhāṇusena. Then, when he proceeded to attack Suśeṇa, Karna protected his son by breaking Bhīma's arrows to pieces. Sātyaki then smashed Vṛṣasena's chariot and so this son of Karna was hurriedly picked up by Duḥṣāsana. Thereafter, Karna fought furiously and after greatly afflicting all of the Pāṇḍava warriors who surrounded him, he penetrated further into the enemy ranks while slaughtering thousands of soldiers.

Karna then spotted Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and so he rushed at him impetuously while crushing all of those who tried to stand in his way. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira challenged the onrushing Karna and thus, after pulling his bowstring all the way back to his ear, he released a mighty arrow which pierced his assailant's left side. The bow slipped out of Karna's hand as he fell unconscious onto the floor of his chariot. Upon seeing this, all of the Pāṇḍava warriors cried out with joy, while the Kauravas uttered exclamations of despair. However, Karna quickly recovered, and in an instant, he retaliated by killing the two protectors of Yudhiṣṭhira's chariot-wheels. Bhīma, Sātyaki, and numerous others rushed forward, but as they surrounded him, Karna invoked a brahmāstra which filled all directions with constant showers of arrows. Indeed, the entire Pāṇḍava army became greatly afflicted by this terrible weapon, and taking advantage of this, Karna proceeded to break Yudhiṣṭhira's bow and cut off his armor, making him fall down to the ground. In retaliation, Yudhiṣṭhira reached for a dart and then hurled it, but Karna easily cut it to pieces. In desperation, Yudhiṣṭhira next threw some lances, one after another, and these pierced Karna in the chest and forehead. However, becoming more enraged, Karna retaliated by smashing Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's chariot to pieces, and at this, the king had to quickly dismount.

After getting up onto another chariot, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to
flee from the battlefield, and he was very depressed at finding himself to be incapable of contending with Karna. Karna then gave chase, desiring to take Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira captive, and he soon caught up with the Pāṇḍava king. However, when Karna placed his hand upon Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's shoulder, he suddenly remembered his promise to Kuntidevi. At this crucial moment, Śalya warned, "O Karna, you had better not try to capture Yudhiṣṭhira, for as soon as you attempt to do so, you shall be reduced to ashes!"

Karna then mockingly laughed, and in order to rebuke Yudhiṣṭhira, he said, "O King, why are you fleeing from the battlefield? Are you not conversant with the duties of a kṣatriya? Now, if you feel that your life is still worth maintaining, you can return to the shelter of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna."

After setting Yudhiṣṭhira free, Karna continued to massacre the Pāṇḍava soldiers and because the Pāṇḍava king retreated from the battlefield, his army followed him. Then, when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira saw how his soldiers were being annihilated by Karna, he sent Bhīma to rally his forces and face the sūta's son. Thereafter, when Bhīma and many other Pāṇḍava heroes proceeded to confront Karna, all the leading Kaurava warriors joined in the fray, and thus a very fierce battle ensued. Indeed, the slain soldiers fell down by the thousands, and the fighting became so savage that the warriors were seen dragging each other by the hair, and biting and tearing one another with their teeth and nails. Thus, everything became covered with blood, and the corpses floated in the rivers of blood which were created. At last, because their senses of smell, taste, sight, and touch had all become absorbed in blood, the warriors on both sides felt themselves overwhelmed by a terrible repulsion and thus they became disheartened.

After some time, the Pāṇḍava warriors gained the upper hand, and as they proceeded to beat the Kaurava army badly, Bhīma and Sātyaki flared up with renewed vigor. The Kaurava army was already wavering, and when these two heroes rushed at them impetuously, Duryodhana's soldiers fearfully turned their backs and fled. Indeed, even though Duryodhana shouted at the top of his lungs in an attempt to rally them, the Kaurava soldiers could not be induced to turn back. In retaliation, Karna rushed at Bhīma, who then became very determined to gain
revenge for Yudhiṣṭhīra's having been vanquished within his sight. Then, in order to challenge Kārṇa, Bhīma vowed, "O Śūta, I shall either kill you right now or else be slain by you!"

Bhīma charged forward while roaring loudly, and at this time, Śālya tried to frighten Kārṇa by describing the son of Vāyu's ferocious appearance. Kārṇa simply laughed, however, and replied, "O Śālyā, by slaying Bhīma, I shall accelerate my cherished opportunity to combat Arjuna."

After a brief battle, Kārṇa managed to break Bhīma's bow. Bhīma quickly took up another bow and then struck Kārṇa very deeply with a powerful arrow, making him fall down unconscious onto the floor of his chariot. Śālya hurriedly took Kārṇa away from the battlefield, and so Bhīma began to easily slaughter the Kaurava soldiers.

Just previously, Duryodhāna had ordered his brothers to attack Bhīma in order to give Kārṇa protection. Now, twenty of the Dhrūtarāṣṭras surrounded Bhīma and began to shower their arrows upon him. Bhīma first of all killed 550 other chariot-warriors and then he began to cut off the heads of Dhrūtarāṣṭra's sons. Thereafter, as the surviving Dhrūtarāṣṭras fearfully fled, Kārṇa regained his senses and returned to resume fighting with Bhīma.

There was a very fierce exchange of arrows, and then Kārṇa once again managed to break Bhīma's bow. After taking up another bow, Bhīma continued to fight furiously, but then Kārṇa drew his bowstring back to his ear and released three very powerful arrows. Being deeply pierced, Bhīma certainly felt great pain, but he did not falter. Then, in retaliation, he released a terrible arrow which went right through Kārṇa's body, making him tremble violently in agony. Kārṇa was undaunted, however, and in a fit of rage, he proceeded to cut down Bhīma's standard, kill his driver, break his bow, and smash his chariot to pieces. Grabbing his mace, Bhīma jumped to the ground and began creating a great massacre of the Kaurava warriors. Then, when a division of huge elephants rushed at him, Bhīma slaughtered 700 of the infuriated beasts and thereafter smashed 100 chariots to pieces. Next, 500 more chariot-warriors rushed against Bhīma, but they were soon smashed to pulp by his mace. Next, Bhīma was assaulted by 3,000 horse-soldiers, and after quickly dispatching them to the abode of Yamarāja, the son of Vāyu mounted upon another chariot.
Meanwhile, Karṇa saw Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira re-enter the battlefield, and so he rushed toward him and killed his driver. Then, when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira picked up the reins and began fleeing from the battlefield, Karṇa chased after him. Bhīma quickly rushed from behind to intercept Karṇa, and so, upon seeing this, Karṇa gave up chasing Yudhiṣṭhira in order to face him. Sātyaki and other Pāṇḍava warriors then came to support Bhīma, and at the same time, Aśvatthāmā, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛtavarmā, Śakuni, and others rushed to aid Karṇa. Thus, as the sun crossed the meridian, a very dreadful battle took place between the two armies, and the dust which was raised darkened the entire sky. Countless carnivorous creatures wandered over the battlefield, gorging themselves upon the flesh and blood of the corpses which were everywhere strewn about. During this terrible battle, headless trunks were seen to raise themselves off of the ground, and yet, in spite of such a ghastly scene, all of the warriors on both sides cast off their fears and fought bravely. As the battle progressed, the Kaurava army gradually weakened, and elsewhere, Arjuna fought with the Samsaptakas. When Suśarmā struck Arjuna's flag with his arrows, Hanumān roared so loudly that he caused such a great fear to enter the hearts of the enemy warriors that they became practically stunned. Then, after recovering their senses, the Samsaptakas once again surrounded Arjuna with renewed determination. At this time, Arjuna showered upon his adversaries torrents of arrows, and yet, the enraged Samsaptakas managed to come right up to his chariot. Indeed, some of the Samsaptakas grabbed onto Lord Kṛṣṇa's arm, while others held onto the horses as well as the various parts of Arjuna's chariot, thus creating a very fearful situation. With a violent shake of His arm, Lord Kṛṣṇa threw off those who had grabbed Him, and at the same time, Arjuna invoked a Nāga weapon which stopped the Samsaptakas' movements by tying up their legs with snakes. This allowed Arjuna to very easily slaughter all the warriors who surrounded him, and thus his chariot became freed. When Suśarmā saw that his army had become paralyzed, he invoked a suparṇā weapon which created innumerable gigantic birds that proceeded to devour all of the snakes which were oppressing his soldiers. Arjuna continued to slay the Samsaptakas in droves, however, but then, all of a sudden, Suśarmā pierced him in the chest with a powerful arrow, causing him to sit down
upon his chariot in great pain. Upon seeing this, all of the enemy soldiers roared, "Arjuna has been killed!" However, Arjuna quickly recovered himself and then invoked an Aindra weapon. Thousands upon thousands of arrows thus issued forth from Arjuna's bow, killing many thousands of enemy warriors. Becoming terrified, the Samsaptakas lost heart and began to retreat, and altogether, Arjuna had managed to slay 20,000 of them during that fierce battle. Meanwhile, Karṇa continued to annihilate the Paṇcālas by the thousands, and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira once again rushed at him along with Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Draupadi's sons, and many other leading Pāṇḍava warriors. And yet, in spite of being surrounded by so many, Karṇa was able to check all of the Pāṇḍava heroes by afflicting them greatly with his arrows. After slaying most of the Samsaptakas, Arjuna wanted to join in the attack on Karṇa, and so he ordered Kṛṣṇa to take him to where the battle was raging. Aśvatthāmā then rushed at Arjuna while incessantly sending forth showers of arrows. The powerful son of Droṇa proceeded to cover Arjuna's chariot with so many arrows that the two Kṛṣṇas became completely obscured from view. Indeed, when Arjuna saw Aśvatthāmā's unprecedented display of prowess, he considered himself to be surely vanquished. However, Lord Kṛṣṇa became very angry when He saw that Arjuna had lost his confidence and determination, and with red-hot eyes He appeared to burn both Kunti's and Droṇa's sons as He glanced at them. Lord Kṛṣṇa then chastised Arjuna by saying, "O descendent of Bhārata, how can you allow Aśvatthāmā to dominate you in battle like this? Do not give way to weakness of heart and thus spare the son of your teacher!"

At this, Arjuna angrily took up broad-headed arrows and proceeded to cut down Aśvatthāmā's bow, standard, umbrella, flags, and club. Arjuna then deeply pierced the son of Droṇa in the shoulder, causing him to sit down on his chariot while supporting himself by holding onto the flagstaff. Then, as Aśvatthāmā proceeded to faint away, his river judiciously carried him away from the battlefield. Being without a protector, the supporting Kaurava warriors became easy prey, and as Duryodhana looked on helplessly, Arjuna slaughtered them by the thousands.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had been frequently wounded while repeatedly
fighting with Karna, and at last, due to feeling severe pain, he retreated to a distance of two miles from the battlefield in order to rest and recuperate. Duryodhana then went to Karna and pleaded, "O commander of my forces, now is the time for you to either defeat the Pandavas once and for all or else attain to heaven by dying upon the battlefield!"

Overhearing this, Aśvatthāmā first of all responded to the fervent appeal by vowing, "O King, I hereby pledge to slay Dṛṣṭadyumna this very day without fail!"

Karna and the others then also made heroic speeches, and so the Kaurava warriors became very enlivened and once again prepared to launch an all-out attack upon the Pandava army. A very dreadful battle then took place, and at that time, the Apsarās showered down celestial flowers from the sky, causing the cool breezes to become very fragrantly scented. However, this could hardly detract the warriors' attention from the ghastly battle-scene which was permeated with blood and horribly anguished screams.

At this time, Arjuna became very anxious about Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and so he requested Lord Kṛṣṇa to take him to where the Pāṇḍava and Kaurava armies were engaged in massacring each other. While going along, Lord Kṛṣṇa very poetically described to Arjuna the vast panorama of the battlefield as follows: "O son of Kuntī, just see all of the bows and quivers which have fallen from the hands and shoulders of the slain warriors! Look at how many arrows, ivory-handled swords, and gold-embossed shields are strewn about here and there, as well as innumerable darts, spears, maces, and axes. So many slain soldiers are still clutching their weapons, thus giving the appearance that they are still alive. Thousands upon thousands of men are lying dead here, their heads and limbs having been smashed by heavy maces or else mangled by rampaging elephants. Behold all of the severed arms which are so nicely decorated with sandalwood paste, the fallen heads that are bedecked with costly earrings, and the headless trunks all smeared over with blood. Behold how many chariots are smashed to pieces and how many horses are slain with hundreds of arrows sticking all over their bodies! Just see the elephants, as huge as hills, laying dead with their tongues hanging out. Some of the whips and goads, bedecked with glittering jewels, are
strewn here and there, while others remain in the hands of the slain drivers.

"O Arjuna, the entire earth is muddied with blood, and from out of the mire stare the faces of the slain soldiers. The ground is speckled with the sparkling of countless jewels which had fallen from the royal crowns and ornaments of slain kings, and thus it gives the appearance of the starry sky at night. Just see how many soldiers are lying wounded, crying out in pain. Many of the dying warriors are surrounded by their bitterly weeping relatives. Some of their kinsmen are running to fetch water in order to fulfill the dying request of those warriors who are parched with thirst. Other soldiers are seen to be breathing their last after having quenched their thirst, and still others have died while clutching a water glass in their hands. Some relatives have returned with water, only to find that their loved ones have already left this world for the next. Because of this, they are throwing the water aside as if deprived of their reason on account of unbearable grief."

After describing the dreadful battlefield scene to Arjuna, Lord Kṛṣṇa proceeded to where the Pāṇḍava warriors were engaged in battle with the Kauravas. While fighting a fierce duel with Dhrṣṭadyumna, Karna simultaneously held all of the other Pāṇḍava warriors in check with his continuous shower of arrows. Karna then released a very powerful arrow in the hopes of slaying Dhrṣṭadyumna, but Śātyaki cut it off as it soared through the air. Highly enraged, Karna turned to fight with Śātyaki, and so Aśvatthāmā rushed toward Dhrṣṭadyumna, desiring to avenge the death of his father. After a fierce duel, Aśvatthāmā broke Dhrṣṭadyumna's bow and then proceeded to destroy his chariot. Dhrṣṭadyumna then picked up a sword and shield, but Aśvatthāmā smashed them to pieces before he could even dismount. Thereafter, Aśvatthāmā proceeded to pierce Dhrṣṭadyumna with innumerable arrows, and yet, even though he was in such a vulnerable position, the Paṅcāla prince remained undaunted. Aśvatthāmā thus concluded that his foe could not be slain by ordinary arrows, and so he put aside his bow and then rushed impetuously at Dhrṣṭadyumna. When Lord Kṛṣṇa saw this, He began to urge on His horses while commanding Arjuna to come to Dhrṣṭadyumna's rescue. Seeing Arjuna approach, Aśvatthāmā wanted to quickly put an end to Dhrṣṭadyumna, and so he darted forward and
grabbed him. Then, as Aśvatthāma dragged Dhṛṣṭadyumna down from his disabled chariot, Arjuna proceeded to pierce him with many arrows so that at last he was forced to release his grip. Aśvatthāma then hurriedly remounted his chariot and picked up his bow in order to face Arjuna. At this time, Sahadeva came and whisked away Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and then, Arjuna suddenly pierced Aśvatthāma in the shoulder with a very powerful arrow, causing him to faint onto the floor of his chariot. Then, as Aśvatthāma's driver took him away to safety, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira re-entered the battlefield.

Upon seeing this, Duryodhana and the other Kaurava warriors made a great rush for the Pāṇḍava king in the hopes of taking him captive. Numerous Pāṇḍava warriors then came to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's aid, but Karna drove them all off as he also proceeded toward the Pāṇḍava king. Karna then attacked Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira with great force and the king soon became severely wounded. Indeed, while sitting down upon his chariot, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira ordered his driver to beat a hasty retreat. At this, the Dhṛtarāṣṭras joyfully rushed at Yudhiṣṭhira, hoping to seize him, but then Bhīma intervened and checked them. Still, as Mahārāja Yuddhistliira proceeded on toward the Paṇcāla camp, accompanied by Nakula and Sahadeva, Karna once again came to attack him. The twins rushed to check Karna, but the sūta hero still managed to slay Yudhiṣṭhira's horses and then knock the crown right off from his head. Karna then broke Nakula's bow and killed his horses, and so both he and Yudhiṣṭhira had to get up onto Sahadeva's chariot. Upon seeing the plight of these three Pāṇḍavas, Śalya became moved by compassion and said, "O Karna, why are you unnecessarily wasting your arrows and tiring your horses in this way? It would be better for you to immediately go and fight with Arjuna."

Karna ignored these words, however, and he continued to pierce Yudhiṣṭhira very severely with his arrows, making him turn away from the fight. Indeed, Karna was determined to slay Yudhiṣṭhira, but then, just as he was prepared to rush at him, Śalya pointed out how Duryodhana had fallen into great difficulty while fighting with Bhīma. When Karna saw that the Kaurava king was actually in a precarious position, he gave up fighting with Yudhiṣṭhira in order to quickly proceed to his rescue.
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then continued on, overwhelmed by shame and
grief, and after arriving at the Pāṇḍava camp, he sat down upon his bed
so that the arrows which were sticking into his body could be extracted.
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then ordered Nakula and Sahadeva to return to
the battlefield in order to assist Bhīma. Meanwhile, Aśvatthāmā
returned to attack Arjuna with renewed enthusiasm, and the fighting
which took place was exceedingly dreadful. Aśvatthāmā was able to
successfully counter all of Arjuna's celestial weapons. Indeed, even when
Arjuna managed to kill his driver, Aśvatthāmā picked up the reins and
continued to afflict the two Kṛṣṇas while simultaneously guiding his
chariot. At last, however, Arjuna cut off the harnesses and reins of
Aśvatthāmā's horses, and because of this, the afflicted steeds carried
Droṇa's son far away from the scene of battle. The Pāṇḍava army
became greatly enlivened upon seeing Arjuna's victory, and so they
proceeded to route the Kauravas, in spite of Karṇa's attempts to
retaliate.
Duryodhana then went to Karṇa and begged him to do something in
order to save his faltering forces. Then, after thinking over the matter
momentarily, Karṇa fixed a powerful bhārgava weapon onto his
bowstring, and at once, millions of arrows began to flow forth in steady
streams. Within moments, thousands of Paṇcāla warriors fell down slain
onto the battlefield, while all those who survived fearfully cried out for
Bhīma and Arjuna to save them. In response, Arjuna was immediately
ready to attack Karṇa, but Lord Kṛṣṇa restrained him by saying, "O son
of Kuntī, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira has been wounded by Karṇa and so your
first duty is to find him and make sure that he is all right. After doing
this you can fight with Karṇa."
Arjuna could not see Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira anywhere on the battlefield,
however, and so he went to Bhīma and inquired about him. Bhīma then
said, "My dear brother, after being wounded in battle, Yudhiṣṭhira fled
from the fight. Indeed, since he was pursued by Karṇa, I am doubtful
whether he is still alive or not."
Arjuna replied, "O Bhīma, please go quickly and search for Yudhiṣṭhira.
Perhaps he has returned to our camp."
However, Bhīma pleaded, "My dear Arjuna, you should go and search for
Yudhiṣṭhira. If I were to do so, then people would call me a coward for
having left the battlefield."
Thereafter, when Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna arrived at the Pāṇḍava camp they found Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira lying down upon his bed. Being overjoyed just to see that he was still alive, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna bowed down at the king's feet. Seeing Arjuna before him, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira assumed that he must have come to tell him of how he had slain Karna. Thus, with great happiness the king said, "O Arjuna, I had been so greatly humiliated by Karna, right in the presence of my protectors. How overjoyed I am to know that you have slain the wicked sūta's son at last! My dear brother, for thirteen long years I could not sleep properly at night, nor could I enjoy anything freely during the day due to a great fear of Karna. Indeed, through all of those years, my heart continually burned with intense hatred for the sūta's son. Now, please tell me exactly how you had managed to slay Karna so that I can relish every word."
Arjuna replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, up until now I have been fully engaged in fighting with Āśvatthāmā and so I have not had time for Karna. However, with your blessings and permission, I shall certainly relieve your burning heart by slaying him this very day without fail."
When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira heard that Karna was still alive, he became almost deranged due to extreme disappointment. Becoming exceedingly agitated, he then chastised Arjuna by saying, "What? How could you be such a coward and leave Bhīma all alone to fight with Karna? Now I can see that all of the hopes which we had placed in you during our years of exile were futile because you are too afraid to face Karna in battle. It seems that even demigods speak lies, for on the seventh day after your birth, a voice from the sky had announced that you would perform heroic deeds in the future. O Arjuna, if you are too afraid to fight with Karna, then you should give your Gāṇḍiva bow to someone else who can utilize it better. In fact, it would have been better if you had come out of Kunti's womb five months after conception as a miscarriage rather than a coward who has left the battlefield."
After hearing these incredibly harsh and disdainful words, Arjuna became practically mad with rage, and in a fit of passion he drew his sword in order to slay his elder brother. Lord Kṛṣṇa then restrained Arjuna and said, "O son of Kunti, please remember that we had come
Here just to see if Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was all right. Now that we have accomplished our mission we can return to the battlefield."

However, Arjuna heatedly replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, long ago I made a secret vow to behead anyone who would even suggest that I give away my Gāṇḍiva bow. It is for this reason that I shall now slay Yudhiṣṭhira and thus pay off my debt to Truth."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then strongly chastised his friend by saying, "O Arjuna, you speak so self-righteously, but you actually do not know what is true morality. According to śāstra, it is highly virtuous to tell a lie for the purpose of saving a life, especially that of a king or a brāhmaṇa. Lying is also meritorious when used to save one's wealth from danger, or for obtaining a woman's hand in marriage. Indeed, if truth is upheld at the cost of someone's life, then it is the greatest untruth and unrighteousness. My dear Arjuna, in this regard I shall tell you what once happened to the learned sage Kauśika.

"Kauśika Rṣi lived at a holy place which was situated at the confluence of several rivers. This great sage came to be highly celebrated for having made a vow to speak the truth in all circumstances and at all times. One day, some people entered the forest where Kauśika lived while fearfully fleeing from a band of dacoits who were chasing them. As they searched for their victims, these dacoits came upon Kauśika, and so they inquired of their whereabouts from him. The truthful Rṣi then pointed out the path which these innocent people had taken, and as a result, the dacoits were able to quickly find them. After plundering them of all their possessions, the dacoits killed these unfortunate people, and for the sin of telling the truth when lying would have been virtuous, Kauśika had to enter the hellish planets after death and suffer there for many years. Now, my dear Arjuna, what do you think is the proper course of action in this case?"

Arjuna replied, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, I must admit that if I were to kill my elder brother, then I would not be able to remain living in this world for even a moment longer. Therefore, my dear lord, I request You to provide a solution to my dilemma. Kindly allow me to keep my vow intact and at the same time save Yudhiṣṭhira's life."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O Arjuna, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira is very tired, aggrieved, and pained by his wounds. It is for this reason alone that he
had spoken to you so harshly. Actually, he was only trying to provoke you to kill Karna and thus bring this ghastly war to a close. Now, since disrespect is equivalent to death for one who has always been honored, I suggest that you show some slight disregard for Yudhishthira in order to keep your vow intact. This can be accomplished if you simply address him once as 'you', instead of the formal 'your honor'.

However, in response, Arjuna proceeded to speak to Mahārāja Yudhishthira very harshly as follows: "O King, Bhīma may have the right to criticize me, for he is a hero who has slain many, many thousands of warriors in battle without retreating. You have no such right, however, especially while lying here on Draupadi's bed after having fearfully fled from the battlefield. Frankly speaking, I am not very enthusiastic to fight for the purpose of regaining the kingdom which you had foolishly lost by gambling. Because of your addiction to dice, you have plunged your entire family into the depths of misery. And yet, in spite of this, you still have the nerve to ask us to fight so that you can take back the kingdom which you had stupidly lost. And, as if this were not enough, you are such an ungrateful wretch that you want to criticize me for no reason."

Arjuna was very soft-hearted by nature and thus he was afraid of deviating from the path of virtue. Therefore, after speaking to his elder brother so harshly, Arjuna became horribly depressed. Then, having become plunged into an ocean of despair, Arjuna suddenly unsheathed his sword, and so with great surprise, Lord Kṛṣṇa asked, "O son of Kuntī, what is it that you intend to do?"

Arjuna replied, "I am going to kill myself, for I cannot bear to go on living after having acted so abominably."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Arjuna, by committing suicide, you will sink down into an even lower hell than that which you would have had to go for killing your elder brother. Instead, I suggest that you kill yourself by boasting of your own glories, for to become too puffed-up with false pride is in itself spiritual suicide."

Accepting this advice, Arjuna then bragged, "O Kṛṣṇa, I have already single-handedly killed half of the Kaurava army while my impotent brothers and allies have more or less stood aside as spectators. Now, it is my solemn promise that I shall kill Karna this very day and thus prove
that I am not merely a heroic talker."
After saying this, Arjuna put his sword back into its sheath. Then, with folded hands and his head hanging down in shame, Arjuna begged forgiveness from Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and assured him that he would quickly return to the battlefield in order to fight with Karna. Finally, after touching his elder brother's feet, Arjuna prepared to depart, and at this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira got up from his bed. While following Arjuna, the king began to very despondently condemn himself by saying, "O my brother, I am such a cruel wretch and a coward. I do not deserve the association of such noble persons as yourself, nor am I qualified to act as the emperor of the world. Therefore, instead of continuing my false show of being a pious ruler, I shall retire to the forest. After defeating the Kauravas, Bhima can be installed upon the royal throne in order to rule over the earth."
After saying this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira actually began to leave for the forest. Lord Kṛṣṇa then came and bowed down at his feet while pacifying him with sweet words as follows: "O King, Arjuna had spoken to you so harshly only because I had instructed him to do so. This was his way of preserving his vow to kill anyone who would even suggest that he give away his Gāṇḍīva bow. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I promise you without a doubt that Arjuna will slay Karna this very day. Therefore, please give up your grief."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became pacified by Lord Kṛṣṇa's words. Indeed, the Lord had fallen down at his feet and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira picked Him up while saying, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, both Arjuna and myself have certainly acted very foolishly. However, You have saved us with Your good advice and thus once again You have proved that You are our eternal protector."
Lord Kṛṣṇa could understand that Arjuna was still depressed on account of his offensive behavior. Therefore, He said, "O son of Kuntī, do not give way to despondency. Just think how much worse you would feel if you had actually killed your elder brother instead of merely insulting him. Now, go and worship Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and then we shall fight with Karna and kill him. That will certainly bring the king the greatest joy and satisfaction."
Arjuna then went and fell onto the ground, touching his head to
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's feet. While shedding profuse tears, Arjuna remorsefully begged for forgiveness again and again, and in response, Yudhiṣṭhira raised him up and embraced him with great affection. Both brothers then cried aloud for some time, and in this way, they were relieved of their excessive grief. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then once again embraced Arjuna, and said, "My dear brother, after being vanquished by Karna, I felt as if my life were no longer worth living. Indeed, if you do not slay the wretched śūta today, I shall certainly give up my miserable life."

Arjuna replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I promise that I will either kill Karna today or else be slain by him."

Having said this, Arjuna once again touched Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's feet and then, after receiving his blessings, he ordered Lord Kṛṣṇa to bring his chariot. Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna quickly proceeded toward Karna, and while going along they could hear auspicious birds singing very sweetly nearby. At the same time, carnivorous birds flew in front of Arjuna, indicating the imminent destruction of his enemy. Still, Arjuna became very anxious as he wondered how Karna could be slain, and thus a cold sweat soon covered his entire body. Understanding his fears, Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Arjuna, you have already proven by your heroic deeds that you are to be counted amongst the very best of incomparable warriors. What to speak of this world of men, even the celestials would find it very difficult to vanquish you on the battlefield. Of course, you should never disregard Karna, not even for a moment for he is at least your equal and perhaps even your superior in battle."

"My dear Arjuna, there are now only five formidable heroes remaining on the Kaurava side: Karna, Śalya, Aśvatthāmā, Kṛpa, and Kṛtavarmā. I admit that you may have good cause to be lenient with four of them, but there is absolutely no reason for you to show any mercy to Karna. It is upon Karna alone that Duryodhana has depended all these years, and thus he is actually the root cause of all the miseries which you and your brothers have had to endure. You should remember how Karna was always envious of you as a student, and for that reason alone he took the side of the Kauravas. Can't you even now hear the terrible insults which he heaped upon the helpless Draupadī at the time of the gambling match? Do not Karna's cruel and piercing words which he had uttered as
you departed for the forest still ring in your ears? You should know for
certain that this wretched son of a sūta deserves to be slain for his sinful
behavior."
"O son of Kuntī, just see how the Pañcālas are being consumed by Karṇa
and yet these brave warriors are not fleeing from the battlefield.
However, there is absolutely no doubt that if Karṇa is left unchecked,
then he will very soon completely exterminate the entire Pāṇḍava and
Pañcāla armies."
Lord Kṛṣṇa had spoken very strongly just to incite Arjuna's wrath, and
after hearing the Lord's words, Arjuna felt relief from his anxiety.
Having resumed his normal cheerful attitude, Arjuna then replied, "My
dear Kṛṣṇa, with You as my protector, I am fully confident that victory
will be mine. Indeed, I know that it is not by dint of my own strength
and endeavor that the enemy will be vanquished, but it will be by Your
mercy alone."
Meanwhile, as the battle raged between the Pāṇḍava and Kaurava
armies, Uttamaujā suddenly cut off the head of Karṇa's son, Suśeṇa.
Thereafter, Bhīma became very desirous of slaying the Dhṛtarāṣtrās and
so he ordered his driver to take him into their midst. As Bhīma
proceeded to penetrate the Kaurava ranks, he slaughtered a great
number of soldiers. Then, turning to his charioteer, he said, "O Viśoka,
take an inventory of my remaining stock of weapons. Arjuna has still
not returned, and so I am very fearful that Yudhiṣṭhira has perished. If
this be the case, then the only means which I can see for obtaining
solace from my resultant unbearable grief would be to exterminate the
entire Kaurava army."
Viśoka replied, "O Bhīma, you still have 60,000 ordinary arrows, as well
as 20,000 razor-headed and 20,000 broad-headed arrows. Besides these,
there are several thousand maces, swords, spears, darts, and other such
weapons."
Just then, Viśoka sighted Arjuna coming their way while engaged in
killing many Kaurava warriors. Then, when Viśoka pointed out Arjuna
to him, Bhīma replied, "My dear charioteer, for giving me this most
welcome news, I shall reward you with fourteen villages and abundant
wealth as well."
Although the Kaurava soldiers tried their best to resist the onrushing
Arjuna, he slaughtered them by the thousands. After seeing Arjuna, Bhima began to fight more recklessly, and because of this, the entire Kaurava army began to reel. Duryodhana then ordered a massive attack on Bhima, but the result was a dreadful carnage of 10,000 elephants, 100 chariot-warriors, and many thousands of foot soldiers. Duryodhana next dispatched Śakuni and his brothers, and the Gândhāra king immediately pierced Bhima deeply on the left side of his chest. Bhima responded by angrily breaking Śakuni's bow, but after taking up another bow, Śakuni heroically cut down his adversary's emblem and umbrella. At this, the enraged Bhima retaliated by hurling a dart, but when it fell upon his chariot, Śakuni picked it up and hurled it back, piercing Bhima right through the left arm. Upon beholding this wonderful feat, all of the Kaurava warriors roared loudly with great delight. Bhima was unable to tolerate this, and after picking up his bow, he quickly killed Śakuni's horses and driver. Jumping down from his chariot, Śakuni continued to shower his arrows from the ground, but Bhima then broke his bow. Bhima then proceeded to pierce Śakuni deeply, and so the Gândhāra king soon fell to the ground, practically devoid of life. At this, Duryodhana quickly came and took Śakuni away upon his chariot, and without a leader, the entire Kaurava army lost courage and began to retreat.

Meanwhile, Karna continued to slay the Pañcāla soldiers while simultaneously afflicting all of the great Pāṇḍava heroes who dared to come forward and check him. Indeed, under Karna's protection, Duryodhana, Kṛpa, Āśvatthāmā, Kṛtavarmā, and the other Kaurava warriors were also able to slaughter thousands of enemy soldiers. Thus, when Arjuna finally caught sight of Karna, he urged Lord Kṛṣṇa to approach him quickly. Śalya then pointed out to Karna how Arjuna was rapidly approaching. This time, as Śalya urged him to fight with Arjuna, he praised Karna very highly. With great surprise, Karna then remarked, "O Śalya, you seem to be in your proper frame of mind now, for your speech is very agreeable. Of course, it must be admitted that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are worthy of the highest glorification. Lord Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu Himself, and thus His glories could not be fully delineated even if all the people of the world were to go on reciting His praises for 10,000 years. My dear Śalya, I Know that I am the only one who is powerful enough to
contend with these two great heroes, and yet, a great fear has entered my heart upon seeing them. Still, I am very eager to either kill Arjuna this very day or else lay down upon the battlefield slain."

Karna then went to Duryodhana and requested, "O King, you should have Kṛpa, Kṛtavarmā, Aśvatthāmā and other great warriors attack Arjuna first. Then, after the Pāṇḍava hero has become exhausted from fighting with them, I shall easily be able to slay him."

However, in the fierce battle that ensued, Arjuna quickly killed Aśvatthāmā's horses and driver, broke Duryodhana's bow, killed Kṛtavarmā's horses, and drove back Kṛpa with thousands of arrows. Arjuna then avoided these warriors and went to where Bhima was furiously battling a large section of the Kaurava army. Arjuna soon put the Kauravas to flight, and then he informed Bhima that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was alive and well. After Arjuna departed, ten Dhātarāṇoras rushed at Bhima, but as a result, they were quickly deprived of their heads. Ninety Samsaptakas then came and surrounded Arjuna, but Lord Kṛṣṇa proceeded toward Karna without even caring for them, while Arjuna dispatched them to the abode of Yamarāja. A large force of the Kaurava army next encountered Arjuna, and when Bhima came to his brother's aid, the two quickly exterminated them.

Bhima then went off alone on foot, and while ranging over the battlefield, mace in hand, he crushed to death thousands of enemy soldiers. Thereafter, as Bhima remounted his chariot, Arjuna quickly proceeded off toward Karna. Then, as Karna continued slaying great numbers of Pañcālas, Sātyaki suddenly killed his son, Prasena, right in his presence. At this, Karna became exceedingly aggrieved, and in a fit of rage, he retaliated by killing one of Dhṛṣṭadyumna's sons. Upon seeing this, Lord Kṛṣṇa urged Arjuna to attack without further delay.

Meanwhile, Duḥśāsana suddenly rushed at Bhima. However, the mighty son of Vāyu knocked down the royal flag of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son and then broke his bow. Next, Bhima pierced him in the forehead and then chopped off the head of his driver. Duḥśāsana himself picked up the reins and continued to guide his chariot. Then, taking up another bow, Duḥśāsana released a powerful arrow which pierced Bhima deeply, causing him to fall down flat onto the floor of his chariot. Bhima soon recovered, but when he picked up his bow in order to resume fighting,
Duḥśāsana broke it to pieces and continued to pierce him with arrows. Becoming highly agitated, Bhīma retaliated by hurling a fierce dart, but when Duḥśāsana skillfully cut it to pieces, all of the Kaurava warriors applauded him greatly. In a fit of rage, Bhīma challenged, "O Duḥśāsana, you wretch, today I shall drink your blood without fail after you have fallen down mortally wounded upon the battlefield!"

After saying this, Bhīma picked up a huge mace while Duḥśāsana simultaneously hurled a dart. Thereafter, as Bhīma's club soared through the air, it smashed Duḥśāsana on the head, throwing him off of his chariot a distance of ten bow-lengths. As that mace proceeded to slay his horses and smash his chariot to atoms, Duḥśāsana lay wounded upon the ground, writhing in agony, his ornaments and garlands in disarray.

While gazing upon him in this wretched condition, Bhīma remembered how Duḥśāsana had dragged Draupadī into the assembly of Kurus and then tried to make her stand naked. Blazing up with terrible rage, Bhīma then announced, "O Duryodhana, Kṛpa, Karṇa, Aśvatthāmā, and all other Kaurava warriors, I am now going to kill Duḥśāsana and I shall slay anyone who dares to try and protect him!"

After saying this, Bhīma jumped down from his chariot and rushed to where Duḥśāsana was lying upon the ground. Lifting up his terrible sword, Bhīma first of all placed his foot upon Duḥśāsana's throat. Then, while trembling with rage, he tore open Duḥśāsana's chest with his nails and drank the hot blood as it gushed out from the wound. After having thus fulfilled his vow in this way, Bhīma violently threw Duḥśāsana's lifeless body back onto the ground and then sliced off its head with his sword. Thereafter, little by little, Bhīma continued to drink more of Duḥśāsana's blood while intently savoring its taste. Then, addressing the dead body, he declared, "O Duḥśāsana, your blood is more enjoyable than milk, honey or even nectar."

After saying this, Bhīma laughed hideously and at last questioned, "O wretch, what more can I do now, for death has already rescued you from my clutches!"

The Kaurava warriors who saw Bhīma drink Duḥśāsana's blood became almost mad with fear. While some of them feverishly ran away in all directions, others became completely stunned and fell to the ground unconscious. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira saw how Karṇa's son
Citasena was fearfully fleeing along with the rest of the Kauravas, he cut off his head with a well-aimed arrow. Then, ten Dhrtrarashtra mustered up all of their courage and rushed impetuously at Bhima, determined to take revenge. However, Bhima quickly cut off all of their heads with ten broad-headed arrows, and upon seeing this, a great fear entered Karna's heart. Seeing him so fearful of Bhima, Salya then encouraged Karna by saying, "O Hero, Duryodhana is in a state of shock on account of the death of his brothers, and many of our warriors are trying to console him. Since Arjuna is now approaching, you must fight courageously, for it is upon you alone that the Kauravas depend."

In the meantime, Karna's heroic son, Vrshasena, valiantly rushed forward to attack Bhima. However, Nakula quickly came and intercepted him by breaking his bow and knocking down his standard. When Vrshasena then picked up another bow, he proceeded to fight ferociously, for he had become highly enraged on account of witnessing Duhsasana's death. Vrshasena killed Nakula's horses, and so the son of Madri took up a sword and shield and got down from his chariot. Thereafter, Nakula ranged over the battlefield, and while doing so, he slaughtered 2,000 horses along with their warriors. Vrshasena finally smashed Nakula's shield to pieces, however, and this enabled him to easily break the son of Madri's unprotected sword and then pierce him in the chest.

Nakula then quickly jumped up onto Bhima's chariot, and because Arjuna was also nearby, the heroic Vrshasena began to attack all three Pandavas. At this time, Bhima and Nakula ardently requested Arjuna to kill Vrshasena, and so Arjuna quickly came forward to encounter Karna's son. At the same time, many Pandava warriors had come to aid Nakula, and when the Kaurava army came to oppose them, a very dreadful battle took place. Vrshasena then displayed amazing prowess as he proceeded to pierce Bhima, Arjuna, and Krsna with numerous arrows. However, the heroic son of Karna's show of strength ultimately became the cause of his downfall, for upon seeing it, Arjuna became determined to slay him. Indeed, while laughing menacingly, Arjuna suddenly declared, "O Karna, watch now as I kill your favorite son right within the vision of all the Kaurava heroes. This is just the opposite of your having concertedly slain Abhimanyu in a secluded place. O wicked son of a suta, after slaying Vrshasena, I will dispatch you to the abode of Yamaraja this very
After making this vow, Arjuna deeply pierced Vṛṣasena with ten arrows, causing him to waver. Then, with four more, Arjuna proceeded to break Vṛṣasena's bow and cut off his arms and head. Karna became scorched by grief upon witnessing this brutal slaughter of his son, and so he rushed madly at Arjuna. Then, as Karna advanced, Lord Kṛṣṇa warned, "O Arjuna, you must be very careful."

However, Arjuna replied, "My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, because of Your presence, I am confident of victory. Therefore, take me quickly toward the onrushing Karna so that I can slay him without delay."

Thereafter, as Karna and Arjuna prepared to fight, all of the warriors on both sides shouted with joy and loudly blew upon their conchshells in order to gladden their respective heroes. No one could ascertain who would come out victorious, for both Karna and Arjuna were the foremost of chariot-warriors. The Dhṛtarāṣṭras came and surrounded Karna, while the Pāṇḍavas with Dhṛṣṭadyumna supported Arjuna. In the sky, all of the celestial beings could be heard expressing their various opinions as to who would emerge triumphant. While arguing among themselves, the stars, asuras, Guhyakas, Rākṣasas, Ādityas, vaishyas, śūdras, sūtas, ghosts, spirits, dogs, and sea monsters all took the side of Karna. On the other hand, the demigods headed by the Lokapālas, the pātris, brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, rājarṣis, and Gandharvas were all for Arjuna.

Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva then suddenly appeared in the sky, accompanied by a host of great ṛṣis. At this time, Indra could be heard loudly wishing for Arjuna's victory, and when he heard this, Śūrya countered by expressing his hope that Karna would prevail. Thus, a heated argument developed between Indra and Śūrya about the respective merits of their dear sons. The king of heaven then approached Lord Brahmā and pleaded, "O Grand sire, may your previous statement that the two Kṛṣṇas would never be vanquished remain true!"

Lord Brahmā replied, "My dear Indra, please rest assured that Arjuna's victory is certain. Because Karna is fighting on the side of the Dānavas, it is proper for him to meet with defeat. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are none other than Nara and Nārāyaṇa ṛṣis, and thus they transcend the laws of Destiny. Indeed, they are the very creators of all spiritual and material existence, including all varieties of entities which are contained
therein. As such, there is no one who has any power to exert even the slightest influence over them. Karna is certainly a very great hero, and thus he deserves a supremely exalted destination after death. Still, victory will be with Arjuna, for he is acting instrumentally in order to fulfill the mission of the demigods and Krsna."

After hearing this most authoritative statement, the demigods joyfully played upon their musical instruments and showered down fragrant flowers onto the battlefield. Then, as the two great heroes faced each other, Hanumān suddenly leapt from Arjuna's flag and attacked the elephant-rope emblem of Karna with his sharp nails and teeth. While a fierce fight raged between the two flags, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Śalya, and Arjuna and Karna angrily glanced at each other. Śalya was defeated, however, for he had to turn his eyes away from Lord Kṛṣṇa's intensely powerful stare, and the same was the case with Karna. Karna then inquired, "O Śalya, what would you do if I were killed in this battle?" Śalya replied, "My dear Karna, I would mount upon my own chariot and then slay both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna."

Arjuna asked the same question and so Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "O Arjuna, the sun may one day fall from its orbit, the earth may split into fragments, or fire may even become cold, but Karna shall never be able to kill you. However, just supposing that you were slain, then I would first of all kill Karna and Śalya with My bare hands and then destroy the entire universe in a fit of rage!"

Thereafter, the most dreadful battle of the war commenced. As both armies proceeded to massacre one another, Karna and Arjuna covered the sky with so many arrows that soon everything became obscured due to darkness. Thereafter, Karna and Arjuna began to invoke their celestial weapons, and when innumerable warriors were slain on both sides as a consequence, the two armies began to retreat. Duryodhana, Aśvatthāmā, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛtavarmā, and Śakuni stood their ground, however, and they continued to shower their arrows upon Arjuna. Arjuna then turned toward these five, and he quickly killed all of their horses and smashed their chariots to pieces. Next, hordes of Yavana warriors rushed at Arjuna, but he effortlessly cut off all of their weapons, killed their animal-carriers, and severed their heads. The demigods then expressed their great pleasure at seeing Arjuna's wonderful display of prowess by
showering flowers upon his head and praising him very highly. Aśvatthāmā had become exceedingly mortified while witnessing the great slaughter which was taking place, and so he went to Duryodhana and implored, "O King, please make peace with the Pāṇḍavas and end this horrible carnage! If you give me permission, then I shall immediately go and stop this duel between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Thereafter, the surviving warriors can return home while you and Yudhiṣṭhīra share the kingdom of the earth."

After hearing this appeal, Duryodhana contemplated deeply for awhile and then replied, "My dear Aśvatthāmā, it is impossible for me to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas now, for I shall never be able to forgive the inhuman way in which Bhīma killed Duḥśāsana. Similarly, you can be sure that the Pāṇḍavas are unwilling to forget all of the injustices which we had inflicted upon them. O Aśvatthāmā, do not become overwhelmed by fear and lose heart. I can assure you that Karna will soon slay Arjuna."

Meanwhile, as the two foremost of bowmen continued to exchange showers of arrows, Arjuna suddenly released an Agni weapon which brightly lit up the entire sky. Karna then invoked a Varuṇa weapon which quenched that fire by creating clouds which poured forth torrents of rain. Arjuna dispelled these clouds with a Vāyavya weapon and then he released a favorite weapon of Indra which made thousands of arrows issue forth from his Gāṇḍīva bow. While being pierced all over, Karna countered the Aindra weapon with a bhārgava weapon, and then he proceeded to slay many of the foremost Pañcāla warriors. Upon seeing this, Bhīma's anger blazed up like fire and he chastised his brother by saying, "My dear Arjuna, how can you allow all of these great warriors to be slain right within your very sight? Please remember how Karna had insulted Draupadi and thus give up your indifference and slay him without delay."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O Arjuna you must exert your full prowess now, and if need be, you can take help from My Sudarśana-cakra. After momentariiy considering the purpose of his appearance in this world, Arjuna replied, "My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, with Your permission, as well as that of Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva, I shall now invoke the brahmāstra."

After saying this, Arjuna bowed to these two deities and then invoked
the supremely powerful weapon. However, Karṇa immediately neutralized it with his own brahmāstra before the weapon could even leave Arjuna's bowstring. At this, Bhīma became even more agitated, and so he ordered Arjuna to invoke another brahmāstra. Arjuna did this, and at once, his brahmāstra began to shroud Karṇa's chariot with countless arrows while at the same time slaying innumerable Kaurava soldiers. Karṇa remained undaunted, however, and he continued to pierce Krṣṇa, Arjuna, and Bhīma with his sharp arrows. In turn, Arjuna became highly incited with rage, and so he began to pierce Karṇa more severely while at the same time slaughtering 400 elephants, 800 chariot-warriors, 1,000 cavalry soldiers, and 8,000 infantry. However, Karṇa continued to massacre the Pāṇḍava soldiers in the same manner, and at this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra re-entered the battlefield after having had his wounds treated with drugs and mantras.

Arjuna then broke his own bowstring while stretching it with great force, and as he feverishly endeavored to replace it. Karṇa pierced him with 100 arrows, and Krṣṇa with 60. At last, after restringing his bow, Arjuna continued fighting, but then Karṇa suddenly pierced Krṣṇa with five arrows that went right through His armor. These arrows were actually five snakes who sought revenge for Arjuna's having killed Aśvāsenā's mother at the time when Agni had devoured the Khāṇḍava forest. After piercing Krṣṇa, these five snakes entered the earth, penetrating all the way down to the lower planets. Then, after bathing in the Bhogavatī river there, they returned to Karṇa's quiver. Arjuna became highly enraged at seeing how Karṇa had wounded Krṣṇa, and so he quickly killed these five snakes by cutting each one into three parts. He then pierced Karṇa very deeply, making him tremble because of severe pain. As Karṇa struggled with great difficulty to remain standing, Arjuna invoked a celestial weapon which killed 2,000 chariot-warriors who supported the sūta hero, being the cream of the Kaurava army. The other warriors who were protecting Karṇa then deserted him out of fear, and yet, even though he now had to fight alone, Karṇa was unafraid. After recovering himself, Karṇa rushed at Arjuna while simultaneously neutralizing the celestial weapon which had been afflicting the Kaurava soldiers.

Thereafter, as Karṇa and Arjuna continued their fierce duel, sometimes
one of them would prevail, but soon thereafter, the other would gain the upper hand. The snake Aśvasena then entered an arrow in Karna's quiver after assuming a subtle form. Ever since his mother had been killed, Aśvasena had resided in the lower planets harboring a great hatred for Arjuna within his heart. It is for this reason that he now entered the battlefield, hoping to gain revenge.

As Karna and Arjuna continued to cover the sky with their incessant showers of arrows, the Apsarās sprinkled sandalwood-scented water upon them and fanned them with gentle breezes in order to relieve their fatigue. Indra and Sūrya also revitalized their respective sons by gently brushing their faces with their hands. Karna then remembered the special arrow which he had worshipped for many years in the hopes of slaying Arjuna. Indeed, Karna considered Arjuna incapable of being killed by any other means, and so he took up that arrow, which was the very same one that Aśvasena had entered by dint of his mystic power. Then, when Karna placed that wonderful arrow upon his bowstring, meteors and thunderbolts began to fall from the sky so that all directions appeared to be ablaze. When they saw that fearful arrow, Indra and the other Lokapālas cried out loudly in great distress while at the same time Śalya said, "O Karna, this arrow will not be able to strike off Arjuna's head. Therefore, you had better select another one."

Karna replied, "My dear Śalya, it is my vow to never aim the same arrow twice and thus I am unwilling to withdraw it."

After saying this, Karna let go of that dreadful arrow and shouted, "O Arjuna, you are slain!" Then, as that blazing arrow soared through the sky, Lord Kṛṣṇa hurriedly pressed down Arjuna's chariot with His feet, making it sink into the earth one full cubit. As a result, Arjuna's horses fell down to their knees and the arrow which had been released by Karna struck off Arjuna's crown. This celestial crown was adorned with pearls and jewels, and it had been made by Lord Brahmā for Indra, who later on presented it to his son. This crown was smashed into fragments by Karna's arrow, and so Arjuna tied his hair back with a white cloth. Aśvasena then returned to Karna and begged, "O Hero, please discharge me one more time so that I can encompass the destruction of Arjuna."

Karna had not been aware that Aśvasena entered his arrow, and now, upon being spoken to, he inquired about the serpent's identity. In reply,
Aṣvasena explained how Arjuna had killed his mother and then once again urged, "O Kṛṣṇa, please place me upon your bowstring and release me for the destruction of Arjuna without delay. I have been waiting all these years just to get such an opportunity."

However, Kṛṣṇa replied, "O Nāga prince, I have no desire to attain victory with the help of another, and furthermore, I have vowed to never release the same arrow twice. Now, please take your leave so that I can resume fighting."

Upon being rejected like this, Aṣvasena became so mad with rage that he took the form of an arrow, and then by dint of his own prowess, he sped off toward Arjuna. Lord Kṛṣṇa then pointed out the serpent to Arjuna as he coursed through the air. Arjuna in turn inquired about the Nāga, and so Lord Kṛṣṇa explained, "O son of Kuntī, this snake is the son of Takṣaka and his name is Aṣvasena. When Agni had devoured the Khāṇḍava forest, his mother had enabled him to escape the conflagration by concealing him within her own body."

After hearing this, Arjuna released six razor-sharp arrows which cut Aṣvasena to pieces as he flew through the sky. Lord Kṛṣṇa then lifted up Arjuna's chariot, and as He was thus engaged, Kṛṣṇa managed to pierce Him with ten arrows. Flaring up with rage, Arjuna retaliated by piercing Kṛṣṇa deeply and then knocking off his crown and earrings, as well as some pieces of his armor. Indeed, as Arjuna continued to strike him, Kṛṣṇa became extremely pained and covered all over with blood.

Finally, after being repeatedly pierced in the chest by Arjuna's arrows, Kṛṣṇa cast aside his bow and quiver as his head began to reel due to dizziness. When Arjuna saw that his adversary had fallen into such a vulnerable condition, he desisted from further attempts to slay him. However, when Lord Kṛṣṇa saw this reluctance, He angrily shouted, "O Arjuna, now is the time to immediately kill your enemy!"

Taking heed of Lord Kṛṣṇa's words, Arjuna resumed discharging his arrows, but by this time Kṛṣṇa had recovered and was able to counter the attack. Then, desiring to end the dreadful conflict without further delay, Arjuna took up a mighty celestial arrow. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa's final hour had arrived, and so Kala invisibly came to him at that time and said, "O Kṛṣṇa, in accordance with the brāhmaṇa's curse, the Earth will now devour your chariotwheel."
At that very moment, the mantras used for invoking the brahmāstra which Karṇa had received from Paraśurāma disappeared from his memory. Then, as Karṇa racked his brain in an attempt to remember the mantras, the Earth suddenly grabbed hold of his left chariot-wheel, and thus it appeared to sink right into the mud. As his chariot ground to a halt, Karṇa became so frustrated and depressed that he lost all composure and began to wave his arms about like a madman. Karṇa then raved, "Alas! Even though righteousness is supposed to be the protector of all those who follow her path, she is now failing me even though I had always acted as the very emblem of virtue!"

Since he was being repeatedly pierced by Arjuna's arrows and because his chariot-wheel was stuck in the ground, Karṇa became practically indifferent to maintaining his life. Still, as a matter of course, he continued to fight back, piercing Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna with his arrows. Arjuna then wounded Karṇa very severely, causing him to tremble, and it was at this time that he decided to make one last determined endeavor to exert himself to the utmost. With great effort, Karṇa tried to invoke his brahmāstra while Arjuna released his Aindra weapon, causing thousands of arrows to issue forth from his bow. Karṇa skillfully cut off all those arrows, however, and so Lord Kṛṣṇa impatiently urged, "O Arjuna, you must now employ your most powerful weapons."

At this, Arjuna invoked his brahmāstra, but the heroic Karṇa not only baffled it with his own, but he cut off his adversary's bow string as well. Then, as Arjuna was in the process of restringing his bow, Karṇa slashed the new string. Indeed, even though Arjuna proceeded to restring his bow again and again so rapidly that no gap could be discerned in his movements, each time Karṇa cut the string in two. It thus appeared that Karṇa had gained the advantage in the fight, and so Lord Kṛṣṇa once again urged Arjuna to employ superior weapons. Then, as Arjuna once again strung his bow, Karṇa quickly jumped down from his chariot in order to try and free his embedded chariot wheel. With both arms, Karṇa feverishly strained to pull his chariot wheel out of the mud, and at this time, Arjuna invoked an Agni weapon and united with it the power of his Raudra weapon.

Meanwhile, Karṇa proceeded to pull a distance of four fingers' breadth
the entire earth with her seven islands, seven seas, and innumerable
mountains, and while doing so, he shed tears of frustration, for in spite
of exerting superhuman strength, Mother Earth would not release his
wheel. Karṇa then pleaded, "O Arjuna, you should stop fighting for as
long as I am in this vulnerable position. Please do not attempt to slay me
while I am engaged in pulling my chariot-wheel out of the ground. You
know very well the code of ethics which forbids a kṣatriya from attacking
one with disheveled hair, one who is fleeing from the battlefield, a
brāhmaṇa, one who stands with folded hands, one who has surrendered
or begs for protection, one who has put down his weapons, one whose
arrows have become exhausted, and one whose armor has become
displaced."
Lord Kṛṣṇa then sarcastically replied, "O Karṇa, it is very commendable
that you have remembered the path of virtue at this time, for wicked
persons generally criticize Destiny when put in distress. Still, it appears
that you have forgotten your own past misdeeds. Do you not remember
how you had forced Draupadī to come before the assembly of Kurus and
then insulted her with harsh words? Where was your consideration of
virtue then, or at the time when Abhimanyu was killed, or when the
Pāṇḍavas were cheated out of their kingdom, or when they were denied
their kingdom after having returned from exile? You can rest assured
that as a result of your past sinful behavior, you shall not be able to
escape with your life."
After hearing Kṛṣṇa's words, Karṇa hung his head down in shame
without attempting to make any reply. Lord Kṛṣṇa then ordered, "My
dear Arjuna, I want you to kill Karṇa without delay by utilizing your
celestial weapons."
Arjuna had become highly enraged while hearing Kṛṣṇa's description of
Karṇa's wicked deeds. Karṇa saw Arjuna's ferocious demeanor, and so he
quickly invoked his brahmāstra while at the same time trying to free his
chariot wheel. Arjuna employed his own brahmāstra in order to
neutralize Karṇa's, and after doing so, he continued to send forth a
steady stream of arrows. Thereafter, Arjuna released a favorite Agni
weapon, but Karṇa doused it with a rain showering Varuṇa weapon.
Arjuna dispelled the Varuṇa weapon's clouds with a vāyavya (Vāyu)
weapon, but then 'Karṇa took up a blazing arrow which caused violent
winds to blow as the entire earth trembled. Indeed, when the demigods and the Pāṇḍava warriors saw that arrow being aimed for the destruction of Arjuna, they became struck with fear and uttered exclamations of woe. After being released, that mighty arrow pierced Arjuna in the chest, and as he reeled backward, the Gāṇḍiva bow dropped from his loosened grip. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Karna once again grabbed onto his sunken wheel and tried with all his might to release it from the earth's clutches. However, due to Destiny, Karna failed. Meanwhile, Arjuna had recovered his senses and took up a very powerful arrow named aṅjalikā which was called so because its head was as broad as two hands joined together. Lord Kṛṣṇa then urged, "O Arjuna, cut off Karna's head quickly before he can remount his chariot!"

First of all, Arjuna released another arrow that cut down Karna's flag, which was as effulgent as the sun. Upon seeing this, the Kaurava warriors lost all hope for the life of their commander-in-chief. Then, Arjuna empowered his aṅjalikā arrow with the energy of Indra's thunderbolt and fixed it upon his bowstring. After offering a brief prayer that the arrow may slay his enemy, Arjuna released it with a mighty twang of his bow. That wonderful arrow lit up the entire sky with its glaring effulgence as it soared swiftly toward its mark and plucked off Karna's head, making it fall down to the ground. Then, as all of the warriors and demigods looked on, a blazing spark of spiritual light appeared from out of Karna's fallen body, and after rising up into the sky, it merged into the sun.

Upon seeing Karna slain, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and the other Pāṇḍava warriors joyfully blew upon their conchshells, and the Pañcālas played upon their trumpets and waved their garments in ecstasy. Indeed, some of the Pañcāla warriors danced and shouted, while others embraced, and all of them declared, "It is our good fortune that Karna has finally been slain by the mighty Arjuna. Thus, the Karna-sun, with its arrowy rays, after having scorched our army for many days, has at last been made to set by the indefatigable Arjuna-time!"

After Karna's death, Śalya beat a hasty retreat, as did the rest of the Kaurava army. Śalya went to Duryodhana, who was crying on account of Karna's death, and he tried to console the Kaurava king. However, in spite of Śalya's attempts, Duryodhana remained standing as if demented,
while internally he reflected over his former evil deeds. No one even thought of rallying the panic-stricken Kaurava army and they trampled over one another while stampeding from the battlefield. Indeed, the Kaurava soldiers were so frightened that each and every one of them thought, "At any moment, Bhīma or Arjuna may come and strike me down!"

At last, Duryodhana regained some composure, and after ordering 25,000 foot soldiers to precede him, he vowed, "I shall now slay Arjuna in order to repay my heavy debt to Kārṇa!"

As the Kaurava warriors rushed forward, Bhīma and Dhṛṣṭadyumna had the Pāṇḍava army surround them. Bhīma then dismounted from his chariot in order to properly observe the rules for fair conduct during combat. Thereafter, with his mace in hand, Bhīma proceeded to slay all of the Kaurava foot soldiers so rapidly that soon there was only a small remnant remaining. When Arjuna and other Pāṇḍava warriors then joined the fight, all of the surviving Kaurava soldiers quickly fled from the battlefield. Although deserted, Duryodhana was undaunted, and he rushed forward while challenging all of the Pāṇḍavas.

Thereafter, when the Pāṇḍava army responded by rushing at him, Duryodhana proceeded to display amazing and unprecedented prowess. While simultaneously checking all of the leading Pāṇḍava warriors, the Kaurava king killed thousands of enemy soldiers. Duryodhana then tried to rally his soldiers, but they continued to flee, in spite of his repeated commands. Śalya then went to Duryodhana and said, "My dear king, the sun is now low on the horizon, and your badly beaten army cannot be rallied. Therefore, you should retire for the night. Just see how the battlefield is covered over with dead warriors who gave up all comforts in life in order to attain that merit which is awarded to the dutiful kṣatriya. O Duryodhana, just consider how you alone are the root cause of this incredible carnage!"

Upon hearing these words, Duryodhana almost became mad with grief, and once again began to weep for the slain Kārṇa. Other warriors, headed by Aśvatthāmā then came and comforted Duryodhana, and so at last, the Kaurava king headed back to his camp. Meanwhile, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "O Arjuna, let us now go and inform Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra of your victory. Even though the king had re-entered the battlefield in order to
witness your duel with Karṇa, he once again became wounded by the sūta’s onslaught of arrows, and so was forced to return to his camp.” Thus, the two Kṛṣṇas proceeded toward the Pāṇḍava camp while being congratulated by the numerous well-wishers who surrounded them. Indeed, all of the demigods, rṣis, human beings, and all other creatures worshipped Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna after the slaying of Karṇa. Thereafter, while the Pāṇḍava army remained on the battlefield in case of an enemy attack, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna came before King Yudhīśthira, who was lying upon his bed. As Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna came and touched his feet, Yudhīśthira saw their beaming faces and extraordinary wounds, and thus he could understand that Karṇa had finally been killed. With great happiness, Mahārāja Yudhīśthira got up and embraced Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna again and again. Then, in answer to the king’s eager inquiries, Lord Kṛṣṇa narrated the entire story of how Karṇa had met his end. Mahārāja Yudhīśthira then praised Lord Kṛṣṇa with heartfelt gratitude for His having enabled Arjuna to perform such a heroic feat.

Thereafter, Yudhīśthira mounted upon his chariot and set out along with the Kṛṣṇas in order to view Karṇa's slain body. Although devoid of life, Karṇa's body miraculously had not lost any of its natural beauty, and its complexion still appeared to be just like molten gold. When Mahārāja Yudhīśthira gazed at Karṇa's dead body, he could hardly believe it. It seemed too good to be true that he was finally relieved of the fear that had been haunting him for so many years. Yudhīśthira then said, "My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, it is by Your great mercy that You have enabled us to come out victorious, again and again."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Yudhīśthira, let Me assure you that your kingdom has now been won back, and thus your long cherished desire has been accomplished."

Indeed, Mahārāja Yudhīśthira felt reborn after seeing Karṇa's fallen body. All of the great Pāṇḍava warriors then approached the king and praised him along with Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, and thereafter, they all together retired to their camp for the night. After hearing about the death of Karṇa, Dhṛtarāṣṭra suddenly fainted and fell down from his throne onto the floor. As Sañjaya and Vidura rushed to pick up the elderly king, Gāndhārī also swooned, and so the
palace ladies rushed to her aid. Finally, after regaining consciousness, Dhrūtarāṣṭra remained silent for some time as he inwardly indulged in extreme melancholy.

Vaiśampāyana then said, "My dear king Janamejaya, because this parva contains the glorification of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the reader or the hearer will attain great happiness as well as the fulfillment of all his heart's desires."

After the death of Śalya, at noon on the eighteenth day of the battle, the subsequent slaying of Duryodhana by Bhīma later on that day, and then the massacre of the Pañcālas by Aśvatthāmā that night, Sañjaya hurriedly returned to Hastināpura. Overwhelmed by grief, he entered Dhrūtarāṣṭra's palace while shedding profuse tears and exclaiming again and again, "Duryodhana and his allies have been slain by the Pāṇḍavas!"

Upon hearing this calamitous news, all of the palace residents began to run about as if demented, wailing aloud and crying piteously. When Sañjaya entered Dhrūtarāṣṭra's chambers, he saw the old, blind king seated upon his throne, surrounded by Gāndhārī, Vidura, his eldest daughter-in-law, and other friends and relatives. With a voice that was choked up due to excessive grief, Sañjaya announced his presence and then said, "O King, your son Duryodhana has been slain by Bhīma! Indeed, there are now only seven warriors remaining on the Pāṇḍava side: the five sons of Pāṇḍu, Lord Kṛṣṇa, and Sātyaki. On the Kaurava side, only Aśvatthāmā, Kṛpa, and Kṛtavarmā are still alive."

Upon hearing this shocking news, Dhrūtarāṣṭra immediately fainted onto the floor. Vidura also fainted away, and then, so did Gāndhārī and the other Kuru ladies so that the entire assembly was soon laying down upon the floor, wailing aloud as if demented. Dhrūtarāṣṭra then slowly recovered his sense, and turning to Vidura he said, "My dear brother, since I am now bereft of my sons, you are my sole refuge."

After saying this, Dhrūtarāṣṭra once again fell into a swoon, and so his relatives quickly came and fanned him while sprinkling cool water over his body. This time, when the old king regained consciousness, he remained silent, and upon seeing his master's great affliction, Sañjaya's eyes became filled with tears. At last, Dhrūtarāṣṭra ordered the ladies to retire, and then, when he was left alone with Sañjaya and Vidura, he began to indulge in very pitiful lamentations. While waving his arms
about in great despair, Dhṛtarāṣṭra bemoaned his fate by saying, "Alas! Without the shelter of my sons and relatives, I feel completely lost! While listening to Bhīma repeatedly refer to his slaughter of my 100 sons, how shall I be able to go on living? O Sañjaya, please narrate to me now all that had happened at Kurukṣetra after the death of Karna."

While the 25,000 Kaurava foot-soldiers were being slain by Bhīma, Duryodhana had fought very heroically. However, when the remaining Kaurava soldiers had fled from the battlefield, the king had been induced to retire for the night. Krpa then went to Duryodhana and said, "My dear king, I beg you to now make peace with the Pāṇḍavas. In this way you shall still be able to rule over the Kuru kingdom along with Mahārāja Yudhisṭhira. Certainly, this is far more preferable than succumbing to utter defeat!"

Duryodhana reflected upon Krpa's words for a long time, and then he replied, "O brāhmaṇa, it is not possible for me to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas now. Still, I thank you very much for your friendly and sincere advice, even though I am not able to accept it. I have already committed so many offenses against the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadi that they would never be able to forgive me. How is it possible that Bhīma will agree to forego his vow to kill me and all of my brothers? How can the Pāṇḍavas, Kṛṣṇa, and Subhadrā be expected to forgive the slaying of Abhimanyu? How can Kṛṣṇa forgive the offenses which I committed when He came to Hastināpura as an envoy? O Krpa, even if I were to beg for peace, I am sure that the Pāṇḍavas would never believe my words since they had formerly been cheated by me at dice. Besides, I have already become accustomed to having unrivaled sovereignty over the earth. How then could I ever remain satisfied with being Yudhisṭhira's subordinate, humbly following him from behind? For all of these reasons, I shall never be able to surrender unto Lord Kṛṣṇa and Mahārāja Yudhisṭhira. "My dear brāhmaṇa, I have already performed numerous sacrifices, I have given away vast amounts of wealth in charity to the brāhmaṇas, and I have enjoyed everything that is possible for a human being to possess. Therefore, let me now die upon the battlefield and thus achieve an exalted destination in heaven. He is no hero who dies a miserable death at home, afflicted by diseases, old age, and invalidity, and surrounded by his kinsmen! After having made so many warriors lay
down their lives for my sake, how could I now act in such a cowardly way, just to save my own life? What kingdom could I possibly enjoy now, being bereft of my brothers and friends?"

After hearing Duryodhana's noble words, all of the Kaurava warriors praised him very highly and worshipped him with great respect. Thereafter, the assembled kings urged Duryodhana to install a new commander-in-chief, and so the Kaurava king got down from his chariot and approached Aśvatthāmā. Duryodhana then said, "My dear Aśvatthāmā, you are the son of our preceptor, and so I shall leave it in your hands to select our new leader."

Aśvatthāmā chose Śalya, and so all of the Kaurava warriors went and surrounded the king of the Madrakas while shouting with joy. Duryodhana then approached Śalya on foot, and with folded hands, he very humbly begged him to take charge of his army. Śalya immediately accepted the post and then declared, "O King, you can place your full faith in me, for I am greater than Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna combined! Rest assured that I shall soon vanquish all of the Paṇḍavas in battle!"

The installation ceremony was then solemnly performed, and after the abhiñeka, the radiant Śalya declared, "O Kings, please hear me! Tomorrow, I shall either kill all of the Paṇḍavas and Pañcālas, or else ascend to heaven by laying down my life upon the battlefield!"

Indeed, after the installation of the heroic Śalya, everyone forgot about the loss of Karṇa. Considering the Paṇḍavas to be already vanquished, all of the Kaurava warriors slept soundly and happily that night. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira heard the joyful shouts of the Kauravas, he could understand that Śalya had been installed as their new commander-in-chief. The king then went to Kṛṣṇa and said, "My dear lord, we are your surrendered souls and ever-obedient servants. Therefore, please do whatever is required now for the welfare of my brothers and myself."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, Śalya is a very great warrior, perhaps even superior to Bhīṣma, Drona, and Karṇa. Indeed, I consider him to be superior even to Arjuna, Bhima, or Sātyaki, and thus I do not see anyone of your allies who can slay him. Only you, my dear Yudhiṣṭhira, are a fit match for Śalya, and thus you must fight with him tomorrow. After killing him, you shall be able to enjoy the kingdom of the earth. Therefore, do not think of showing any compassion for your
maternal uncle. O King, you have already crossed over three vast oceans, represented by Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Karna. Now, you must be careful not to sink into the calf’s hoof print which is represented by Śalya!"

After saying this, Lord Kṛṣṇa retired to His tent, and thereafter, all of the Pāṇḍava warriors passed the night very happily due to having witnessed the death of Karna. After arising the next morning, the Kauravas made an agreement that none of their warriors should attempt to face the Pāṇḍavas single-handedly, but instead, they should all fightconcertedly. Back in Hastināpura, upon being requested by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Sañjaya listed the number of warriors which remained on both sides at the beginning of the eighteenth day. In the Kaurava army there were still 11,000 chariot-warriors, 10,700 elephants, 200,000 horse-soldiers, and 3,000,000 foot soldiers. The Pāṇḍava army consisted of 6,000 chariot-warriors, 6,000 elephants, 10,000 cavalry, and 1,000,000 infantry.

After the sun had risen, fierce fighting raged as the two armies once again encountered each other. Bhīma and Arjuna immediately began to inflict very heavy losses upon the Kaurava army, and thus the battlefield was soon strewn over with countless severed limbs and mangled bodies. Nakula then broke the bow of Karna’s son, Citrasena, and thereafter, killed his horse and driver. Taking up his sword, Nakula then jumped down from his chariot and rushed at Citrasena with the intention of slaying him at once. Citrasena had taken up a new bow, however, and he sent forth a steady stream of arrows at his onrushing foe. And yet, without faltering, Nakula jumped right up onto Citrasena’s chariot and quickly severed his head. At this, two more of Karna’s sons, Suśeṇa and Satyasena, rushed at Nakula after he had in the mean-time remounted his chariot. The two brothers quickly smashed Nakula’s chariot into fragments, however, and so the son of Mādrī had to continue fighting from the ground. Still, Nakula managed to cut off Satyasena’s bow and then kill his horses. Satyasena then ascended another chariot, but once again Nakula cut off his bow and slaughtered his horses.

In order to rescue his brother, Suśeṇa rushed forward and broke Nakula’s bow with a well aimed arrow. Taking up another bow, Nakula angrily broke Satyasena’s bow, but then Satyasena picked up another bow and broke Nakula’s in return. The enraged Nakula next hurled a
blazing dart, and that mighty weapon shattered Satyasena's heart into 100 pieces, making him fall down dead onto the battlefield. Becoming mad with rage after seeing his brother's death, Suśena proceeded to smash Nakula's chariot to pieces, and so Draupādi's son, Sutasoma, quickly came and picked his father up. Nakula then rushed toward Suśena while releasing a powerful arrow, and that blazing shaft cut off the head of Karna's son.

The Kaurava army began to flee, but Śalya suddenly appeared upon the scene, and after rallying his soldiers, he launched a ferocious attack upon the Pāṇḍava forces. Thereafter, a great battle took place between Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Draupādi's sons, Nakula and Sahadeva on one side, and Śalya, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, Kṛtavarmā, Duryodhana and Śakuni on the other. When Kṛtavarmā killed his horses, Bhīma took up his mace and jumped down from his disabled chariot. Śalya then killed Sahadeva's horses but in retaliation, the son of Mādrī jumped down from his chariot and killed Śalya's son with his sword. Bhīma then smashed Kṛtavarmā's horses with his mace, forcing the great hero of the Bhoja dynasty to run away on foot. Śalya attacked Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and so Bhīma rushed toward the king of the Madrakas with an upraised mace. That celebrated iron mace had eight sides and was bedecked with numerous jewels as well as the blood and fat of countless slain warriors, and with it Bhīma crushed Śalya's horses to death. In retaliation, Śalya angrily hurled a lance which passed right through Bhīma's armor and pierced his chest. However, without wavering in the least, Bhīma pulled that lance out from his body and then used it to slay Śalya's driver. Upon seeing this display of superhuman prowess, Śalya became simultaneously struck with wonder and depressed as well. In this state of mind, he picked up his mace and got down from his chariot, and as Bhīma rushed at him, a fierce duel commenced while all others stood aside as spectators.

No difference of skill could be discerned between these two great wielders of the club as they moved around in circles and then jumped high in order to avoid each other's blows. When the two powerful maces clashed, the sparks that were generated made them appear to be ablaze. Due to striking each other's limbs, both Bhīma and Śalya soon became
drenched in their own blood. Then, all of a sudden, both heroes struck each other simultaneously with great force, and together they fell down dazed upon the ground. Krpa then quickly came and took Šalya up onto his chariot, and so the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava armies resumed fighting. Duryodhana pierced Cekitāna in the chest with a lance, making that great warrior fall down dead onto the floor of his chariot. Šalya then returned to the battlefield, and when he attacked Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, the two began to deeply pierce each other with their arrows. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then killed the two protectors of Šalya's chariot-wheels and chopped off the top of his royal emblem. At this, Šalya became very angry, and so he left off slaying the other Pāṇḍava warriors and proceeded to densely shroud Yudhiṣṭhira with his arrows. At this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became so afflicted that he lost all heart and began to feel helpless. Upon seeing this, Bhīma, Sātyaki, Nakula, and Sahadeva attacked Šalya all at once, and yet, the king of the Madrakas resisted them with wonderful skill. While simultaneously cutting off the innumerable arrows that were being showered upon him, Šalya broke the bows of Sahadeva, Yudhiṣṭhira, and Sātyaki. After achieving this wonderful feat, Šalya roared victoriously, and even though this made the Pāṇḍava heroes more enraged, Šalya himself blazed up like a raging fire and continued to drive them away.

As Šalya continued to wonderfully defend himself against the combined attack of many Pāṇḍava heroes, he broke Sātyaki's bow and then smashed his chariot. Indeed, Šalya inflicted the entire Pāṇḍava army so severely that its soldiers began to flee right in the presence of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Upon seeing this, the Pāṇḍava king became highly enraged, and after summoning his brothers and Lord Krṣṇa, he announced, "Today I shall slay Šalya without fail or else be killed by him. Šalya was given to me as my quota, and whereas all of you have fulfilled your obligations, I have not been able to do so."

After saying this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira ordered Nakula and Sahadeva to guard his chariot-wheels, Bhīma to stay in front, Arjuna in back, and Dhrṣṭadyumna and Sātyaki at his sides. After thus insuring his advantage over Šalya, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira proceeded toward him while all of the Pāṇḍava heroes blew upon their conchshells with great joy. Thereafter, as Yudhiṣṭhira confronted Šalya, Bhīma encountered
Duryodhana, while Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Mādrī's twins and Śātyaki fought with numerous other warriors headed by Śakuni. Duryodhana cut down Bhīma's flag and then broke his bow. However, Bhīma angrily retaliated by hurling a dart which caused Duryodhana to faint onto the floor of his chariot. Then, when Bhīma severed the head of Duryodhana's chariot driver, the unguided horses carried the Kaurava king far away from the scene of battle. Kṛpa and Aśvatthāmā anxiously followed the wounded king, and as a result, all of the Kaurava soldiers felt unprotected, and thus a great fear entered their hearts. At this time, Mahārāja Yudhiśthira assumed an aspect of unprecedented rage and then impetuously rushed toward Śalya while ruthlessly slaughtering thousands of Kaurava soldiers who stood in his way. Thereafter, as the two great kings fiercely battled one another, no one could tell whether Mahārāja Yudhiśthira would regain the kingdom of the earth after having slain Śalya, or whether Śalya would bestow the kingdom of the earth upon Duryodhana after having killed Mahārāja Yudhiśthira. Śalya then broke Yudhiśthira's bow, but after taking up another one, the Pāṇḍava king broke Śalya's in retaliation. Then, as Śalya struggled to pick up another bow, Mahārāja Yudhiśthira quickly killed his four horses and driver and cut down his royal flag. At this, the Kaurava army began to panic, and Aśvatthāmā hurriedly came and rescued Śalya by taking him away on his chariot. Upon seeing this, Mahārāja Yudhiśthira roared with great indignation, and so Śalya ascended another chariot and proceeded to massacre the Pāṇḍava army. Mahārāja Yudhiśthira then once again rushed at Śalya while being protected by Śātyaki, Bhīma, Nakula and Sahadeva. In response, Duryodhana sent his foremost warriors to aid Śalya, and thus a dreadful battle took place. After an exchange of numerous arrows, Śalya broke Mahārāja Yudhiśthira's bow. Then, when Mahārāja Yudhiśthira attempted to pick up another bow, Śalya broke it as well, and thereafter, Kṛpa killed the Pāṇḍava king's driver, and Śalya killed his horses. At this, Bhīma angrily blazed up and retaliated by breaking Śalya's bow and killing his horses and driver. Then, as Bhīma continued to send forth showers of arrows, Śalya became dazed, and in that vulnerable condition, the son of Vāyu was able to cut the armor off from his body. Still, Śalya soon recovered, and in a fit of rage he took up a sword and
shield, jumped down from his chariot, and rushed toward Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. When they saw Śalya madly rushing toward Yudhiṣṭhira's chariot, Śātyaki, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and Śikhaṇḍi rushed to intercept him. Bhima then slashed Śalya's shield to pieces with ten arrows, and then with another arrow he broke his sword at the handle. Having accomplished this difficult task, Bhima roared loudly with great delight, and so the other Pāṇḍava warriors followed suit. All of the Kaurava warriors became highly alarmed to see their commander's plight, and due to extreme dejection they broke out into a cold sweat.

In spite of being bereft of weapons, Śalya continued to rush madly at Yudhiṣṭhira, who was standing upon his disabled chariot. At this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira remembered Lord Kṛṣṇa's words, requesting him to kill Śalya without any consideration of family ties. The king thus decided to take up an effulgent dart which had been created by Tvaṣṭā for Lord Śiva. This incomparable dart had been carefully worshipped by the Pāṇḍavas for many years with offerings of the best garlands, scented drinks, and other paraphernalia. After empowering that dart with mantras, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira carefully took aim and then violently hurled it at his onrushing foe. That terrible dart generated sparks as it whizzed through the air, and although Śalya tried to catch it as it came toward him, it avoided his clutches and pierced right through his chest. Then, as the dart proceeded to enter into the earth, Śalya fell down slain onto the ground as blood flowed profusely from his nose, eyes, ears, and mouth, as well as his inflicted wound.

After the death of Śalya, Yudhiṣṭhira took up his bow and continued to massacre the Kaurava soldiers. Śalya's younger brother then suddenly rushed at the Pāṇḍava king, hoping to gain revenge. However, when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira immediately cut off his head, the entire Kaurava army panicked and retreated from the battlefield. Śātyaki gave chase to the fleeing Kaurava soldiers, and so Kṛtavarmā rushed forward to check him. Śātyaki soon smashed his chariot to pieces, however, and so Kṛpa came and took the Bhoja warrior away. Śātyaki and other Pāṇḍava warriors then continued to destroy the panic-stricken Kaurava soldiers, and so Duryodhana next rushed forward. At the same time, Kṛtavarmā returned with a new chariot, but Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira immediately killed his horses. This time the Bhoja warrior was taken away by
Aśvatthāmā.

Thereafter, as the sun crossed the meridian, 1,700 Madraka chariot-warriors rushed at Yudhiṣṭhira in the hopes of avenging the death of their ruler. Since the other Pāṇḍavas surrounded Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Duryodhana tried to forbid the Madrakas from rushing toward their certain destruction, but to no avail. Thus, the Pāṇḍavas proceeded to exterminate the Madrakas, and upon seeing this, Śakuni went to Duryodhana and complained, "O King, how can you stand by indifferently and watch these heroic warriors being slain? Have you forgotten our vow to fight unitedly this day?" Duryodhana replied, "My dear Śakuni, I had ordered the Madraka warriors to desist from attacking Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, but they disregarded my command."

In spite of this poor excuse, Śakuni took his army and went to the Madrakas' aid, and upon seeing this, Duryodhana decided to follow suit. However, the Pāṇḍavas had already completed the extermination of the Madrakas, and as they were shouting victoriously, Duryodhana and his army of infantry surrounded Bhīma. Picking up his mace, Bhīma jumped down from his chariot and proceeded to crush 21,000 enemy foot soldiers.

Śālva, the king of the Mlecchas, then rushed at the Pāṇḍava army while riding upon his gigantic elephant. Indeed, Śālva proceeded to afflict the Pāṇḍava soldiers so severely that they soon began to fearfully retreat from the battle. At this, Dhṛṣṭadyumna rushed to check Śālva, and by repeatedly piercing his elephant, he forced the mleccha king to turn away. However, Śālva quickly turned his elephant back around and then urged it to charge impetuously at Dhṛṣṭadyumna's chariot. Anticipating the consequences of this, Dhṛṣṭadyumna took up his club and jumped to the ground, while Śālva's elephant picked up his chariot with its trunk and smashed it to the ground, crushing it to pieces along with the driver and horses. Bhīma, Śātyaki, and Śīkhanda then surrounded Śālva's elephant and began to pierce it with innumerable arrows. Finally, as the elephant began to weaken, Dhṛṣṭadyumna rushed forward and smashed it over the head with his mace. Then, with its skull cracked open, the gigantic creature fell down dead. Śātyaki then released a well-aimed
arrow which cut off Śālva's head, and thus the mleccha king also fell down with his carrier.

After witnessing the death of Śālva, the Kaurava army once again began to flee, but then Kṛtavarmā rushed forward. While displaying wonderful prowess, he checked all of the Pāṇḍava heroes. Sātyaki then attacked Kṛtavarmā, and after a fierce duel, he managed to kill Kṛtavarmā's horse and driver. As Kṛpa quickly came and whisked Kṛtavarmā away, Duryodhana next tried to rally the Kaurava army by rushing heroically at the Pāṇḍavas. At that time, Duryodhana displayed such astonishing skill and energy while fighting, that there was not a single Pāṇḍava warrior who was not pierced by his arrows. Indeed, as Duryodhana ranged through the enemy ranks, slaughtering innumerable soldiers, none of the Pāṇḍavas were able to check him, and upon seeing this, the Kaurava army returned to fight.

In the battle that ensued, Śakuni killed Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's horses, and so Sahadeva had to take the king away on his chariot. Then, after mounting upon another chariot, Yudhiṣṭhira returned to the fray, and when he killed Kṛtavarmā's horses, Aśvatthāmā had to come and rescue the Bhoja hero. Śakuni and 10,000 horse soldiers then began to scatter the Pāṇḍava soldiers, and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira ordered Sahadeva to kill him. Accompanied by the sons of Draupadī and a large army, Sahadeva proceeded to attack Śakuni with such vengeance that the battle became exceedingly dreadful and destructive. Indeed, the soldiers on both sides began to retreat, and this created a temporary pause in the fighting. Śakuni then once again attacked Sahadeva with his 700 surviving horse soldiers, but after some time, he became very anxious about his nephew, Duryodhana. At that time, his men pointed out the Kaurava king, and Śakuni therefore left off fighting with Sahadeva in order to approach him. Śakuni then cheerfully said, "My dear king, you should go now and slay all of the Pāṇḍava chariot warriors, just as I am engaged in massacring their horse soldiers."

At this, Duryodhana set out with the Kaurava army, and when he saw this, Arjuna said, "O Kṛṣṇa, I shall now end this battle once and for all. Vidura had predicted that Duryodhana would never return our share of the kingdom for as long as life remained within his body. Now I can see the truth of his words, for the Kaurava king continues to fight in spite of
all the losses that he has incurred. My dear Kṛṣṇa, please take me now to where the Kaurava army is advancing so that I can destroy it."

Thereafter, as Arjuna proceeded to penetrate the enemy ranks, he fought so fiercely, creating such a great carnage, that all of the Kaurava warriors began to flee. Meanwhile, while fighting with Duryodhana, Dhrṣṭadyumna killed his horses and driver, broke his bow, and continued to pierce him deeply. At last, Duryodhana got up onto the back of Śakuni's horse and quickly left the battlefield, and thus, after awhile, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarmā became very anxious, for they were unable to see the Kaurava king. Fearing Duryodhana's death, they made inquiries, and then, when they found out his whereabouts, they went to where he and Śakuni were staying. However, with the departure of these four great warriors, the Kaurava soldiers became hopeless of saving their lives as the Pāṇḍavas continued to execute them. Along with Aśvatthāmā and Kṛpa, Sañjaya had been fighting with Dhrṣṭadyumna. However, after the departure of Droṇa's son and brother-in-law, Sātyaki attacked Sañjaya, and while cutting off his armor, the Yadu hero wounded him severely. Then, as Sañjaya fell unconscious onto the ground, Sātyaki rushed forward and captured him alive.

Meanwhile, a division of 3,000 elephants had surrounded the Pāṇḍavas. Bhīma and Arjuna quickly destroyed them all, but due to the hills of slain elephants, the two Pāṇḍava heroes could not proceed with their chariots. Bhīma thus dismounted, and by dragging aside some of the dead elephants, he was able to make a path for their exit. At this time, all of the remaining Dhrṛtarāṣṭras, except Duryodhana and Sudarśana united together and rushed at Bhīma. After remounting his chariot, Bhīma proceeded to easily slay ten of the Dhrṛtarāṣṭras, one by one, as they approached him. The Dhartarashtra Ṣrutarvan then rushed forward very heroically, and while piercing Bhīma, he managed to break his bow as well. However, Bhīma took up another one and quickly retaliated by killing Ṣrutarvan's horses and driver. At this, the son of Dhrṛtarāṣṭra angrily grabbed his sword and shield and jumped down from his chariot. However, as Ṣrutarvan rushed forward while valiantly brandishing his sword about, Bhīma cut off his head with a razor sharp arrow.

The remains of the Kaurava army then surrounded Bhīma menacingly in
order to make one desperate attempt to gain revenge. The result was just
the opposite, for in a short time, Bhīma killed 500 chariot-warriors, 700
elephants, 700 horse soldiers and 10,000 infantry. This left the Kaurava
army with very few warriors, and these survivors became very depressed.
At this time, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "My dear Arjuna, Duryodhana and
Sudarśana are the only surviving Dhṛtarāṣṭras, and they are staying in
the midst of the remaining Kaurava horse-soldiers. Sañjaya has been
captured alive by Sātyaki, and Kṛtavarmā, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛpa have
left Duryodhana in order to attack the Pandava army elsewhere.
Therefore, now is the time to slay the Kaurava king."
Arjuna replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, aside from the 500 horse-soldiers belonging to
Śakuni, only 200 chariot-warriors, 100 elephants, and 300 infantry
remain in the Kaurava army. Therefore, I shall now proceed to slay all of
them along with Duryodhana."
After saying this, Arjuna attacked the Kaurava army with the help of
Bhīma and Sahadeva. As soon as the battle began, Sudarśana challenged
Bhīma, while Śakuni rushed at Arjuna, and Duryodhana fought on
horseback with Sahadeva. Duryodhana struck Sahadeva in the forehead
with a lance, causing him to sit down in a daze upon the seat of his
chariot. Then, as Sahadeva recovered himself and resumed fighting,
Arjuna completely exterminated the remaining Kaurava horse soldiers,
and so he next proceeded against the Trigartas. After slaying many
enemy chariot-warriors, Arjuna at last rushed at Suśarmā and killed his
horses. Then, taking up a very powerful arrow, Arjuna carefully aimed it
at the Trigarta king and released it. After soaring magnificently through
the air, the arrow pierced right through Suśarmā's heart, making him fall
down dead onto the battlefield. Thereafter, Arjuna killed Suśarmā's 35
sons and along with them, all the rest of the Trigarta chariot-warriors.
Meanwhile, Bhīma cut off Sudarśana's head and then slaughtered all of
the Kaurava warriors who had supported him. Uluka next came forward
to attack Bhīma while his father rushed toward Sahadeva. Śakuni again
struck Sahadeva on the forehead with a lance and again, Sahadeva had
to sit down in a dazed condition. Upon seeing this, Bhīma became highly
enraged, and while roaring ferociously, he showered so many arrows
upon Śakuni's army that the soldiers fled away in fear. However,
Duryodhana went and reminded the retreating Gāndhāra warriors that
a kṣatriya's duty is to fight, and in this way he managed to rally them. In the meantime, Sahadeva recovered, and so he once again picked up his bow and continued to pierce Śakuni with his arrows. Because Bhīma had rushed to his brother's aid, Uluka came and joined his father in the fight against Sahadeva. Sahadeva then broke Śakuni's bow, but after quickly picking up another bow, the son of Subala retaliated by repeatedly piercing Sahadeva and Bhīma with his arrows. Uluka then thought that the time had come for him to display his true heroism, and so he rushed impetuously at Sahadeva. However, Uluka's bravery was short lived because the son of Mādrī quickly cut off his head with a broad-headed arrow. After witnessing the death of his dear son, Śakuni tearfully remembered Vidura's words. Then, while breathing heavily, the aggrieved Gāndhāra king rushed at Sahadeva in order to take revenge. However, Sahadeva broke Śakuni's bow as he charged forward, and so Śakuni, the son of Subala, next took up a sword and hurled it at his foe. Sahadeva easily broke that sword to pieces as it sailed through the air. Thereafter, when Śakuni proceeded to hurl innumerable weapons, one after the other, the son of Mādrī cut them all to pieces. Finally, Śakuni fearfully began to flee, and so the soldiers who were protecting him followed suit. At this time, Sahadeva remembered how Śakuni had been allotted to him as his quota, and so with great determination, he proceeded to chase Duryodhana's uncle. While striking Śakuni in the back with arrows, Sahadeva challenged, "O wretch, turn around and fight with me so that you can receive the long-awaited results of your deceitful dice playing!"

At this, Śakuni turned around, and so Sahadeva rushed at him. When Sahadeva succeeded in cutting down the Gāndhāra king's flag and royal emblem, he roared like a maddened lion. Although Sahadeva continued to pierce him deeply, Śakuni decided to make a final do-or-die effort by rushing at his assailant with an upraised lance. However, with three arrows, Sahadeva cut that lance in half and severed Śakuni's arms. Then, with another well aimed arrow, Sahadeva cut off the wicked Śakuni's head, and upon seeing this, Lord Kṛṣṇa and all of the Pāṇḍavas rejoiced greatly. However, as the Pāṇḍava warriors triumphantly blew upon their conchshells and praised Sahadeva highly, the followers of Śakuni rushed forward in order to gain revenge. Bhīma and Arjuna
intercepted them, however, and thus these Gāndhāra horse soldiers were quickly massacred.

Duryodhana had also become highly enraged upon witnessing the death of Śakuni, and so he gathered together the remainder of the Kaurava army and led them in an attack on the Pāṇḍava army. However, when the Kaurava army charged forward, instead of gaining revenge, they met with total destruction. Duryodhana himself had become somewhat dazed on account of the numerous wounds which he had received, and when he saw the complete annihilation of his army and heard the victorious shouts of the Pāṇḍava warriors, he decided to give up fighting for good and flee from the battlefield.

Drūtarāṣṭra then inquired, "My dear Sañjaya, how many warriors remained on the Pāṇḍava side after the extermination of the Kaurava army?"

Sañjaya replied, "O King, 2,000 chariot warriors, 700 elephants, 5,000 horse soldiers and 10,000 infantry remained in the Pāṇḍava army."

Because his horse had been slain, Duryodhana proceeded on foot toward the east, taking with him only his mace. While walking along, Duryodhana's heart burned with grief as he thought over the advice which Vidura had formerly given him again and again. Meanwhile, when Dhṛṣṭadyumna saw that only the captive Sañjaya remained on the Kaurava side, he asked, "O Sātyaki, what is the benefit in keeping this one alive?"

At this, Sātyaki raised up his sword in order to cut off Sañjaya's head. Just at that moment, Śrīla Vṛṣṇideva appeared upon the scene and ordered that Sañjaya be released. Sātyaki received the great rṣi's command with folded hands, and after putting on his armor and taking up his weapons, Sañjaya took permission and departed. That evening, after having proceeded two miles along the road to Hastināpura, Sañjaya came upon Duryodhana, who was standing on the side of the road, mace in hand, his body badly wounded and his mind overwhelmed with grief. Indeed, Sañjaya also became exceedingly sad upon seeing the condition of the Kaurava king. After hearing about Sañjaya's capture and subsequent release, Duryodhana inquired from him about the condition of the Kaurava army. Sañjaya replied that only three chariot warriors
remained alive and that all others had been slain. Duryodhana then affectionately touched Sañjaya with his hand and requested, "O Sūta, please inform my father that I have now entered a lake named Dvaiḍāyana which is located within this forest. Being completely bereft of my friends, I no longer have any desire to continue maintaining my life."

After saying this, Duryodhana departed, and thereafter, by utilizing his mystic power, he entered a deep lake within the forest and created a resting place for himself there. Soon thereafter, while walking along the road to Hastināpura, Sañjaya came upon Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavarmā. The three warriors were very happy to see Sañjaya, and they anxiously inquired from him about Duryodhana. In reply, Sañjaya informed them of how the king had entered the waters of a lake, and when Aśvatthāmā heard this, he grievously lamented, "O Sañjaya, Duryodhana must not have known that we are still alive. Otherwise, there would be no need for him to be morose, since the four of us together are quite competent to vanquish our enemies."

Sañjaya was then taken up onto Kṛpa's chariot, and the four of them set out for the Kaurava camp. Upon arriving there, they informed the outposted soldiers, the women and the old men who attended them about the end of the battle. Upon hearing of the deaths of their husbands, the wives of the Dvātarāṣtras began to cry very piteously while tearing at their bodies with their nails and beating their heads with their hands. Then, after untwisting their braided hair, these widows continued to indulge in profuse lamentations, while the men quickly loaded up all of the camp paraphernalia onto carts so that they could return to Hastināpura without delay. Thus, out of fear of the Pāṇḍavas, the Kaurava camp was hastily dismantled and taken back to the Kuru capital by means of a caravan. At this time, Yuyutsu, who was the only son of Dvātarāṣtra besides Duryodhana still alive, took leave of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira so that he could return to Hastināpura. After being warmly embraced by the Pāṇḍava king, Yuyutsu departed, and before going far, he met up with the caravan, and so continued his journey with them to the capital of the Kurus. As he entered Hastināpura, Yuyutsu was first of all met by Vidura, who had just come out of Dvātarāṣtra's palace. Then, in answer to Vidura's anxious inquiries, Yuyutsu described the final day
of the war, including the flight of Duryodhana and the hasty dismantling of the Kaurava camp.

Meanwhile, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavarmā had left the abandoned Kaurava camp and proceeded toward the lake in the forest in the hopes of meeting Duryodhana. After Duryodhana had fled, the Pāṇḍavas searched all over the battlefield for him, and at last, when they were unable to locate him, they returned to their own camp. In the meantime, the three surviving Kaurava warriors arrived at the shore of the Dvaipāyana lake and announced their presence to Duryodhana, who was fast asleep within the water. Aśvatthāmā then called out, "My dear king, please rise up from the water and fight with Yudhiṣṭhira. With the three of us supporting you, you can rest assured that the Pāṇḍavas will never be able to bear your prowess!"

Having been awakened, Duryodhana replied, "My dear Aśvatthāmā, Kṛpa, and Kṛtavarmā, I am extremely happy to know that you three are still alive. After resting here tonight, I shall certainly be able to fight with the Pāṇḍavas tomorrow."

Aśvatthāmā then urged, "O Duryodhana, please allow me to fight with the Paṉcālas this very night, for I am unwilling to take off my armor until I can avenge the death of my father."

As the four warriors were conversing in this manner, some hunters arrived there in order to quench their thirst. These men were engaged daily in procuring large amounts of meat for Bhīma, and so they were very tired from carrying the heavy load. When the hunters saw the three Kaurava warriors, they hid themselves in the bushes in order to overhear their conversation. Then, when they were able to understand that Duryodhana was hiding within the lake, the hunters decided to quickly go and inform the Pāṇḍavas. While engaged in searching for the Kaurava king, Bhīma had already inquired from them about his whereabouts. Thus, the hunters were confident that the Pāṇḍavas would reward them highly for this information.

Meanwhile, the spies which had been sent out to search for Duryodhana returned to the Pāṇḍava camp without any clue to his whereabouts. Because of this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became very anxious, but then, the hunters arrived and informed Bhīma of all that they had seen and heard. Bhīma first of all amply rewarded them for bringing the good
news, and then he went and informed Yudhiṣṭhira. Indeed, all of the Pāṇḍavas became very joyful upon learning of Duryodhana's whereabouts, and they immediately set out for the Dvaipāyana lake. Lord Kṛṣṇa accompanied them, and hundreds of other warriors followed, making a great tumult as they proceeded through the forest. Because of this, Duryodhana, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavarmā could hear the Pāṇḍavas approaching, and so the latter three quickly took their leave and made a timely retreat.

Finally, after going quite some distance, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā and Kṛtavarmā became very fatigued, and so they sat down underneath a large banyan tree in order to rest.

Meanwhile, as the three Kaurava warriors wondered what would become of Duryodhana, the Pāṇḍavas arrived at the lake, and they could see that it had become solidified by the Kaurava king's mystic power. Since Duryodhana was lying at the bottom of the lake, unassailable by man or beast, Lord Kṛṣṇa told Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, you should employ your own mystic power in order to neutralize that of Duryodhana. Do not hesitate, for such contrivances are often necessary for achieving success, and they have always been used against the demons. Just consider how Ilvala and Vātāpi, Vali, Sunda, and Upasunda had all been slain by employing duplicitous means."

However, instead of following Lord Kṛṣṇa’s advice, King Yudhiṣṭhira challenged, "O Duryodhana, why have you acted like a coward and thus hidden yourself within this lake? Come out now and fight if you consider yourself to be a real kṣatriya and a hero."

Duryodhana replied, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, do not think that I have entered this lake out of fear for my life. Being bereft of my chariot, horses, and weapons, and having become severely wounded, I have come here in order to take some rest. You and your brothers may also spend the night here on the shore of this lake, and then, in the morning, I shall certainly come out and fight with you."

Yudhiṣṭhira said, "We have already rested enough, and because we have been searching for you for hours, we are anxious that you come out at once in order to face us."

Duryodhana said, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, after having become deprived of all
my friends and relatives, I no longer desire to rule over the earth, or even maintain my life any further. Therefore, you can rule over this barren planet while I put on a deerskin and retire to the forest in order to perform austerities."

At this, Yudhishthira rebuked Duryodhana by saying, "You wretch! I shall never be willing to accept the earth from you as a gift! I will only ascend the royal throne after having vanquished you in battle. I no longer have any compassion for you, and so I want to see you slain because of your past offenses. Besides, as long as we both remain alive, people will doubt which of us has actually gained victory in this terrible war."

Duryodhana became very depressed upon hearing these bitter words. However, since there was really no alternative, the Kaurava king, finally made up his mind to accept Mahārāja Yudhishthira's challenge and fight. He then replied, "O Yudhishthira, I am only one whereas you Pāṇḍavas are many. Therefore, please do not demand that I fight with all of you at once. Kindly allow me to combat you one at a time, for in this way, I shall be able to slay you all and thus repay my debt to the great warriors who died for my sake."

Mahārāja Yudhishthira then said, "O Duryodhana, it is very commendable that you have accepted my challenge. Now, you may choose whichever one of us you would like to fight with, and the choice of weapons shall also be yours. If you are able to kill anyone of us Pāṇḍavas, then you will be given back your kingdom. Otherwise, if you are slain by us, then you will surely attain a heavenly destination."

Duryodhana replied, "O Yudhishthira, you have amply displayed your noble character by allowing me to fight against only one opponent. My choice of weapons is the mace, and I am willing to fight with anyone who dares to come before me on foot, armed with a similar weapon!"

Mahārāja Yudhishthira then said, "Very well! Now, come out and be slain!" Having become very agitated due to being unable to tolerate these words, Duryodhana immediately rose up from the water, carrying his heavy mace. Indeed, the Kaurava king looked like a second Yamarāja due to his fierce demeanor and great effulgence. Still all of the Pāṇḍava warriors grabbed each others' hands with joy upon at last being able to see Duryodhana before them. Then, while angrily biting his lip, the Kaurava king said, "O Yudhishthira, you will now suffer the consequences
of your taunting words. My only request is that you please remember your promise not to fight with me all at once for that would be exceedingly wicked."

Mahärāja Yudhiṣṭhīra replied, "O Duryodhana, how can you say this? Have you already forgotten how Abhimanyu was slain? Where was your consideration of morality at that time? Now, put on your armor and fight with any of us whom you choose, for that was my solemn promise." Duryodhana put on his golden armor and crown, and then he challenged, "O King, I am ready to fight with you or anyone of your brothers, whomever you wish to select."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then chastised Yudhiṣṭhīra very severely by saying, "O King, you have acted very rashly and foolishly! What do you think would happen if you fought with Duryodhana, or for that matter, even Arjuna, Nakula, or Sahadeva? Don't you know that for thirteen years, Duryodhana practiced wielding his mace day and night against an iron statue of Bhéma, just waiting for the day to come when he would be able to slay him? Only Bhéma is competent to fight against Duryodhana with a club. Even still, since Bhéma is less practiced than Duryodhana, out of foolish compassion you have allowed another gambling match to take place. Bhéma is certainly stronger than Duryodhana, but the Kaurava king possesses more skill in wielding the mace. O Yudhiṣṭhīra, ability is more important than brute strength in a duel with clubs and so you once again face a very dangerous situation. Who else besides you would abandon a certain victory by granting benedictions to his one remaining enemy? Even Bhéma is incapable of killing Duryodhana in a fair fight. Therefore, how could you dare to declare that the Kaurava king can regain his kingdom after having killed only one Pāṇḍava?"

Then, with a voice which was laden with disgust, Lord Kṛṣṇa concluded His chastisement by saying, "O Yudhiṣṭhīra, it is obvious that you are not meant to rule over the earth, but are instead destined to live a life of mendicancy in the forest!"

Bhéma then said, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, please do not become so aggrieved. I can assure you that I shall be able to slay Duryodhana, for I am eager for battle and my mace is one and one half times heavier than his." Lord Kṛṣṇa was very glad to hear these chivalrous words. He then replied, "My dear Bhéma, I am confident that you shall be able to slay
Duryodhana and thus bestow the kingdom of the earth upon your elder brother. However, you must always fight with the greatest caution, for the Kaurava king is very skilled and crafty." Thereafter, all of the Pândava warriors came and encouraged Bhîma with their praises, and then they took their seats in order to witness the great duel. Bhîma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you can rest assured that by slaying Duryodhana, I will now pluck out the poisonous dart of hatred which has been piercing our hearts for many years."
After saying this, Bhîma took up his huge mace and challenged, "O Duryodhana, while fighting with me, I want you to remember all of the wicked deeds which you have performed. It is you alone that has caused the extermination of your dynasty, and so the time has now come for you to suffer the harsh consequences."
Duryodhana replied, "O Bhîma, words will not help you now. Therefore, you should stop talking and begin to display your prowess as far as you are able to."
Just then, as Bhîma and Duryodhana prepared to strike one another, Lord Balarâma arrived there, and as soon as they saw Him, Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Pândavas got up from their seats and rushed forward to greet Him. At this time, Lord Balarâma embraced Lord Kṛṣṇa and Sâtyaki very joyfully and smelled their heads with great affection, for He was meeting them after a long period of separation. After being worshipped with great respect, Lord Balarâma was invited to witness the contest between Duryodhana and Bhîma and He happily agreed to do so. Bhîma and Duryodhana then came forward and worshipped Lord Balarâma, and at this time, He inquired about the welfare of all those who were present and also answered their questions about His well-being. Then, after taking His seat amongst the spectators, the fair-complexioned hero of the Yadu dynasty, dressed in blue garments, shone like the moon surrounded by the stars in the sky.
Almost a month before the Kurukṣetra war had commenced, Lord Balarâma had taken leave of Lord Kṛṣṇa and then left Dvārakā, accompanied by many members of the Yadu dynasty, in order to visit the holy places of pilgrimage. Before this, Lord Balarâma had requested Lord Kṛṣṇa to fight along with Him on the side of the Kauravas. However, when Lord Kṛṣṇa had refused to do so, Balarâma vowed not to take any
part in the battle and then had departed so as to avoid even hearing anything more about the impending war. All of the other residents of Dvārakā had followed Balarāma's policy of non-alignment, with the exception of Kṛṭavarmā, Sātyaki, and Lord Kṛṣṇa. Taking with Him a vast amount of wealth and countless cows, and accompanied by brāhmaṇas who carried the sacred fire, Lord Balarāma proceeded to visit many lands. Wherever He went, Lord Balarāma unstintingly gave away to the brāhmaṇas, the aged, and the poor, whatever was requested of Him.

After leaving Dvārakā, Lord Balarāma first of all journeyed to Prabhāsa. This holy place is so named because of the role it had once upon a time played in helping Soma to regain his original splendor after having lost it.

Long ago, Dakṣa gave 27 of his daughters in marriage to Soma, and so the moon-god engaged them in performing the function of time-calculation. Rohinī was the most beautiful and qualified among the girls, and because of this, Soma began to take great pleasure in her company to the exclusion of his other wives. For this reason, Rohinī's co-wives became very displeased with Soma, and at last they went and complained about him to Dakṣa. The girls tearfully said, "O Father, our husband does not pay any attention to us because he spends all of his time with Rohinī."

In reply, Dakṣa consoled the girls by saying, "My dear daughters, please return to your husband and rest assured that by my order he will treat you all equally from now on."

However, after the girls had returned to Soma, they soon found out that his behavior did not at all improve. Thus, they once again went to their father, and this time Dakṣa became quite irritated. After summoning his son-in-law, he warned, "O Soma, you had better treat all ofyour wives equally or else I shall certainly curse you."

And yet, in spite of this threat, Soma continued to disregard his father-in-law by spending all of his time with Rohinī. Because of this, Dakṣa's daughters at last became so aggrieved that they left Soma and once again returned to their father, begging that he give them shelter. This time, Dakṣa became so enraged that he cursed the moon-god to become
afflicted with tuberculosis. Thus, as a result of Dakṣa's curse, Soma began
to gradually waste away, day by day. Thereafter, the moon-god tried to
counteract his affliction by performing many sacrifices as atonement,
but it was all to no avail. And, due to Soma's emaciated condition, all of
the vegetation on earth soon became stunted, dry, and tasteless, and this
in turn caused men and animals to suffer from hunger and malnutrition.
Upon seeing this calamitous condition of the earth, the demigods went
to Soma and inquired, "O lord of the moon, why are you not as
resplendent as before?"
In response, Soma explained how he had been attacked by tuberculosis
on account of Dakṣa's curse. After hearing about Soma's plight, the
demigods went to Dakṣa and pleaded, "O Prajāpati, kindly withdraw
your curse because all creatures, including ourselves, are suffering as a
consequence."
Dakṣa replied, "My dear demigods, I am not willing to allow my words to
become directly nullified. However, if Soma begins to treat all of his
wives equally and if he worships Lord Śiva at the sacred place where the
river Sarasvatī enters into the Western sea, then he shall at least become
partially cured. As a result, the moon will thereafter wax for half of the
month and then wane for the other half."
The demigods then went and informed Soma of Dakṣa's instructions,
and by obediently executing them, the moon-god regained his full
splendor, at least for some period each month. Later on, when Soma
approached Dakṣa, the Prajāpati said, "My dear son-in-law, never again
disregard women or brāhmaṇas. Because you have followed my
instructions I have become pleased with you, and so you may now return
home."
Indeed, since that time, Soma comes to Prabhāsa every new-moon day
for the purpose of restoring his full radiance.

From Prabhāsa, Lord Balarāma visited other tīrthas along the banks of
the river Sarasvatī until He at last came to a place called Udapana,
which had formerly been the residence of the great sage Trita.
Once, long ago, there lived three rṣis named Ekat, Dvita, and Trita, and
by performing very severe austerities they very much pleased their
father, Gautama. In due course of time, Gautama passed on to higher
regions, and so the kings who had been his patrons began to worship his three sons. Among the three ṛṣis, Trita was the foremost, and so these kings especially regarded him, offering him the same respect they had formerly given to Gautama.

After some time, the greedy Ekat and Dvita became very desirous of obtaining wealth. For this purpose, they asked Trita to join them in requesting their patron kings to perform sacrifices so that they could receive the remuneration which is given to priests. Trita agreed, and thereafter, the three ṛṣis engaged the kings in performing sacrifices, and at the end, they received many animals in charity. The three brothers then departed toward the East and as they walked along the road, Trita stayed in front while the other two herded the animals. However, after some time, the wicked Ekat and Dvita began to speak among themselves as follows: "My dear brother, let us devise some means whereby we can keep all of the animals for ourselves. After all, Trita is very expert in Vedic knowledge and the performance of sacrifices. Therefore, it will be very easy for him to earn more wealth."

In this way, Ekat and Dvita decided to desert Trita when the suitable opportunity would arise. Then, as darkness set in, the three brothers suddenly saw a ferocious wolf blocking their path just as they were reaching the banks of the river Sarasvatī. Being very afraid, Trita began to run away through the forest, and while doing so, he unwittingly fell into a deep hole. Even though Trita cried out in great distress, his brothers left him there to die, partly due to fear of the wolf, but primarily because of having received the desired opportunity to take all of the animals for themselves.

Within the deep pit, Trita became very afraid of dying and he thought to himself, "Alas! Since I have not yet acquired the merit gained by drinking soma-rasa, I might even fall down into hell if I leave this world now."

Trita then saw a creeper hanging down into the hole, and the idea came to him that he should mentally perform a sacrifice while considering it to be the soma plant. Thus, while standing at the bottom of that very deep pit, Trita performed all of the functions of a sacrifice in his mind. Then, when the sacrifice reached a successful conclusion, Trita happily drank the soma juice. While this mental sacrifice was being concluded,
the demi-gods in the heavenly planets became disturbed at heart, although no one could ascertain the cause. After drinking the soma-rasa, Trita had shouted with joy, and upon hearing this, Brhaspati informed the residents of heaven, "My dear demigods, your anxiety is being caused by the sacrifice which was performed by Trita. Indeed, this ṛsi is so powerful that if he likes, he can create an entire new set of demigods. Therefore, you should approach him without delay and try to gratify all his desires."

All of the demigods then went to where Trita was standing, and after introducing themselves, they requested their allotted shares of the sacrificial offerings. Trita then very respectfully offered the demigods gifts by dint of his mental prowess, and after doing so, he begged them to help him out of his miserable condition. The demigods gave Trita assurances, and when they also offered him a benediction, the ṛsi requested, "O residents of heaven, please grant that whoever bathes in this hole will achieve the same result as drinking soma-rasa."

At once these words were uttered, the water of the river Sarasvaté appeared in that dry hole. Indeed, being raised up by the swelling water, Trita easily climbed out from the pit, and thereafter, he worshipped the demigods with heart-felt gratitude. Finally, the demigods returned to their heavenly abodes, and Trita also returned home. However, when he saw his two brothers, Trita became highly enraged and he cursed them by saying, "You sinful wretches! May you both become wolves, and may leopards, bears, and apes be awarded to you as offspring!"

Very soon after this curse was pronounced, the greedy and hard-hearted Ekat and Dvita took their births as fierce wolves. From Udapana, Lord Baladeva proceeded along the banks of the Sarasvatī in order to visit other holy places. When He arrived at the forest of Naimiṣa, Lord Balarāma could see how the river had changed her course, bending toward the east, having done so in order to benefit the ṛśis living there.

In the Satya-yuga, there were so many great sages living on the banks of the river Sarasvatī that there was not enough room for them all. Whereas some of the ṛśis could measure out a very small plot of land for themselves by using their brāhmaṇa-threads, there were others who found no space at all on the riverbank. Upon seeing how all of the ṛśis were in anxiety, Mother Sarasvatī changed her course in order to
provide a much broader area for their residences.

Balarāma then visited Sapta-Sarasvatī, where the seven branches of the river become one. The āśī Manikanaka used to reside there, and the story of how vegetable juice had once flowed out from a cut in his finger has already been narrated. Balarāma next arrived at Kapālamocana. Once, while living at Janasthana, Lord Rāmacandra had cut off the head of a Rākṣasa as He fought with him. After sailing through the sky, that severed head landed upon the thigh of a āśī named Mahodara, who was residing in the dense forest nearby. Amazingly, that head pierced right into Mahodara's thigh and there was nothing that the āśī could do to make it drop off. Because of this, Mahodara felt great pain, and he also found it very difficult to walk. Thereafter, the āśī visited many holy places and took the help of the sages who were living there, and yet, he could not gain any relief, for the head remained stuck in his leg. Finally, Mahodara went to Uśanā, the place where Śukrācārya had performed great austerities, and as soon as he entered the river Sarasvatī there, the Rākṣasa's head fell off from his thigh into the water. Then, when Mahodara returned to Janasthana and related what had happened to the other āśīs residing there, they renamed that place Kapālamocana.

Balarāma next came to the āśrama of the āśī Dalvya-vaka. Previously, Dalvya-vaka had lived in the forest of Naimiśa, and while residing there he had performed a twelve-year sacrifice. At the conclusion of this sacrifice, Dalvya-vaka gave away his own cows to the priests who had assisted him, assuring them that he would be able to replace them by begging charity from a king. Thereafter, Dalvya-vaka approached Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the son of Vicitravīrya, and requested him to give him some cows in charity. Now, it so happened that Dhṛtarāṣṭra had just received news that some of his cows had mysteriously died, without any apparent cause. Being very irritated because of this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra angrily replied to Dalvya-vaka, "O Rṣi, if your like, you can take my dead cows."
When Dalvya-vaka heard these sharp words, his heart became set upon the destruction of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. After taking the king's dead cows, Dalvya-vaka went to the banks of the River Sarasvatī, and there, he lit a sacrificial fire. The āśī then cut pieces of flesh from those dead cows and offered them into the sacrificial fire as libations for the purpose of
destroying Dhṛtarāṣṭra's kingdom. Indeed, upon the completion of Dalvya-vaka's sacrifice, the kingdom of the Kuru began to wane as it became beset with numerous calamities. Upon seeing how his kingdom was becoming overwhelmed by misfortune, Dhṛtarāṣṭra anxiously consulted with his ministers. Then, taking to heart their good advice, he went to the banks of the River Sarasvatī and fell down at Dalvya-vaka's feet. After touching the rṣi's feet to his head, Dhṛtarāṣṭra stood up, and with folded hands, he very humbly begged for forgiveness. At this, the rṣi's heart softened, and so he gave up his anger. Thereafter, Dalvya-vaka arranged for the Kuru kingdom to become restored to its original prosperous condition.

Lord Balarāma next visited the holy place, Vasiṣṭhapavaha. Here, the great rṣis Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra used to dwell on opposite sides of the river: the former on the eastern bank and the latter on the western. Viśvāmitra burned with envy upon seeing the ascetic prowess of Vasiṣṭha, and indeed, every day the two rṣis would exchange challenges while boasting the superiority of their austerities. Finally, Viśvāmitra decided to slay Vasiṣṭha, and for this purpose he began to summon the Sarasvatī River by wrathfully meditating upon her. Being very afraid of the great rṣi, Sarasvatī immediately appeared to Viśvāmitra in her personified form and stood before him with folded hands. Viśvāmitra then commanded, "Go and bring Vasiṣṭha to me at once by means of your strong current so that I can kill him!"

Sarasvatī remained silent, however, while trembling due to great fear. Viśvāmitra then very angrily repeated his order, and this time, Sarasvatī quickly departed. Although she greatly feared the curses of both rṣis, Sarasvatī knew that Vasiṣṭha was more powerful. Therefore, she went and took shelter of Vasiṣṭha, and after frankly informing him of Viśvāmitra's intentions, she described her own dilemma. Seeing how her face had become pale due to anxiety, Vasiṣṭha replied, "My dear Sarasvatī, there is no reason for you to be so fearful. You may take me to Viśvāmitra, and rest assured that I shall save you from being cursed."

Thereafter, Sarasvatī began to flood her banks, and in this way she carried Vasiṣṭha away to the opposite shore. Then, after bringing Vasiṣṭha close to Viśvāmitra's āśrama, Sarasvatī went and informed the son of Gādhi, Viśvāmitra. With great agitation, Viśvāmitra then began
to search for some weapon with which to slay his rival, and when Sarasvati saw this, she became highly mortified at the thought of becoming implicated in the slaying of a brāhmaṇa. For this reason, she quickly returned Vasiṣṭha to his āśrama on the eastern shore. After being deceived in this way, Viśvāmitra became highly enraged. In great anger, he then cursed Sarasvati by saying, "You wretched river, may your waters become polluted with blood and thus be suitable for only the Rākṣasas to drink!"

Thereafter, for one full year, the water at that place became mixed with blood, and so the Rākṣasas used to come there to enjoy themselves. After drinking to their hearts' content, they would dance and laugh in great happiness as if they had become mad with intoxication. Then, one day, some rṣis who were touring the holy places along the banks of the River Sarasvati came to the place where the water was mixed with blood. When they saw how the Rākṣasas were engaged in merry-making, the rṣis took compassion upon Sarasvati, and so they summoned her and inquired about the cause of her plight. Sarasvati then explained how her water had come to be polluted, and after hearing the story, these rṣis became determined to free her from Viśvāmitra's curse. With this purpose in mind, they began to worship Lord Śiva while at the same time performing great austerities, and as a result, the waters of the River Sarasvati soon became clear and pure once again. However, because of this, the Rākṣasas became afflicted with hunger and thirst, and at last, they came and took shelter of the compassionate rṣis. When the Rākṣasas begged them to provide relief from their distress, the brāhmaṇas made the following declaration: "From now on, food which has been sneezed upon, food in which there are worms or insects, food which has been mixed with the remnants of others, food which has been stepped over, and food which contains hair or tears, will become the allotted portions for Rākṣasas. Therefore, all learned persons must carefully avoid such food, and those who do not do so should be considered to be eating the food of Rākṣasas."

Sarasvati could understand that the rṣis wanted to benefit the fallen but repentant Rākṣasas. Therefore, out of gratitude for their having purified her waters, she formed a new branch called Aruna. Thereafter, when the Rākṣasas bathed in that river, they immediately gave up their
abominable bodies and ascended to heaven. Later on, Indra also bathed in the Aruna River in order to purify himself from the sinful reaction which he had incurred for killing a brāhmaṇa.

Once upon a time, the great asura Namuci entered a ray of the sun out of fear of Indra. Later on, however, a friendship was contracted between the two, and at that time, Indra gave Namuci the benediction that he could not slay him with any weapon that was wet or dry, nor during the day or night. However, one foggy day thereafter, Indra cut off Namuci's head by using foam from the sea as a weapon. The demon's severed head began to pursue the king of heaven, however, and indeed, while chasing Indra, the head condemned him for having killed a friend. Being greatly harassed, Indra finally took shelter of Lord Brahmā, and the grandsire informed him that he could become freed from his sinful reaction by performing a sacrifice at the Aruna branch of the Sarasvatī River. Indra performed the prescribed sacrifice, and when he became freed from the sinful reaction, Namuci's head fell into the river there. Thereafter, Indra returned to his heavenly abode and Namuci also attained an exalted destination.

Thereafter, Lord Balarāma visited the sacred place where Soma had performed the Rājasūya sacrifice with Atri presiding as the chief priest. After the completion of the sacrifice, a terrible fight took place between the demigods and the demons, and Tāraka was slain by Kārttikeya, also called Skanda.

Soon after Skanda's birth, all of the great personalities within the universe came to worship him. When Lord Śiva, accompanied by his ghostly associates, as well as all of the demigods, arrived, Skanda got up in order to receive them. At this time, Lord Śiva, Umā, Gaṅgā, and Agni all wondered, "Unto whom will this child come and honor first? Certainly he will offer me the first respect!"

Understanding this, Skanda assumed four forms by dint of his mystic power, and then he simultaneously approached the aforementioned four persons. Although these four forms were identical, the original form approached Lord Śiva. Lord Śiva, Umā, Gaṅgā, and Agni then requested Lord Brahmā, "O Grandsire, please award some exalted position to this child which will befit his wonderful birth and prowess."

After considering the matter for a moment, Lord Brahmā announced,
"Skanda should be installed as the commander-in-chief of the demigods, and thus he will continue to be served by all the other residents of heaven."

Lord Brahmā then led all of the demigods and ṛṣis to the banks of the River Sarasvatī, and there, Brhaspati performed the installation ceremony. And, at the conclusion, the chief demigods and ṛṣis performed the abhiṣeka by bathing their new commander-in-chief with the water of that sacred river. The army of the demigods was then formally entrusted to Skanda, and Lord Brahmā, Lord Viṣṇu, and Lord Śiva, as well as the other principal demigods, gave him an entourage of personal associates. In this way, many thousands of wonderful and diverse beings joined with Skanda. Some of them had animal faces like those of roosters, tortoises, dogs, cats, sharks, hogs, crows, and camels, and some had human faces. Some of those who became Skanda's personal associates were bald, and some had different numbers of hairy tufts, while others had feathers on their heads. However, all of these diverse creatures had one thing in common: they all took great delight in battle. Indeed, they were so filled with joy at the prospect of fighting that they frolicked around their new master while shouting with glee. Thousands of females also became Kārttikeya's followers, and they were also very fierce fighters who were able to assume any form at will. Indra then gave Skanda a blazing dart, Lord Viṣṇu gave him a vaijayantī garland, and Gaṅgādevī gave him a celestial water pot which had been produced from nectar. Umā gave Skanda two effulgent pieces of cloth to wear, Brhaspati gave him a sacred stick, and Lord Brahmā gave him a black deerskin. Finally, Garuḍa gave his favorite son, a beautiful peacock, for the purpose of becoming Skanda's carrier.

Thereafter, Kārttikeya led his army against the demons, and personified Endeavor, Victory, Virtue, Success, Prosperity, Courage, and the Vedas also accompanied him. When the Daityas, Dānavas, and Rākṣasas saw Kārttikeya approaching with this impetuous army, they became so afraid that they began to run away as quickly as possible. Skanda pursued the demons, however, and by repeatedly hurling his dart, from which millions of darts issued forth, he killed Tāraka and his innumerable followers.

Bāṇāsura, the son of Bali, then stationed himself on top of the Krauṇca
mountain and began to check the onslaught of the demigods. However, when Skanda impetuously rushed toward him, Bānāsura fearfully hid himself within that mountain. Kārttikeya then pierced the Krauṇca mountain with his dart, causing thousands of demons to rush out, being afflicted by the weapon's fierce energy. These demons were easily exterminated, and thereafter, all of the demigods came and worshipped Skanda with great respect while glorifying his heroic victory.

Lord Balarāma also worshipped Skanda at the sacred place where he had been installed as commander-in-chief of the demigod army. Then, after proceeding on, Lord Balarāma came to Vadarapacana. The daughter of Bhāradvāja named Sruvavāti had practiced severe austerities here while living as a brahmaśīrī, desiring to obtain King Indra as her husband.

One day, when Bhāradvāja Ṛṣi happened to see the beautiful Apsarā Ghṛtacī pass by, he involuntarily discharged his semen. After catching the semen in his hands, Bhāradvāja put it into a leaf cup, and soon thereafter, Sruvavāti was born. When she grew up, Bhāradvāja had her remain at his āśrama while he departed for the forests of the Himālayas in order to resume his practice of austerities. After having lived an ascetic life for many years, Sruvavāti pleased Indra, and so the king of heaven came before her, disguised as Vasiṣṭha. Upon seeing the ṛṣi before her, Sruvavāti received him with all due respect. Then, as she awaited his commands, Sruvavāti said, "O foremost of sages, I am prepared to satisfy you as far as possible, with the exception of becoming your wife, for I have already chosen Indra as my husband."

Indra-disguised-as-Vasiṣṭha then smilingly replied, "My dear girl, rest assured that you shall achieve the fulfillment of your heart's desire. It is a fact that all kinds of good fortune can be achieved by the performance of austerity, and indeed, there is no other means."

After saying this, Indra handed Sruvavāti five jujubes and said, "My dear girl, please boil these, and upon my return I shall eat them."

Indra then departed, and, in order to test Sruvavāti's devotion, he exercised his mystic power so that when she tried to boil these fruits, they refused to become soft. Indeed, even as the sun was setting and all of her firewood had become exhausted, these jujubes remained as hard as rocks. Then, when Sruvavāti saw that the fire was dying out for want of fuel, she put her own feet into the flames in order to keep them going.
And yet even as Sruvavāti sat there while her feet proceeded to burn, she did not mind it, for she was firmly determined to follow the order of the ṛṣi who had visited her. Sruvavāti’s face did not even show the least sign of pain, nor did her heart feel any unhappiness as her feet were being consumed by the fire. Instead she actually felt great joy while remembering the words of the ṛṣī.

When Indra saw this, he became exceptionally satisfied with Sruvavāti, and he once again came before her in his true form. Indra then announced, "My dear girl, after giving up your present body, you will come to live with me at Amarāvatī. In addition, as recognition for your unparalleled devotion, this āśrama will henceforward become a great place of pilgrimage possessing the power to cleanse away all of the sins of those who visit it."

Thereafter, Indra narrated to Sruvavāti the following story: Once, at the very place where Sruvavāti was residing, the sapta-ṛṣis left Arundhatī so that they could go to the Himālayas and collect fruits and roots for their subsistence. A terrible twelve-year drought had set in, and so the sapta-ṛṣis continued to live in the Himālayas during the entire period. All the while, Arundhatī patiently remained at the place where her husband had left her, and she passed her time by performing austerities. As a result, Lord Śiva became very pleased with Arundhatī, and so he assumed the form of a brāhmaṇa and came to her, begging for alms. Arundhatī then explained, "O ṛṣi, my stock of food is entirely exhausted, except for these jujubes. Therefore, please accept them and be satisfied."

The brāhmaṇa then requested Arundhatī to cook the jujubes, and so she put them on the fire and then listened to his discourses on spiritual topics as they boiled. Miraculously, as Arundhatī engaged herself in hearing with rapt attention, the twelve-year drought passed away as if it had lasted just a single day. Indeed, during that entire period, Arundhatī not only did not eat anything, but she had not even been aware that there was any necessity of taking food. Then, when the sapta-ṛṣis at last returned home from the Himālayas with the food which they had procured, Lord Śiva revealed his true form and announced, "O great sages, Arundhatī has performed great austerities in your absence. Indeed, the merit which she has earned by cooking for twelve years
without herself eating a morsel is greater than that which you achieved while living in the Himalayas."

Thereafter, when Lord Śiva requested Arundhatī to ask for a benediction, she replied, "O Lord, may this place become a holy tīrtha, and may whoever refrains from eating while staying here for three nights, get the results of undergoing a twelve-year fast."

Lord Śiva granted this boon and then departed, and the sapta-rṣis were struck with wonder. Not only had they been able to see Lord Śiva directly, but they were also amazed that, in spite of fasting for twelve years, Arundhatī had remained perfectly healthy and was not in the least emaciated.

Indra then said, "My dear Sruvavāti, you have performed even greater austerities than Arundhatī, and thus I shall now reward you with a superior benediction. Henceforward, anyone who reverently bathes in the River Sarasvatī and then resides at this place for just one night, will go to live in heaven after giving up his present material body."

After saying this, Indra departed as fragrant flowers began to shower down upon Sruvavāti's āśrama, and drums resounded in heaven. Not long thereafter, Sruvavāti cast off her mortal body and immediately went to Indraloka in order to become a consort of the king of heaven.

Lord Baladeva then visited other tīrtha's along the banks of the Sarasvatī, including the place where Indra had performed 100 horse sacrifices, and where Paraśurāma had performed sacrifices after annihilating the kṣatriyas 21 times and then had given away the entire earth to his priest Kaśyapa as daksīṇa. Lord Balarāma then arrived at the holy place named Āditya where Sūrya had once performed sacrifices which enabled him to attain lordship over all the other luminaries. Lord Viṣṇu had taken His bath at this sacred place after slaying the great demons, Madhu and Kaitabha, and the great rṣi Asita-Devala had also resided there long ago. Because of his very exalted spiritual consciousness, Asita-Devala used to treat all varieties of living entities not only equally, but compassionately as well.

One day, a rṣi named Jaigīśavya came to Asita-Devala's āśrama and began to reside there for the purpose of performing austerities. As long as Jaigīśavya remained as his guest, Asita-Devala kept a very watchful eye on him so that he could properly supply all of his needs. Once,
Jaigīśavya was absent the entire day but then, at dinnertime, he suddenly reappeared in the guise of a wandering mendicant, begging for alms. Understanding that this was actually Jaigīśavya, Asita-Devala showed him great respect and gave him ample food to eat. After much time had passed, however, Asita-Devala became very anxious, thinking, "My guest has been residing with me for years, and yet, even though I have never failed to worship him with the greatest respect, he has not so much as spoken a single word to me."

Then, one day, Asita-Devala left his guest alone in order to bring some water from the ocean. After flying though the sky with his water pot in his hand, Asita-Devala arrived at the seashore, and when he saw that Jaigīśavya was present there, he became highly astonished. Then, after having bathed and said his prayers, Asita-Devala returned home with his pot of water, and to and behold, Jaigīśavya was sitting there silently, just as he had been previously. Becoming even more struck with wonder, Asita-Devala began to deeply reflect over all that he had seen, and while doing so, he once again soared up into the sky. From there Asita-Devala saw numerous Siddhas come to his āśrama in order to worship Jaigīśavya. Jaigīśavya then departed for the abode of Yamarāja, and from there he proceeded on to the moon, and then, one after another, all of the higher regions inhabited by the demigods and ṛṣis until at last he went out of sight. Desiring to find out Jaigīśavya's real identity, Asita-Devala then went and very submissively inquired from the Siddhas with folded hands as to where the ṛṣi had gone. When the Siddhas explained that Jaigīśavya had gone to the spiritual world, Asita-Devala also attempted to soar aloft in order to attain the same destination. However, he was very soon forced to fall down again, and so the Siddhas mercifully said, "O Asita-Devala, please desist, for you are not competent to attain the same destination as Jaigīśavya."

When Asita-Devala heard this, he returned to his own āśrama, and much to his surprise, he saw Jaigīśavya seated there just as before. After trying to contemplate over this wonder for some time, Asita-Devala very humbly approached Jaigīśavya and begged, "O foremost of saintly persons, I would now like to apply myself to that practice which will enable me to gain liberation from this material world. Therefore, kindly instruct me how to follow that supreme path."
Seeing that Asita-Devala was firmly determined to achieve the highest destination, Jaigīsavaya instructed him in the practice of the topmost yoga, wherein one meditates in samādhi upon the transcendental form of the Supreme Lord, Viṣṇu, as He is situated within the region of the heart. However, when Asita-Devala’s pīrśs (ancestors) saw him preparing to liberate himself from material bondage, they invisibly appeared before him and tearfully lamented, "O Son, who will now supply us with the food offerings that enable us to continue our heavenly enjoyment?"

When Asita-Devala heard these lamentations coming from all directions, he decided to give up his attempt to attain liberation. However, the next moment, Asita-Devala heard fruits, roots, flowers, and herbs condemning him by the thousands, saying, "O Rṣi, after having adopted the vow of perfect non-violence, how can you once again dare to pluck and cut us?"

After hearing this, Asita-Devala considered the matter very carefully to himself as follows: "Which path would actually enable me to achieve the ultimate benefit of life? Should I remain in household life so that I can worship my ancestors, or should I renounce all material attachment in order to gain liberation from the cycle of repeated birth and death?"

After thinking over this matter very deeply for some time, Asita-Devala finally decided to adopt mokṣa-dharma (the path of liberation). Thereafter, he very soon perfected the yoga system and thus, after leaving his present material body, he ascended to the eternal spiritual sky, never again to return to this miserable world of birth and death.

Lord Balarāma next arrived at the holy place where the great rṣi Sārasvatā had resided. Once, long ago, Indra became very fearful on account of the great austerities which were being performed by the rṣi Dadhīcī. Indra then tried to tempt Dadhīcī away from his austerities by offering him various rewards. However, when all of these attempts failed, the king of heaven at last sent the beautiful Apsarā Alambuṣā to where Dadhīcī was staying on the banks of the River Sarasvatī. When Dadhīcī saw the enticingly lovely bodily features of the heavenly prostitute as she gracefully strolled in front of him, he became extremely agitated by lust. Indeed, due to the powerful onrush of passion, the rṣi involuntarily discharged his semen, and it fell into the nearby river. The River Sarasvatī then continued to hold Dadhīcī's semen within her
womb, and in due course of time she gave birth to a wonderful male child. Sarasvatī took the child to Dadhīci, and the ṛṣi happily accepted him as his own. Being very pleased with Sarasvatī, Dadhīci then blessed her by saying, "O Goddess, when the demigods and ṛṣis receive offerings of your water, they shall become very satisfied. This son of ours will be named Sārasvatā, and later on, when a very severe drought afflicts the earth for twelve years, he will teach the Vedas to the foremost of brāhmaṇas."

After hearing this, the River Sarasvatī happily departed, taking her fortunate son with her. During this time, the demigods had been engaged in a prolonged war with the demons. At last, when the demigods became exceedingly afflicted, Indra searched all over the universe for weapons which would be capable of slaying the demons. However, after failing to find any such weapons, Indra informed the demigods, "O residents of heaven, at present we are incapable of defeating the demons. Therefore, our only hope is to acquire the bones of Dadhīci ṛṣi, for it is from these alone that the powerful enough weapons can be manufactured."

After hearing this, the demigods went to Dadhīci and begged him to donate his bones for the purpose of slaying the demons. In response, the ṛṣi unhesitatingly gave up his life for the welfare of all living entities within the universe, and by doing so, he attained a very exalted destination. Dadhīci had been generated by Bṛgu Muni, and because he was the most powerful person in the creation, Indra had been in constant anxiety on his account. The demigods then made an incomparable thunderbolt from Dadhīci's bones, as well as other weapons, such as maces and cakras. Indra then took up that thunderbolt, after it had been empowered by Lord Viṣṇu, and with it he killed all of the demons.

Thereafter, a drought set in for twelve years, and so all of the ṛṣis gradually left their āśramas in order to search for food elsewhere. When the ṛṣi Sārasvatā was also about to depart, his mother, the River Sarasvatī, forbade him, assuring that she would provide him with plenty of fish to eat. While Sārasvatā thus remained at home, the other ṛṣis wandered about in a famished condition. Indeed, due to their extreme misery, the ṛṣis spent all of their time searching for food, and thus they
completely forgot the knowledge of the Vedas after some time. At last, when the drought ended, the rśis resumed their normal lifestyle, and also began searching for someone who could once again impart to them the forgotten Vedic wisdom. One of the rśis happened to see Sārasvatā as he was engaged in reciting the Vedas, and so he excitedly returned to the assembly of sages and informed them of his discovery. All of the rśis then went to where Sārasvatā was residing within the secluded forest, and they begged him to instruct them in the Vedas. Sārasvatā then replied, "O great sages, I shall be glad to impart Vedic knowledge unto you, but only on the condition that you all become my formal disciples." However, the rśis objected by saying, "O Sārasvatā, you are too young to become our guru."
In response, Sārasvatā explained, "My dear brāhmaṇas, when knowledge is imparted without first of all establishing the proper relationship of respect between the teacher and the student, then both the speaker and the hearer will gradually come to hate one another. You should not judge the status of a rṣi in terms of his age, wealth, family prestige, or any other such material condition. A rṣi's position should be ascertained by understanding to what extent he has realized the conclusions of the śāstra."
After hearing these words of wisdom, all 60,000 sages became initiated by Sārasvatā. Thus, even though Sārasvatā was a mere boy, each rṣi collected a handful of samīt grass and then brought it to make a seat for their guru. After thus acting as his humble disciples, the rśis received Vedic knowledge from Sārasvatā, and as a result, they could properly resume their duties as brāhmaṇas.
Next, Lord Baladeva went to the holy place of pilgrimage where the daughter of the rṣi Kuṇi-Garga had practiced austerities. This girl had been created simply by Kuṇi-Garga's will, and when the rṣi passed away and went to heaven, she remained at his āśrama in order to worship the demigods and pīṭṛs under strict disciplinary vows. Kuṇi-Garga's daughter never married, for she could not see anyone whom she considered to be worthy of her. Thus, after a lifetime of penances, she finally became so old that she could no longer even move about without assistance. Thus, at last, the daughter of Kuṇi-Garga decided that the time had arrived for her to give up her useless material body. Knowing of her intention,
Nārada Muni came to the daughter of Kuṇi-Garga and said, "My dear ascetic lady, in spite of your volumes of austerities, you will not be able to reach heaven if you give up your body now, for you never underwent the purificatory rite of marriage."

After hearing this, Kuṇi-Garga's daughter went to an assembly of ṛṣis and announced, "O brāhmaṇas, I am willing to give one-half of my acquired ascetic merit to anyone who will accept my hand in marriage."

In response, the intelligent son of Gālava ṛṣi named Śrṅgavat accepted her proposal. However, in consideration of her old age and ugliness, he did so only on the condition that she would live with him for a single night. The old ascetic lady gave her consent, and then she immediately married Śrṅgavat with the proper rituals. That night, she transformed herself into a very beautiful young girl and then adorned herself with celestial clothing and ornaments. Śrṅgavat was thus very pleasantly surprised, and he proceeded to pass the night with her in great happiness. In the morning, however, his new bride took her leave, since the agreement which they had made was fulfilled. Then, as she was about to depart for heaven, the daughter of Kuṇi-Garga pronounced the following benediction: "Whoever offers water to the demigods and then passes one night at the place where I had performed austerities, will achieve the merit equivalent to living 58 years as a brahmacārī."

After the departure of the ascetic lady, Śrṅgavat became very unhappy, because he continually remembered her exquisite beauty. At last, being unable to bear separation from her, Śrṅgavat utilized the ascetic merit which she had given to him and thus, after giving up his body, he was able to follow Kuṇi-Garga's daughter to her destination.

While at that place, Lord Balarāma received news of Śalya's death, and thus He became very aggrieved. Soon thereafter, when Lord Balarāma arrived at Samanta-paṅcaka, He inquired from the ṛṣis there about the outcome of the great war. The ṛṣis then described to Lord Balarāma all that had taken place, and at the same time, they narrated to Him the history of how Kurukṣetra had become such a holy place. Long ago, Mahārāja Kuru used to till the soil very diligently at that place, and so, once, Indra came to him out of curiosity and asked the king why he cultivated that land. Mahārāja Kuru replied, "O Indra, I am plowing this field so that whoever may die here in the future will become cleansed of
all sinful reactions and thus easily attain to heaven."

Upon hearing this, Indra laughed derisively, and after ridiculing Kuru for his absurd statement, he returned to his heavenly abode. Kuru was undaunted, however, and he continued tilling the soil as before. Finally, when Indra saw Kuru's fixed determination, he called for a meeting of the demigods and informed them of the king's activities. The demigods then advised, "O Indra, you should stop Kuru by offering him a benediction. Just consider if simply by dying at that place men will be able to reach heaven, then no one will bother to perform any more sacrifices, and thus our existence will be threatened."

Thus, at the urging of the demigods, Indra once again went to Kuru and requested, "O King, please desist from tilling the soil any further. I assure you that whoever dies at this place after having abstained from food and after having brought his senses under complete control, as well as whoever dies in battle without having turned his back to the enemy, will attain to the heavenly planets."

At this, Kuru agreed to give up his farming activities, and so Indra returned to his heavenly abode. Thereafter, that field became known as Kurukṣetra, and it was declared by Lord Brahmā to be the most sacred of all places on earth.

Lord Balarāma next went to a place on the banks of the river Yamunā where Indra, Agni and Aryama had formerly performed austerities. Then, as he sat amidst a gathering of ṛṣis, enjoying their wonderful discourses, Nārada Muni suddenly appeared there in the course of his wanderings. When Lord Balarāma saw the great ṛṣi, who had matted locks of hair on his head and a golden stick, golden water pot, and vīnā in his hands, He immediately stood up in order to honor him.

Thereafter, when Lord Balarāma inquired about further news from Kurukṣetra, Nārada Muni, who is always fond of provoking quarrels, replied, "My dear lord, beside Duryodhana, only three warriors remain on the Kaurava side. Indeed, this very day, Duryodhana and Bhīma will fight with maces, and so I suggest that You quickly go there in order to witness the duel between Your two disciples."

Lord Balarāma bid farewell to the ṛṣis and went back to Dvārakā with everyone who had accompanied Him on His pilgrim's journey. Then,
after mounting upon His chariot, Lord Balarāma proceeded to where Bhīma and Duryodhana were just about to begin fighting. Lord Balarāma was very respectfully received and worshipped by the Pāṇḍavas and Duryodhana, and then He said, "My dear cousins, while on pilgrimage, I learned that whoever dies at Samanta-pañcaka will attain to heaven. Therefore, let us move to that sacred spot so that the ultimate welfare of the combatants will be assured."

Everyone consented and so thereafter, Lord Balarāma led the Pāṇḍava warriors and Duryodhana to Samanta-pañcaka, where a suitable place was selected which was flat and not too sandy. Both heroes then took their mighty maces, and many inauspicious signs became manifest as Duryodhana began to challenge Bhīma with harsh words. Fierce winds suddenly blew, creating a dust storm that shrouded all directions in darkness. Meteors began to fall from the sky by the hundreds as the earth trembled. Thunderbolts created such loud crashing sounds that everyone's hair stood up on end, and the sun became eclipsed, although it was not the scheduled time. Jackals were everywhere heard to be howling very ominously, and mountain peaks crashed to the ground. All directions appeared to be ablaze, and the water in wells swelled up of its own accord.

Bhīma then challenged, "O wretched son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you should now remember all of your past wicked deeds and rest assured that you shall be slain as a result of them."

Duryodhana responded, "O Bhīma, for a long time I have been dreaming of gaining the opportunity to fight with you. Therefore, do not waste any more time by uselessly boasting!"

Thereafter, the two heroic warriors rushed at one another and the fighting became extremely dreadful, like the battle between Indra and Prahlāda that took place in days of yore. After some time, Bhīma and Duryodhana became exhausted from the fight, and so they stopped awhile to rest. Then, as all the demigods in the sky looked on in wonder, they resumed the contest, and while combating, they perfectly displayed all the arts of clubfighting. Sometimes they wheeled about or jumped high in order to avoid each other's blows, and both were covered with blood.

Soon it appeared as if Duryodhana was gaining the upper hand, and
then all of a sudden the Dhṛtarāṣṭra struck Bhīma severely on the head. Without wavering, Bhīma struck back forcibly, but the Kaurava king artfully dodged his blow and then retaliated by smashing him in the chest with great force. As a result, Bhīma became momentarily dazed, and upon seeing this, all of the Pāṇḍava warriors became exceedingly depressed. Bhīma soon recovered, however, and in a fit of rage he rushed at the Kaurava king. Taking careful aim, Bhīma smashed Duryodhana in the side, and the terrible blow made the Kaurava king begin to lose consciousness as he fell down to his knees. At this, there was a great uproar among the spectators, and when he heard it, Duryodhana became mad with rage. While breathing heavily, he rose up to his feet and appeared to burn Bhīma with his red-hot glances.

Duryodhana then rushed forward and struck Bhīma severely on the forehead. And yet, Bhīma did not flinch an inch, in spite of the fact that blood poured profusely from his wound, and in retaliation, he quickly struck Duryodhana with great force. The Kaurava king fell down to the ground and trembled violently. But then, after quickly recovering, he stood up and struck back with a violent blow. When Bhīma fell to the ground, his armor broken to pieces, Duryodhana roared victoriously, while a great fear entered the hearts of the Pāṇḍavas. Indeed, it was only with great difficulty that Bhīma was able to recover his strength in order to raise himself off the ground. At this time Arjuna inquired, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, of the two combatants, who is actually superior?"

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "O Arjuna, both have received equal instruction, but whereas Bhīma's strength is superior, Duryodhana has more skill and practice. Therefore, in a fair fight, Bhīma would never be able to defeat the Kaurava king. However, by employing some devious means, I can assure you that he shall be able to come out victorious. Long ago, Indra had defeated Virocanā by unfair means, and now, Bhīma must do the same. At the time of the gambling match, Bhīma had vowed to break Duryodhana's thighs. Therefore, it is My opinion that this should be the means by which he achieves victory. Yudhiṣṭhira has foolishly put us into an extremely dangerous situation. After having slain millions of enemy soldiers and defeating all of the foremost chariot-warriors, your elder brother has allowed the ultimate victory to depend upon the success of one man."
"Śukrācārya has given the following instruction: 'When an enemy that had formerly been routed returns to the battlefield with renewed vigor and determination, having become reckless of his very life, he should be especially feared.' Duryodhana had fled from the battlefield after losing his entire army, and thus out of hopelessness he wanted to retire to the forest. Now, since he has been challenged after practicing very diligently with the mace for thirteen years, Duryodhana will surely regain his kingdom if he is not killed by unfair means."

Having thus understood from Lord Kṛṣṇa the course of action which had to be taken, Arjuna meaningfully slapped his left thigh within Bhīma's sight. Picking up this signal, Bhīma began to whirl his mace about more impetuously while moving here and there with great dexterity. Still, Duryodhana expertly countered all of Bhīma's attacks, and as the maces repeatedly clashed, thunderous sounds were created as sparks flew off in all directions. Then, once again, when Bhīma and Duryodhana became fatigued, they took some more time off to rest.

Thereafter, as the two combatants once again rushed to encounter one another, Bhīma cunningly gave Duryodhana a good opportunity to strike. Taking advantage of this apparent lapse, Duryodhana rushed forward. Then, Bhīma quickly hurled his mace with all his might. By stepping aside, however, Duryodhana artfully dodged the blow, and as Bhīma's mace fell, Duryodhana struck him very severely. Blood flowed profusely from Bhīma's wound, and although he was somewhat dazed, the son of Vāyu did not want to show it, and so with great patience remained firm. Duryodhana thus thought that Bhīma would quickly strike back, and so he backed off, and in the interim, the son of Pāṇḍu regained his composure.

After picking up his mace, Bhīma rushed madly toward Duryodhana, and so the Kaurava king decided to avoid the impending blow by jumping high. Bhima anticipated this, and while letting out a terrible roar, he dashed forward and brought down his mace very forcefully upon Duryodhana's thighs. Indeed, both thighs were fractured by this powerful blow, and thus Duryodhana fell down to the ground while writhing due to agonizing pain. At that fateful moment, fierce winds began to blow, and the entire earth trembled. As meteors streaked the
sky, clouds poured down showers of blood, creating a ghastly scene. While the Pāṇḍavas and their allies shouted with joy, Bhīma went to Duryodhana and prodded, "O sinful wretch, you should now remember how you laughed when Draupadī was dragged into the assembly of Kurus. At that time, you had repeatedly taunted her by addressing her as 'cow.'" After saying this, Bhīma violently kicked Duryodhana in the head with his left foot, and then proclaimed to all who were present, "At last, each and every wretched person who had previously insulted us has been slain!" Bhīma then once again kicked Duryodhana in the head with his left foot and said, "By good fortune, all of those who had formerly rejoiced while watching us suffer will now have to tolerate the happiness which we feel upon witnessing their retched plight!" Although many of the Pañcāla heroes expressed their disapproval of how he had kicked Duryodhana, Bhīma proceeded to dance with joy. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear brother, you have sufficiently gained your revenge, and so, you should stop the sinful act of crushing the head of our fallen relative. Duryodhana is not only our cousin-brother, but he is a king. Therefore, I forbid you to insult him any further." Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then approached Duryodhana, and with a voice that was choked up with tears, he said, "My dear cousin, please do not be overly aggrieved at your present condition. You should know that your plight is the natural result of your past sinful acts and thus has surely been ordained by the Creator. At the same time, there is no doubt that you shall soon proceed to heaven, and so it is ourselves who should actually be pitied, for we will have to remain here on earth and thus continue to suffer." When Lord Balarāma saw Bhīma unfairly strike Duryodhana's thighs, He had become highly excited with rage. Then, loudly addressing the assembly, Balarāma said, "O Kings, Bhīma is a rascal for having purposely struck his opponent below the navel! Therefore, he deserves to be punished without delay!" After saying this, Lord Balarāma took up His plow weapon and rushed impetuously toward Bhīma with the intention of slaying him. Lord
Krṣṇa quickly caught Balarāma in His arms and then began to pacify Him by saying, "My dear brother, You should keep in mind that it was Bhīma's vow to break Duryodhana's thighs. Besides, this has already been predestined by the curse of Maitreya Rṣi. O Balarāma, You should forgive Bhīma, for he is the son of Your father's sister."

Lord Balarāma replied, "O Krṣṇa, no matter what You say, Bhīma has acted abominably, and thus he should be punished!"

Lord Krṣṇa implored, "My dear brother, please give up Your anger. Even if You consider Bhīma's act to be immoral, You should still consider it to be repayment for all the times which Duryodhana had attempted to harm the Pāṇḍavas."

Śrī Balarāma was not to be easily pacified, however. Considering Lord Krṣṇa to be simply offering excuses, He once again loudly declared, "O members of this assembly, from this time onward, Bhīma will be known as a crooked fighter. On the other hand, Duryodhana will gain eternal renown as a highly virtuous and heroic warrior!"

After saying this, Balarāma angrily stormed out of the assembly, and after mounting upon His chariot, He set out for Dvārakā. Because of this, all the Pāṇḍava warriors became very anxious and depressed, and Yudhiṣṭhira especially stood there morosely with his head hanging down in shame. Lord Krṣṇa then approached Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and asked, "O King, how could you stand by indifferently as Bhīma repeatedly kicked Duryodhana in the head?"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear Krṣṇa, I certainly did not approve of what Bhīma did. Still, when I considered all of the horrible things which Duryodhana had done to us in the past, I could understand the great anguish which must have been present in Bhīma's heart. It is for this reason that I did not attempt to check him."

Lord Krṣṇa then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you have spoken correctly."

Bhīma then came before his elder brother with folded hands and declared, "O King, the earth is now yours to rule without impediment, for at last, all of our enemies have been slain!"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear Bhīma, rest assured that I am very pleased with you, for you have properly paid off your debt to our mother and to your anger as well."

At this, all of the Pāṇḍava warriors once again began to rejoice at the
fall of Duryodhana. Some responded by roaring like lions and waving their garments about. Others blew upon their conchshells and played drums, while still others laughed aloud and began to sport by jumping playfully. While everyone was engaged in praising Bhīma for his difficult accomplishment, Lord Kṛṣṇa suddenly interrupted by ordering, "All of you should now refrain from further rejoicing and harsh speech in Duryodhana's presence. The sinful and greedy wretch has already been defeated, and so let us now return to our camp so that he can die in peace."

Upon hearing Lord Kṛṣṇa's harsh words, Duryodhana became excited with rage. After raising himself up onto his haunches with his arms, Duryodhana very disdainfully said, "O son of Kaṁsa's slave, I know that it was you who gave Bhīma the idea of killing me in this abominable manner. Don't You feel any shame after having caused so many great heroes to be slain by deceptive means? If You had fought fairly, then Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, and Bhūriśravas would never have been defeated."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "Duryodhana, you have been slain as a result of your own sinful life. Therefore, do not try to blame others. The same holds true for Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Karṇa, for they had foolishly followed your path. Don't you remember how you tried to burn the Pāṇḍavas to death in their sleep? Have you forgotten how you tried to poison Bhīma and how you insulted Draupādi? It is you who are truly shameless and thus deserve to be killed!"

Duryodhana then said, "O Kṛṣṇa, I have already enjoyed the kingdom of the earth along with its unrivaled opulence. Therefore, I consider myself to be fortunate to be dying a hero's death. While I enjoy life as a resident of heaven, it will be You and the Pāṇḍavas who shall be pitied, for you will all have to remain here, rotting in this miserable world."

At the conclusion of Duryodhana's speech, a dense shower of flowers fell down upon him from the sky, and the Gandharvas could be heard playing on their musical instruments as the Apsarās sang his praises. Very fragrant and soft breezes began to blow, and thus the entire atmosphere became wonderfully clear and peaceful. When the Pāṇḍavas saw the great respect which was being given to Duryodhana, they felt exceedingly ashamed. Invisible voices then began to declare, "Alas!
Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, Bhūrīśravas, and now Duryodhana, were all slain by unrighteous means!"
Upon hearing this, the Pāṇḍavas became even more sorry, and indeed, they began to shed tears of remorse. When Lord Kṛṣṇa saw that his devotees were in such a miserable condition, He addressed them as follows in a very deep and grave voice: "My dear sons of Pāṇḍu, you never could have defeated those invincible heroes by fair means. Because I desired to do that which was beneficial for you, I employed My powers of illusion, Yogamāyā, in order to slay these great heroes by diverse means. If I had not done so, then victory could never have been yours. However, you should not feel aggrieved nor guilty that your enemies have been slain by deceitful means. According to the military science, when one's enemy is stronger than himself, such unfair means should be employed. Indeed, this has always been the custom, and it was only by deceit that the demigods were able to defeat the demons in ancient times. O sons of Pāṇḍu, victory is now yours, so return now to your camp in order to refresh yourselves."

Becoming cheered by Lord Kṛṣṇa's words, the Pāṇḍava warriors mounted upon their chariots, and while departing, they once again blew triumphantly upon their conchshells. First of all, the Pāṇḍavas went to the Kuru camp, and upon arriving there, they found it vacant. Lord Kṛṣṇa then told Arjuna, "My dear son of Kunti, pick up your Gāndiva bow and two inexhaustible quivers, and then get down from your chariot before Me. In a moment you will see how I am speaking for your benefit." Thereafter, Arjuna first of all climbed down to the ground. Then, as Lord Kṛṣṇa dismounted, Hanumān immediately disappeared from the flag and at the same time, even though no visible flames could be seen, the entire chariot with its yoke and horses was reduced to a pile of ashes. Upon seeing this, Arjuna became struck with wonder. Then, after composing himself, he bowed down before the Lord and with folded hands, he inquired, "O Kṛṣṇa, what is the reason for this astonishing occurrence?"

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Arjuna, in actuality, your chariot had already been consumed by the innumerable weapons which were poured upon it by Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Karṇa. However, as long as I remained
seated on it, the chariot stayed intact. Now, since our object is fulfilled, and because I have gotten down from it, your chariot has been instantly destroyed."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then went and embraced Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra while saying, "O King, do you remember how, when I had come to visit you at Upaplavya, you had begged Me to protect Arjuna at all costs? I had promised you that I would do so, and now, I have fulfilled that vow, thus enabling you to regain your kingdom by surviving this dreadful war."

In reply, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra glorified Kṛṣṇa and then said, "My dear lord, it is Your causeless mercy alone which has enabled us to cross over this dangerous ocean in order to attain ultimate success!"

Thereafter, Lord Kṛṣṇa suggested, "My dear sons of Kuntī, let us seven spend the night out of camp in order to initiate an auspicious future."

Thus, the Pāṇḍavas and Śātyaki accompanied Lord Kṛṣṇa to the banks of the Oghavatī river while all of the Pañcāla warriors returned to their own camp. That evening, however, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra became very anxious while thinking as follows: "How will Gāndhārī feel when she hears how her beloved son has been slain by unfair means? Certainly her anger will burn all of us to ashes, for she has become extremely powerful as a result of her austerities!"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then went to Kṛṣṇa and said, "My dear lord, I am eternally indebted to You for all of the trouble, harsh words, and onslaught of weapons which You had to bear in order to enable us to gain victory. And yet, in spite of our success, my heart trembles when I think of how Gāndhārī's anger will become aroused when she hears about the deaths of her sons and grandsons. Indeed, if Gāndhārī is not consoled, then I am afraid that her wrath will burn us all to ashes. My dear Kṛṣṇa, only You are capable of pacifying Gāndhārī, and so I request that You return to Hastināpura before us in order to accomplish this delicate task."

In response, Lord Kṛṣṇa immediately summoned Dāruka and ordered him to make ready His chariot. Dāruka promptly returned, and so Lord Kṛṣṇa ascended His chariot and set out for Hastināpura without delay. Upon His arrival at the Kuru capital, Lord Kṛṣṇa went directly to the royal palace, and after announcing His presence, He entered Dhṛtarāṣṭra's room. Śrīla Vyāsadeva was seated along with the old blind
king, and so Lord Kṛṣṇa first of all touched the illustrious ṛṣi's lotus feet and then after touching Dhṛtarāṣṭra's feet, He offered His respects to Gāndhārī.

Lord Kṛṣṇa then caught hold of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's hand and began to weep out of intense grief. Finally, after washing His face, as was the etiquette, Lord Kṛṣṇa addressed Dhṛtarāṣṭra as follows in a very gentle voice: "My dear king, you know that the Pāṇḍavas have always been very submissive to you. They had tried their best to avoid fighting with your sons, even to the extent of voluntarily accepting a long period of exile. I also had personally come here and begged for peace, and at that time I had requested a mere five villages on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas. Still, you could not accept this proposal, due to greed and force of Destiny. Nor could you accept the good advice which had been given by Vidura, Bhīṣma, Droṇa and many others who desired a peaceful settlement. Therefore, O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, please do not blame the Pāṇḍavas, for they are faultless and they are now your only remaining descendants. In spite of coming out victorious, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira is burning with grief because of the great slaughter that took place. He also feels exceedingly miserable because he knows just how much you and Gāndhārī must be suffering. Indeed, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira is so ashamed of his position that he is afraid to come before you and it is for this reason that I have come here on his behalf."

Then, turning to Gāndhārī, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "O foremost of virtuous ladies, you must remember how your son had ignored your advice when you had spoken to him in My presence. At that time, you had assured Duryodhana that victory would be with the righteous. Therefore, you should not be angry at the Pāṇḍavas now that these words have proven true. No doubt, due to your great power of austerity, you are capable of destroying the entire three worlds. Still, I beg you to give up any ill feelings which you may be harboring in your heart against the sons of Pandu."

Gāndhārī replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, what you say is true. Although my heart had been burning on account of excessive anger and grief, You can rest assured that I feel somewhat relieved now, after hearing Your words."

After saying this, Gāndhārī covered her face with her sārī and began to weep profusely. Lord Kṛṣṇa then spoke some more in order to further
pacify the king and queen, but being omniscient, He suddenly became anxious to attend to some other pressing matter. Lord Kṛṣṇa therefore offered His obeisances unto Vyāsadeva and then told Dhṛtarāṣṭra, "My dear king, I shall hurriedly take My leave now, for I can understand that Aśvatthāmā has devised a wicked plan for destroying all the Pāṇḍavas and Pañcālas this very night."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī gave Lord Kṛṣṇa their blessings so that He could depart and thus He mounted upon His chariot and set out without delay, confident that His visit to Hastināpura had been successful. After arriving at the place where the Pāṇḍavas and Sātyaki were staying on the banks of the Oghavatī, Lord Kṛṣṇa described all that had transpired and assured them that Gāndhārī had become pacified.

Meanwhile, after the departure of the Pāṇḍavas, Duryodhana had addressed some sympathizers who had remained with him as follows: "My dear friends, the Pāṇḍavas have acted in a most abominable manner for gaining victory over me. Still, I feel that I am very fortunate to be dying a hero's death after having enjoyed worldly power and opulence to the highest degree. Now, I want you all to go and inform Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavr̥ma of how I am lying here after having been mortally wounded by unfair means. Furthermore, convey my message to them that the Pāṇḍavas should never be trusted on account of their having taken to the path of unrighteousness."

These messengers then departed, and they soon met up with Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavr̥ma. After hearing their vivid description of how Bhīma had defeated Duryodhana, the three warriors rushed to where the Kaurava king was lying. When they saw Duryodhana writhing in pain, lying in his own blood, and dazed due to shock, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavr̥ma quickly got down from their chariots and ran to his side. Aśvatthāmā was especially aggrieved, and while lamenting at great length, he suddenly exclaimed, "Alas! Just see how nothing is stable in this material world! The greatest king, who possessed unrivaled influence and opulence, is now being forced to eat the dust of the earth!"

Duryodhana became very depressed while listening to Aśvatthāmā's lamentations. Then, after wiping the tears from his eyes, the Kaurava king said, "I am very happy to see that you three are still alive. However,
please rest assured that there is no real need for you to become so aggrieved at my condition. Certainly, a very exalted destination awaits me after I give up this mortal body."

Duryodhana then remained silent for awhile as his eyes filled with tears. While contemplating how the Kaurava king had become reduced to such a pitiful condition by unfair means, Aśvatthāmā gradually became obsessed with an uncontrollable wrath. He also remembered how his father had been slain by similarly devious means. Then, all of a sudden, Aśvatthāmā vowed, "O King, I hereby promise to slay all of the Pāṇḍavas and Pañcālas this very night! All that I require is your permission to do so."

These words were very pleasing to Duryodhana's heart. The Kaurava king then had Kṛpa bring him a pot of water, and thereafter, he ordered that Aśvatthāmā be installed as the new commander-in-chief. Kṛpa then performed the proper rituals, and at the end of the installation ceremony, Aśvatthāmā embraced Duryodhana with great affection. The son of Droṇa then eagerly departed while letting out a loud roar, and Kṛpa and Kṛtavarmā followed him. Thereafter, as they went along the road, the three warriors discussed among themselves how to accomplish their mission of slaying all of the Pāṇḍavas and Pañcālas.

Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavarmā entered a dense forest near the Pāṇḍava camp. In the distance, the three tired and wounded warriors could hear the sounds being made by the victorious Pāṇḍavas and Pañcālas, and so they proceeded with caution. Since their horses were exhausted and thirsty, and themselves overwhelmed by grief after seeing Duryodhana, they stopped awhile in order to rest. At last, after proceeding on deeper into the forest, the three came to a great banyan tree, and so they decided to spend the night there. After stopping their chariots, they let loose their horses, and since the sun was setting, they took their baths and then recited their evening prayers. Thereafter, the three sat down together as the forest came alive with its nocturnal creatures. However, being highly exhausted, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarmā fell deeply asleep soon after laying down upon the bare ground. On the other hand, Aśvatthāmā was burning with anger and grief and thus he could not sleep, and while passing the time, he incessantly tried to think
of how he could gain revenge against the Pañcālas. Then it so happened that while gazing at the forest, Aśvatthāmā noticed how thousands of crows were sleeping in the branches of a nearby banyan tree. Aśvatthāmā then saw a fierce owl quietly come there. After landing upon one of the branches, that owl proceeded to slaughter a large number of sleeping crows by tearing them apart with its sharp talons. Thus, the ground soon became strewn over with severed limbs and dead bodies, and after accomplishing this massacre, the owl appeared to be highly pleased. Aśvatthāmā considered this incident to be highly significant, and after thinking about it for some time, he concluded that he should follow the example of the owl. Indeed, Aśvatthāmā considered the matter as follows: "The Pāṇḍavas are incapable of being slain by me, in spite of the fact that I had vowed to Duryodhana that I would do so. Therefore, only by employing some deceitful means shall I be able to accomplish my devious tricks in order to achieve their victory. Besides, the military science prescribes that for the purpose of defeating a superior enemy, one may slay him even while he is wounded, eating, or fast asleep at night. Therefore, let me slay all of the Pāṇḍavas and Pañcālas this very night as they sleep."

After making up his mind in this way, Aśvatthāmā woke up his maternal uncle and the Bhoja warrior in order to inform them of his devious scheme. However, both Kṛpa and Kṛtavarmā became very ashamed after hearing Aśvatthāmā speak, and thus they remained silent. Upon seeing their reluctance, Aśvatthāmā reconsidered his plan momentarily and then tearfully said, "O Kṛpa, O Kṛtavarmā, just remember how Bhīma had repeatedly kicked Duryodhana in the head. Considering this, what would you recommend as a means for gaining revenge?"

Kṛpa replied, "My dear Aśvatthāmā, it should be understood that everything that occurs is a result of the combination of Destiny and exertion. Without either of these factors, no good result can be achieved. Therefore, the wise have recommended that one should exert himself only after having duly taken the advice of his elders and worshipped the demigods. Duryodhana had always acted simply to satisfy his greed, and while doing so he disregarded the advice of his superiors. Because of this, and due to his wicked nature and enviousness of the righteous Pāṇḍavas, Duryodhana has met with destruction. At the same
time, however, I must admit that because we had pledged our allegiance to the Kaurava king, we have an obligation to avenge his cruel death. My dear son of Drona, when I consider all of these factors, I become bewildered about our duty, and thus I cannot properly prescribe what should be done. Therefore, I suggest that we go at once to Hastināpura and take advice from Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī, and Vidura.

Aśvatthāmā was very pained to hear these words and so he replied, "O Kṛpa, everyone values his own intelligence above that which is possessed by all others. Thus, it is practically seen that a man make his plans on the basis of his own understanding. For this same reason, the resolution which I have made to kill the sleeping Pāṇḍavas and Paṇcālas appears to me to be the only means whereby I can gain relief from my burning grief. Although I was born in a brāhmaṇa family, I have adopted the kṣatriya mode of life. Therefore, I feel that it is my duty to crush Dhrṣṭadyumna's head as retaliation for his having slain my father."

Kṛpa then urged, "O Aśvatthāmā, please rest for the night. Then, in the morning, the three of us can put on our armor and oppose the Pāṇḍavas in a righteous battle."

At this, Aśvatthāmā, with great irritation, replied, "O Kṛpa, how can you even imagine that it is possible for an angry and aggrieved person like me to sleep at night? I have become practically mad with rage due to being haunted by the constant remembrance of how my father had been slain and Duryodhana's thighs broken. Only after killing Dhrṣṭadyumna and the other Paṇcālas shall I be able to attain any peace of mind. Therefore, I am determined to accomplish my purpose this very night!"

Kṛpa continued to try and dissuade Aśvatthāmā from his sinful resolve by describing the great infamy which he would achieve by performing such an act. Still, Aśvatthāmā argued, "O Kṛpa, the Pāṇḍavas have already broken the bridge of virtue into 100 fragments. How then can I be expected to act righteously? Besides, for the purpose of gaining revenge, I do not even mind if I have to become a worm or an insect in my next life. No one can dissuade me now, and so do not continue to waste your valuable energy by trying to do so."

After saying this, Aśvatthāmā hurriedly yoked the horses onto his chariot and then set out. As Kṛpa and Kṛtavarmā anxiously followed him, Aśvatthāmā soon arrived at the gate of the Pāṇḍava camp, but
there, he saw a gigantic creature guarding it. This wondrous being wore a tiger skin which was dripping with blood and a long snake served as his sacred thread. Thousands of eyes adorned his enormous head, and flames emanated from those eyes, as well as from his nose, ears, and mouth. Aśvatthāmā fearlessly attacked that awesome personality with his celestial weapons. However, when that superhuman being devoured them all, Aśvatthāmā next hurled a fierce dart. That dart broke into pieces as soon as it struck the monster, and so Aśvatthāmā hurled a bright sword. That weapon simply disappeared into the body of the giant, and so at last, since all of his weapons had become exhausted, Aśvatthāmā became pale with fright. The son of Droṇa then thought to himself as follows: "Kṛpa had warned me that persons who do not listen to the advice of their elders have to lament later on. The frustration of my attempt must be due to its inherently sinful nature. I wonder who this astonishing being is that has defeated me, making me turn away from him in fear? Obviously, further exertion on my part will be useless until my destiny becomes more favorable. Therefore, let me now take shelter of my worshipable Lord Śiva and seek his guidance and protection."

Aśvatthāmā then got down from his chariot and began to fervently pray to Lord Śiva by describing his glories at great length. Finally, Aśvatthāmā implored, "My dear lord, I now offer myself, my body, my mind, and my very soul, unto you as an oblation. Please accept me."

Immediately, a golden altar appeared before Aśvatthāmā, and upon it there blazed a sacrificial fire. Thousands of weird beings also appeared there, having facial features which resembled those of animals. Some of these grotesque creatures had ears on their hands and some had no head. Some had no flesh while others had four tongues. However, all of them were very fierce warriors who subsisted upon flesh and blood, and they all possessed the eight mystic perfections and were fully surrendered servants of Lord Śiva. Indeed, they had all become Lord Śiva's associates after having performed great austerities and achieving mastery over the Vedas while living a life of brahmacarya. As they chanted the glories of their lord, these ghastly beings merrily danced, sang, laughed, and roared with delight. They had come by the order of Lord Śiva so as to render assistance to Aśvatthāmā, and also to witness the great and ghastly
slaughter which would take place that night.

Aśvatthāmā then slowly approached the blazing sacrificial fire with upraised arms, but just then, Lord Śiva personally appeared there in order to restrain him. Lord Śiva then smilingly said, "My dear Aśvatthāmā, because I have been worshipped by Lord Kṛṣṇa with complete purity and sincerity and devotion, there is no one more dear to me than Him. Indeed, it was due to my affection for Lord Kṛṣṇa that I had protected the Pañcālas during the great battle by utilizing my mystic powers in various ways. However, the destined lifespan of the Pañcālas has now run out. Therefore, in order to fulfill your ardent desire, I shall enable you to act instrumentally for their destruction."

After saying this, Lord Śiva gave Aśvatthāmā a wonderful sword and then he simultaneously disappeared from view and entered the son of Droṇa's body. Being empowered by Lord Śiva, Aśvatthāmā blazed up with fierce energy, and when he returned to the gate of the Pāṇḍava camp, he saw that Kṛpā and Kritavarma were waiting there to assist him. Aśvatthāmā then instructed, "My dear uncle and Bhoja hero, I shall now enter the Pāṇḍava camp in order to create a great massacre of the Pañcālas. You should both remain here in order to kill anyone who tries to flee."

Thereafter, by the mercy of Lord Śiva, Aśvatthāmā was able to stealthily enter the Pāṇḍava camp, and after doing so, he dismounted from his chariot. First of all, Aśvatthāmā entered Dhṛṣṭadyumna's tent, and there he saw the son of Drupada peacefully sleeping upon an excellent bed which was covered with a very costly sheet and strewn over with fragrant flowers. Aśvatthāmā angrily gave Dhṛṣṭadyumna a violent kick, and at this, the Pañcāla prince opened his eyes. Recognizing that this was the son of Droṇa who stood before him, Dhṛṣṭadyumna feverishly tried to raise himself up out of bed. However, Aśvatthāmā quickly grabbed him by the hair and pushed him down to the ground. Then, as Aśvatthāmā proceeded to kick Dhṛṣṭadyumna violently in the throat and chest so that he might die like an animal, rather than a warrior's death, the Pañcāla prince struggled to fight back by using his nails. However, due to being overwhelmed by fear and drowsiness, Dhṛṣṭadyumna could not fight with much exertion and so, out of desperation, he finally pleaded, "O son of Droṇa, kindly kill me with a
weapon so that I shall be able to attain an exalted destination."
Aśvatthāmā harshly replied, "The killer of his guru can never hope to
achieve such a noble end."
Then, by means of a series of violent kicks with his heels, Aśvatthāmā
forced Dhṛṣṭadyumna to give up his life. Dhṛṣṭadyumna's wives and
guards had awoken with a start upon hearing his anguished cries.
However, in the dark, Dhṛṣṭadyumna's assailant appeared to them to be
some kind of superhuman being and so, out of fear, they remained silent.
After slaying Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Aśvatthāmā rushing out of his tent while
roaring victoriously, and then he once again mounted his chariot. At
this time, Dhṛṣṭadyumna's wives and guards began to wail with grief, and
so many of the Pañcāla warriors who were sleeping nearby awoke. After
putting on their armor and taking up weapons, they ran out of their
tents in order to find out the cause of the disturbance. When the
Pañcālas came to Dhṛṣṭadyumna's tent and saw their slain commander,
they quickly went and surrounded Aśvatthāmā. However, by invoking a
Raudra weapon, Aśvatthāmā quickly killed them all, and he next went
to where Uttamaujā and Yudhāmanyu were sleeping. After being kicked
in the chest, Uttamaujā woke up with a start. But, before Uttamaujā
could even properly understand what was happening, Aśvatthāmā
repeatedly kicked him in the throat and chest until he gave up his life
while writhing in agony. When Yudhāmanyu awoke and saw that his
brother was slain, he took up his mace and forcibly struck Aśvatthāmā
in the chest, thinking him to be a Rākṣasa. Aśvatthāmā was unaffected
by this blow, however, and he quickly seized Yudhāmanyu, and after
throwing him onto the ground, the son of Droṇa stamped out his life. In
the same manner, Aśvatthāmā killed many Pañcāla warriors, one after
another, as they slept. And, by wielding his sword, he slaughtered many
more along with numerous elephants and horses as he ran from tent to
tent Because Aśvatthāmā was completely covered with blood and had
assumed such a ferocious feature, anyone who awoke and saw him, and
heard his wild war cries, became stunned with fear and closed his eyes.
Meanwhile, the five sons of Draupadī had been aroused from their sleep
by the clamor. After hearing that Dhṛṣṭadyumna had been slain, they
hurriedly put on their armor and began to assault Aśvatthāmā with
showers of arrows. Śikhaṇḍī and many other Pañcāla warriors then
joined Draupadi's sons, but in response, Aśvatthāmā became exceedingly inflamed with rage. Taking up his sword and shield, Aśvatthāmā jumped down from his chariot and rushed toward his foes. During the dreadful battle that took place, Aśvatthāmā suddenly struck Prativindhya in the abdomen with his sword, making him fall down dead. Sutasoma then pierced Aśvatthāmā with a lance and rushed forward with an uplifted sword. However, Aśvatthāmā quickly cut off the arm that held that sword and then struck Sutasoma violently in the side, causing him to also fall down dead. Śatānīka then picked up a chariot-wheel and struck Aśvatthāmā violently in the chest. However, as the undaunted Aśvatthāmā charged at him in retaliation, Śatānīka suddenly stumbled and fell to the ground. Taking advantage of this, the son of Drona quickly cut off Śatānīka's head with his sword. Śrutakarmā then rushed at Aśvatthāmā while wielding a spiked club. And yet, even though Śrutakarmā struck him violently on the left side of his forehead, Aśvatthāmā replied to that blow by slashing his assailant in the face with his sword. As a result, Śrutakarmā also fell down dead, and next, Śrutasena charged at Aśvatthāmā while sending forth showers of arrows. Aśvatthāmā deflected all of those arrows with his shield, however, and then he sliced off the onrushing Śrutasena's head with his sword. Thereafter, Śikhaṇḍi and his followers surrounded Aśvatthāmā. As the battle raged, Śikhaṇḍi managed to pierce Aśvatthāmā in between the eyebrows with one of his arrows. This only further enraged Drona's son, however, and after rushing forward with great speed, he cut Śikhaṇḍi in half with his sword. Then, one after another, Aśvatthāmā singled out the other sons and grandsons of Drupada, along with their followers, as well as the followers of Virāṭa, and slaughtered them all.

While this exceedingly dreadful carnage was being enacted, the Pāṇḍava warriors could see Death-night herself before them, appearing as an old woman with a very black complexion. Wearing but a single red cloth and decorated with red garlands, she wandered through the Pāṇḍava camp, noose in hand, leading away the souls of the dead animals and warriors by tying them all together with a rope. Indeed, from the very first day of the Kurukṣetra war, the Pāṇḍava warriors had begun to see Kalā-rati at night in their dreams, leading them away as Aśvatthāmā slaughtered them from behind. Now, being afflicted by Destiny, this
same scene was actually being enacted right before the Pāṇḍava warriors' eyes.
As the great massacre continued, thousands of Pañcāla soldiers woke up.
However, as soon as these warriors drowsily came out of their tents and saw the ferocious son of Droṇa, they became almost mad with fear. In that panic-stricken state, some of the Pañcāla warriors began to slay one another while the rest were easily butchered by the rampaging Aśvatthāmā.

After some time, Aśvatthāmā remounted his chariot and then continued to slay those who were madly running about, here and there, as if deranged. In the confusion, some of the soldiers huddled together in groups while others simply laid down upon the ground out of fear, and all of the horses and elephants became so frightened that they passed urine and stool. Hordes of Rākṣasas and ghostly beings then came upon the scene, shouting with glee, and at this, the horses and elephants went berserk. After breaking the ropes which restrained them, these animals began running wildly, here and there and because of the dust raised from the stampede, the darkness became so dense that persons could no longer be recognized. The Pañcāla soldiers were practically in a state of shock, and many of them were crushed to death by the stampeding animals while the others were killed by their own comrades. Aśvatthāmā killed many more Pañcālas, and all of those who attempted to escape with their lives were slain by Krpa and Kṛtavarmā as they left the camp through the gate. Even though some of these warriors begged for mercy with folded hands, Krpa and Kṛtavarmā spared no one, and in order to further please the son of Droṇa, they set fire to the Pāṇḍava camp at three places.

As Aśvatthāmā continued to chop up the Pañcāla warriors into pieces with his terrible sword, the ground became completely covered over with the dead bodies of humans, horses, and elephants. Everyone thought, "Alas! We are being attacked by Rākṣasas, and because Krṣṇa and Arjuna are absent, they are able to exert their ghastly influence in this way!"
Before half the night was over, not a single Pāṇḍava or Pañcāla warrior remained alive, and so at last the great commotion died down. Still, countless Rākṣasas and ghosts roamed throughout the Pāṇḍava camp,
gorging themselves upon the flesh and blood of dead bodies. Some of these ghastly beings had five feet, others had fingers pointed backwards, and all of them looked extremely ugly and frightful. Innumerable carnivorous animals also came there along with their families, and they also feasted upon the fat and delicate parts of the slain warriors' bodies.

Aśvatthāmā felt highly exhilarated after having avenged the death of his father by slaying all of the Pañcālas. Then, when he met Kṛpa and Kṛtavarmā after coming out of the Pāṇḍava camp, Aśvatthāmā joyfully described to them all of the details of his great triumph. In return, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarmā described how they had slaughtered thousands of soldiers at the gates, and then they embraced Aśvatthāmā and congratulated him with great enthusiasm. Aśvatthāmā then suggested that they take the good news to Duryodhana. Then, without delay, the three joyfully departed. When Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavarmā came to where Duryodhana lay, they became exceedingly aggrieved to see his wretched condition. The Kaurava king's life was rapidly receding, and while numerous carnivorous beasts surrounded him, awaiting his death, he vomitted blood at intervals while constantly writhing in pain. After getting down from their chariots, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavarmā began to cry and lament in various ways as they wiped the blood from Duryodhana's face. Aśvatthāmā then said, "My dear king, I do not lament so grievously for you, because I know that you will soon take up residence in heaven."

"However, I feel highly pained when I think of how your aged parents, being bereft of their children and kingdom, will have to wander over the earth, begging for food and tolerating the onslaughts of nature. O Duryodhana, when you arrive in heaven, please inform my father that I have killed Dhṛṣṭadyumna and all of the other Pañcāla warriors as they slept securely in their military camp. Now, only seven of our enemies remain alive, the Pāṇḍavas, Kṛṣṇa, and Sātyaki."

Although he had practically been unconscious, when Duryodhana heard this good news, he regained his senses and said, "O Aśvatthāmā, you have accomplished what Bhīṣma, Drona, and Karna could not do! My dear son of Drona, I hope that all of us shall once again meet in heaven." After saying this, Duryodhana remained silent for some time. Then,
after having cast aside all grief for those who had been slain, the Kaurava king gave up his life. Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā and Kṛtavarmā repeatedly embraced the lifeless body which Duryodhana had left behind after ascending to heaven. Then, they remounted their chariots and departed.

Sañjaya said, "My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, after witnessing all this, I also departed and reached Hastināpura at dawn the next morning. O King, the very moment that Duryodhana passed away from his material body, the spiritual vision which had been given to me by my preceptor, Śrila Vyāsadeva, was withdrawn."

The morning after Aśvatthāmā's slaughter of the Pañcālas, Dhṛṣṭadyumna's chariot driver came to where the Paṇḍavas were staying on the banks of the Oghavatī River. After bowing down to Mahārāja Yudhishṭhira, the charioteer vividly described the great massacre and then said, "O King, I was the sole survivor, for I managed to escape at a time when Kṛtavarmā was a little inattentive."

When Mahārāja Yudhishṭhira heard about the death of his sons, he fell down to the ground, overwhelmed by grief. Sātyaki then rushed forward and picked up the king in his arms while the other Paṇḍavas hurriedly came and surrounded them. After regaining consciousness, Mahārāja Yudhishṭhira lamented, "Alas, those who had conquered their enemies have now perished due to being caught off guard. How incredible it is that those who were fortunate enough to have survived the onslaughts of Bhīṣma, Karṇa, and Droṇa, have now been slain away from the battlefield after being aroused from their sleep! From this, I can understand that carelessness is the greatest cause of destruction!"

Yudhishṭhira then ordered, "My dear Nakula, please go at once to Upaplavya and bring Draupadī here so that she can be informed of the death of her brothers and sons."

Thereafter, the Paṇḍavas returned to their camp, and when Mahārāja Yudhishṭhira saw all of his relatives lying slain upon the ground, he became so agitated with grief that after crying out loudly, he suddenly fainted to the ground. Then, as Yudhishṭhira's brothers were attempting to console him, Nakula arrived along with Draupadī. Having already been informed of the massacre, Draupadī was trembling due to grief and...
anxiety, and when she actually saw the slain bodies of her sons, she fainted. Bhīma quickly came and picked up Draupādi, and after regaining consciousness, she wept very bitterly. Then, as Bhīma tried to comfort her, Draupādi suddenly declared, "If my husbands do not take revenge against Aśvatthāmā, then I shall sit down here and fast until death!"

After saying this, Draupādi sat down next to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra, with the appearance of one who had become fully determined to give up his life by the execution of the prāya vow. Yudhiṣṭhīra then said, "My dear Draupādi, you should not lament like this, for your sons have died heroes' deaths, and so they must already be enjoying life in heaven. Besides, Aśvatthāmā has already fled far away. How will you know for certain whether he has actually been slain or not?"

Draupādi replied, "O King, there is a gem which has naturally adorned Aśvatthāmā's head ever since his birth. If I cannot receive that jewel, then I shall not be able to go on living."

After saying this, Draupādi went to Bhīma and pleaded, "My dear husband, you must kill Aśvatthāmā and thus save me from my unbearable grief. Many times in the past you had come to my rescue, and so it is unto you that I now take shelter."

Bhīma could not bear to see Draupādi suffer, and so, without hesitation, he ordered Nakula to become his driver. Then, after mounting upon his chariot, Bhīma set out, following the tracks which had been left by Aśvatthāmā. Lord Kṛṣṇa then chided Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra by saying, "O King, how can you remain indifferent while your brother departs in order to single-handedly fight with Aśvatthāmā? The son of Droṇa possesses the brahmaśīra weapon, and thus he is capable of destroying the entire world. In his student days, Arjuna had especially pleased Droṇa, and so the preceptor had rewarded him with the brahmaśīra weapon. Aśvatthāmā could not tolerate this, however, and so he begged his father to also give him the brahmaśīra weapon. Knowing the restlessness of his son, Droṇa imparted that supreme weapon unto him with great reluctance and then warned, 'My dear Aśvatthāmā, you must never use the brahmaśīra against human beings, even if you face the greatest peril.'"

"Later on, however, Droṇa regretted that he had given his son so much
power. After summoning Aśvatthāmā, he said, 'My dear son, I have certainly made a great mistake by training you so highly in the military science, because I do not think that you are destined to live a very righteous life.'

"After being reprimanded by his father in this way, Aśvatthāmā became exceedingly depressed. At this time, while the Pāṇḍavas were in exile, Aśvatthāmā left home and began to wander over the earth in the hopes of alleviating his grief and achieving more power and prosperity. In the course of his travel, Aśvatthāmā came to Dvārakā, and while taking up residence there for some time, he showed great respect to all the members of the Vṛṣṇi dynasty. One day, as I was walking alone on the seacoast, Aśvatthāmā approached Me and said, 'My dear Kṛṣṇa, while instructing me in the military science, my father had awarded me the brahmaśīra weapon which had formerly been given to him by Agastya Rṣi.'

"Then, as he stood before Me with folded hands, Aśvatthāmā begged, 'My dear Lord, please exchange your Sudarśana-cakra for this invincible weapon of mine.'

"I replied, 'O Aśvatthāmā, you should know that all of the demigods and demons together do not even equal one percent of My prowess. I have four favorite weapons which specifically match this unparalleled potency of Mine: the Sudarśana-cakra, the Śārṅga bow, the Kaumodakī mace, and a dart. O son of a brāhmaṇa, I shall let you choose any of these four without even taking your brahmaśīra weapon in return.'

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I had spoken to the puffed-up Aśvatthāmā in this way just to make him overjoyed with great expectations. The son of Droṇa then boldly declared, 'O Kṛṣṇa, I will take Your Sudarśana-cakra! I replied, 'Yes, take it at once!' However, when the foolish son of a brāhmaṇa confidently grabbed hold of the Sudarśana-cakra with his left hand, much to his surprise, he could not even budge it. At this, Aśvatthāmā grabbed onto the Sudarśana-cakra firmly with both hands, and yet, even though he strained and strained with all his might, he could not move it an inch. As a result, Aśvatthāmā became exceedingly tired and depressed; his illusion of possessing the Sudarśana-cakra having been completely smashed. I then said, 'O son of Droṇa, no one before this has ever dared to make such an impudent request of Me. Not
even My own brother, Balarāma; My dearest son, Pradyumna, who is a portion of Sanat-kumāra and whom I had received after performing severe austerities in the Himālayas for twelve years; nor My dear friend, Arjuna, to whom I would not hesitate to give anything, even My very wives and children. O Aśvatthāmā, just whom did you plan to challenge if you had received My cakra?"

"Aśvatthāmā then had the audacity to reply: 'O Kṛṣṇa, if I had received the Sudarśana-cakra, then, after worshipping You, I would have eagerly challenged You to fight!' After saying this, Aśvatthāmā took his leave from Dvārakā. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you can thus see what a cruel and envious person Aśvatthāmā is, and because he still possesses the brahmaśīra weapon, Bhīma should be protected by all means."

After saying this, Lord Kṛṣṇa mounted upon His chariot, and taking Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira with Him, He departed with great speed. They soon began to overtake Bhīma, but because of His extreme rage and firm determination to gain revenge against Aśvatthāmā, they could not deter him from his purpose. Thereafter, when Bhīma reached the banks of the Gaṅgā, he saw Śrīla Vyāsa sitting there, surrounded by many other great rṣis, and in that assembly was Aśvatthāmā, dressed in kuṣa-grass. As Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and Yudhiṣṭhira closely followed him, Bhīma took up his bow and rushed at Aśvatthāmā while uttering harsh challenges. Even though Aśvatthāmā considered that his final hour had arrived, he fearlessly invoked the brahmaśīra weapon by taking up a blade of kuṣa-grass in his left hand and empowering it with the proper mantras. Then, after uttering, "Let this weapon be invoked for the destruction of the Pāṇḍavas," Aśvatthāmā released the brahmaśīra weapon. At once, blazing fire began to emanate from that blade of grass, and as it expanded in all directions, the conflagration appeared capable of destroying the entire three worlds.

Lord Kṛṣṇa had understood Aśvatthāmā's intentions from the very beginning, and so he told Arjuna to neutralize the weapon by employing his own brahmaśīra. In response, Arjuna got down from his chariot, and after first of all bowing down to the principal demigods and his superiors, he released his brahmaśīra. That weapon also flared up like an all devouring fire, and thus all directions appeared to be ablaze. Indeed, thousands of meteors streaked across the sky, loud peals of thunder...
crashed, and the earth trembled. When they saw how all creatures within the universe had become afflicted with fear, Nārada Muni and Śrīla Vyāsadeva quickly came forward, and by standing in-between the two brahmaśiras, they held in check the intense radiation. These two unlimitedly powerful ṛṣis then rebuked Arjuna and Aśvatthāmā by saying, "Such weapons were never used during the battle at Kurukṣetra. Why then have you been so rash as to invoke them now? We order that you both immediately withdraw your weapons!"

Arjuna replied, "O ṛṣis, I only utilized my brahmaśīra weapon because Aśvatthāmā had employed his first. Now, if I were to withdraw my brahmaśīra, then his would surely destroy us all. Therefore, I appeal to both of you foremost of sages to ensure the safety of us Pāṇḍavas as well as all the creatures who are now suffering because of the fiery glare."

After saying this, Arjuna withdrew his brahmaśīra, and only he or else Indra could have done so, for that weapon can only be retracted by one of complete purity who had executed perfect vows of brahmacarya in student life. Indeed, if one who was impure had tried to withdraw the brahmaśīra, it would have come back to strike off that person's head. Aśvatthāmā was unable to withdraw his brahmaśīra, and so he appealed to the ṛṣis by saying, "O Nārada and Vyāsadeva, it was out of fear of the wicked and cruel Bhima that I had invoked my ultimate weapon for the destruction of the Pāṇḍavas. Therefore, please do not unjustly blame me."

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then chastised Aśvatthāmā by saying, "O son of Droṇa, it is you who have acted very wickedly, being impelled by the evil desire to slay the virtuous Pāṇḍavas. When a brahmaśīra weapon is neutralized by another brahmaśīra, the result is that a twelve-year drought sets in at that place. It is for this reason that Arjuna did not fully neutralize your weapon with his own, for he could not bear to be the cause of the great suffering which would have been inflicted upon innocent living beings. Now, if you obey my order by withdrawing your brahmaśīra and then giving the jewel from your head to the Pāṇḍavas, I promise that your life shall be spared."

Aśvatthāmā replied, "O Vyāsadeva, the jewel on my head is worth more than all of the wealth which is possessed by the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas
combined. One who wears this jewel is freed from all fear of weapons, the demigods and the demons, diseases, as well as hunger and thirst. Normally, I would never agree to part with this jewel under any circumstance. However, because you are ordering me to do so, I shall comply. As for the *brahmaśīra*, I am incapable of withdrawing it and so, if you agree, I shall spare the lives of the Pāṇḍavas by re-directing it towards the wombs of the Pāṇḍava women." Śrīla Vyāsadeva agreed to this compromise and so Aśvatthāmā went ahead and redirected his *brahmaśīra* weapon. Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O Aśvatthāmā, while I was at Upaplayya along with the Pāṇḍavas, a certain *brāhmaṇa* had assured Uttarā that her child would continue the Pāṇḍava line at a time when it would become almost extinct. Therefore, in spite of your *brahmaśīra*, the *brāhmaṇa*'s words will remain true and the child Parīkṣit will be born." At this, Aśvatthāmā angrily replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, what You have declared, due to Your partiality toward the Pāṇḍavas, will never take place! My weapon will definitely destroy Uttarā's embryo!"

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O son of Droṇa, I agree that your weapon cannot prove to be fruitless. Therefore, after the fetus within Uttarā's womb dies, I, the all-pervading Supersoul, the controller of material nature, will instantly supply the child Parīkṣit with a new body so that he will be enabled to live a long and illustrious life. Aśvatthāmā, you are a sinful coward and a killer of children! Therefore, you will have to wander over the earth for 3,000 years without any companion to talk to, in order to suffer for your sinful acts. Indeed, during that lonely period, no one will even come near you because of the stench of pus and blood which will emanate from your body. Parīkṣit, on the other hand, will become the Kuru king, and after ruling the earth for 60 years, he will give up his body in a most glorious manner."

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then confirmed, "O son of Droṇa, it is a fact that whatever Lord Kṛṣṇa has said will come true."

Aśvatthāmā was not completely disappointed with all this, for he was happy to learn that he would be able to live such a long life. At last, after taking off the jewel from his head and giving it to the Pāṇḍavas, Aśvatthāmā departed for the forest. The Pāṇḍavas and Lord Kṛṣṇa then took Nārada and Vyāsadeva with them and returned to where Draupadī was fasting until death. As they all came before the anguished princess

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of Pañcāla, Bhīma handed her the jewel from Āśvatthāmā's head, and after describing all that had taken place, he said, "My dear Draupadī, Āśvatthāmā has been released, destitute of his prowess and good reputation, in consideration of his being a brāhmaṇa and the son of our beloved preceptor. At Upaplavya, you had very harshly rebuked us as well as Lord Kṛṣṇa, for trying to make peace with the Kauravas. Now, you should give up your grief, for Duryodhana and his cohorts have all been slain."

Having become pacified, Draupadī replied, "O Bhīma, I had wanted revenge for the deaths of my sons, but now I am happy to hear that the son of our preceptor has been released. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should take Āśvatthāmā's magical jewel and bind it in your hair for achieving good fortune."

Draupadī thus gave up her vow to fast until death, and at this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, how was it possible for Āśvatthāmā to single-handedly kill our sons and the mighty sons of Drupada!"

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "O King, Āśvatthāmā was empowered by Lord Śiva, and thus he was able to slay so many great heroes without assistance. Now, please listen to the following historical narration."

In the very beginning of creation, Lord Brahmā had generated Rudra and then ordered him to produce population. After agreeing to do so, Rudra plunged deep into the water in order to perform austerities there without disturbance. Thereafter, when a long period of time had passed without any sign of Rudra, Lord Brahmā became highly impatient, and so he created Dakṣa for the purpose of expanding the universal population. Dakṣa could understand that Lord Śiva had already begun to perform austerities for that purpose while living deep within the water. Therefore, he told Lord Brahmā, "O Father, I shall create varieties of living beings, but only if no one else has been ordered to do so before me."

Lord Brahmā then reassured Dakṣa by saying, "My dear son, you are without rival because Lord Śiva disappeared within the water long ago and he has not been seen ever since."

Thereafter, Dakṣa began to generate varieties of living creatures in order
to populate the universe. However, these created beings soon became hungry, and because they saw no other food, they rushed toward their creator in order to devour him. At this, Dakśa fearfully ran to the shelter of Lord Brahmā and begged him to allot some food for the maintenance of the created beings. Lord Brahmā then assigned various edibles so the different classes of living entities by utilizing the principle that the stronger would subsist upon the weaker. After this arrangement had been made, all of the created living entities became satisfied, and so they departed in order to multiply themselves in union with their mates. Lord Brahmā also was very pleased to see that the work of filling the universe with living beings was going on nicely. However, one day thereafter, Lord Śiva rose up out of the water, and when he saw that the number of living beings had greatly multiplied, he became so angered that he spitefully caused his genitals to disappear within the earth. Lord Brahmā then tried to pacify his angry son, and while doing so he inquired, "O Rudra, what were you doing for such a long time within the water, and why have you cast off your genitals?"

Lord Śiva angrily replied, "O Father, since someone else has already created the living beings, what is the use of my having genitals? While within the water, I had performed great austerities. As a result, I was able to create numerous varieties of plants which were to serve as food for the creatures whom I expected to beget. These plants also have the power to multiply just like the moving living entities, and so they can now be utilized as food by those beings which have already been created."

After saying this, Lord Śiva angrily departed for the Menjavat mountains in order to continue his life of austerity. Thereafter, when the Satya-yuga passed away and the Tretā-yuga set in, the demigods arranged for a great sacrifice to be performed, and they decided among themselves how the offerings would be divided. Unfortunately, because the demigods were unaware of the exalted position of Lord Śiva, they neglected to assign any portion of the sacrificial offerings to him. Lord Śiva could understand this, however, and so he became highly enraged. Desiring to destroy the demigods' sacrifice, Rudra constructed a wonderful bow, and after taking it up, he angrily approached the place where the sacrifice was being conducted.
Lord Śiva was dressed in deerskin, and he wore matted locks of hair, and upon seeing his ferocious attitude, the goddess Earth trembled in fear, the wind ceased to blow, and the fire, even though fed with fuel, no longer blazed up brightly. As all directions were enveloped in a thick gloom, the demigods became so overwhelmed with fear when they saw Lord Śiva approach that they could not understand what to do. Rudra then placed a fierce arrow upon his bowstring, and by releasing it he pierced Sacrifice personified in the heart. Then, as Sacrifice quickly fled along with Agni, Lord Śiva chased them through the skies. Being bereft of Sacrifice, the demigods lost all of their splendor, and when Lord Śiva returned, he proceeded to break Sāvitrī's arms, pluck out Bhāga's eyes, and knock out Pūṣana's teeth while the other celestials ran away in fear. However, while laughing wildly, Lord Śiva quickly paralyzed all of the fleeing demigods by whirling about his bow. At last, after releasing themselves from a paralysis by breaking Rudra's bowstring with the power of their command, the demigods, along with Sacrifice personified, came and surrendered unto the feet of Lord Śiva while begging him for protection. At this, Rudra became pacified, and he then cast his wrath into the water. That anger then took the form of fire, which, from that time onward, has had the capacity to consume all liquids. Thereafter, Lord Śiva gave Bhāga back his eyes, Sāvitrī his arms, and Pūṣana his teeth. He also restored the sacrifice after the demigods had assigned to him his share of all the oblations of ghee. Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, due to the anger of Lord Śiva, the entire universe had become agitated. Then, when he became pleased, the world resumed its normal condition. It was actually Lord Śiva who killed your sons and all the great Pañcāla warriors by utilizing Asvatthāmā as his instrument. Therefore, you should not give way to lamentation. O King, just carry on with your duties very conscientiously."

Meanwhile, back in Hastināpura, Sañjaya urged the aggrieved Dhṛtarāṣṭra to perform the funeral ceremonies for the departed souls of his slain relatives. However, Dhṛtarāṣṭra simply continued to lament, and while doing so, he again and again cried out, "Alas! Due to having ignored the good advice which was given to me by Lord Kṛṣṇa, Bhīṣma,
Vidura, and so many others, I have now lost all of my sons as well as my kingdom!"
Then, when Dhṛtarāṣṭra suddenly fell onto the floor while giving way to intense grief, Vidura caught hold of him and urged, "My dear king, please get up. Do not continue to lament like this. Death is in the inevitable end of all those who have taken birth. Indeed, all the living entities in this material world are traveling in the same great caravan which is proceeding toward the destination of death. My dear brother, you cannot diminish misery by obsessively dwelling upon it. Indeed, such indulgences only serve to magnify one's grief. The eternal spirit souls are always coming and going, birth after birth, and by doing so, they create transitory relationships with each other, one after another. Because of the flickering nature of material family and friendship, a wise man never laments for the living nor the dead. That which is universal or unavoidable should not be grieved for. O King, for a kṣatriya to die upon the battlefield is to make the best use of a bad bargain, because it is the quickest means of attaining a heavenly destination. Therefore, you should not lament for the deaths of your sons."
Dhṛtarāṣṭra felt some relief after bearing Vidura's words of wisdom. Indeed, the old blind king understood that the reception of true knowledge is the only means for permanently dispelling grief, and so he begged his younger brother to continue speaking.
Vidura then said, "O King, after death when all that is left of the body is a pile of bones and ashes, there ceases to be any distinction between the rich and the poor, or the beautiful and the ugly. Therefore, no one should rejoice at nor lament over such ephemeral conditions."
Thereafter, Dhṛtarāṣṭra continued to inquire about the science of self-realization, which involves understanding how the eternal soul becomes entangled in fruitive activities under the grips of the three modes of material nature. In reply, Vidura described in detail the processes of birth and death, just as Lord Kapiladeva had formerly explained the subject matter to his mother, Devahūti. Vidura then narrated the following allegory: Once, a brāhmaṇa found himself in a dense forest that was teeming with wild beasts of prey. Upon realizing that he was in such a dangerous position, the brāhmaṇa's heart became exceedingly agitated with fear and so he began to run here and there, seeking shelter.
The brāhmaṇa tried to flee from the forest animals, but he soon found that it was not possible for him to out-distance them. In addition, the poor brāhmaṇa discovered that the entire forest was enclosed by a strong net which kept him trapped inside. All along the circumference of that net were innumerable five-hooded serpents that also blocked his exit. Thus, the brāhmaṇa's condition became very precarious because there was a fearful old woman with outstretched arms who constantly pursued him while crying out, "Wait! Wait!"

"While running and running, the brāhmaṇa suddenly slipped into a deep pit that had become covered over by creepers, and while falling toward the bottom, he became completely entangled in those vines. As a result, the poor brāhmaṇa remained hanging head downward in the pit, just like a bigjackfruit, and from that position he could see a gigantic snake waiting for him at the bottom. Then, as the brāhmaṇa looked up in desperation, he saw a colossal elephant, having six faces and twelve feet, stationed at the top of the pit. Numerous bees also hovered above the entrance of that hole, and from their hive dripped honey which the brāhmaṇa was able to continually drink. However, because his thirst was never appeased, the brāhmaṇa strained his neck in order to receive more and more honey, even in that abominable condition. Then, to his horror, the brāhmaṇa saw that there were innumerable black and white rats engaged in eating away the creepers which kept him from plunging down into the depths of that hole. The most remarkable thing was, however, that in spite of suffering so much due to fear of the forest animals, the elephant, the snake at the bottom of the pit, the old woman at the forest's outskirts, the bees, and the rats who were gnawing away at his support, the brāhmaṇa still maintained strong hopes of continuing his existence.

Vidura then said, "My dear brother, this allegory is told by those sages who advocate the path of liberation. The forest spoken about in this story is the material world, and the wild beasts represent diseases. The fearful woman is Jara (old age), and the pit is the material body of the conditioned soul. The snake at the bottom of the pit represents time and the creepers are the objects of material enjoyment which are cherished by all conditioned souls. The elephant symbolizes the year, its six faces are the seasons, and its twelve feet are the months. The black and white
rats are the nights and days which take away our limited duration of life. The bees represent our aspirations, and the dripping honey is the pleasure which we derive from the gratification of those desires. By carefully studying this allegory, one is able to perceive the true nature of his material life and thus become detached from such an abominable existence."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra said, "My dear Vidura, you have told me an excellent allegory! Now, please continue speaking, for my mind and heart find great satisfaction in hearing your words."

Vidura continued, "My dear king, just as a traveler has to make regular stops when he becomes fatigued, the living entity who is traversing the path of material existence has to again and again take shelter within the womb of various mothers. Because of this, the wise person very carefully gives up lust, anger, and greed. He restrains his senses and speaks only that which is truthful so that he can escape the slaughtering process of repeated birth and death."

Although Dhṛtarāṣṭra was engaged in listening to Vidura, his mind continually dragged him back to the recollection of his miserable condition. Because of this, the old king once again fainted to the floor, and so Vyāsadeva, Sañjaya, Vidura, and others rushed forward in order to tend to him. As they sprinkled water over his body while fanning him, Dhṛtarāṣṭra regained consciousness and then proceeded to weep very bitterly for a long time. Then, while lamenting for the deaths of his sons, Dhṛtarāṣṭra suddenly exclaimed, "Alas! Because I have come to realize that the condition of human existence is intolerable, I shall put an end to my life this very day!"

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear son, please do not grieve so much for the deaths of your children. Once, when I had happened to enter the assembly of Indra, I saw the king of heaven surrounded by all of the great demigods and ṛṣis. Earth personified was begging Indra to quickly accomplish that which had already been agreed upon some time earlier in Brahmaloka. Lord Viṣṇu, who was appearing as Vāmanadeva, the younger brother of Indra, then smilingly said, "My dear Bhūmi, rest assured that the eldest son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra will soon relieve you of your burden by causing all of the proud kings to assemble at Kurukṣetra for their destruction."
"My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Duryodhana was an incarnation of the personality of Kali and as such, he was destined to bring about the wholesale annihilation which you are now lamenting for. On the other hand, the Pāṇḍavas are faultless and so you should excuse them. At the time of the Rājasūya sacrifice, Nārada Muni had informed Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira that in the future, the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas would fight with one another, thus causing a terrible massacre of kṣatriyas. Ever since that time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had endeavored to the best of his ability to keep peaceful relations with his cousins. And yet, it was not possible for him to do so because it was the mission of the demigods to remove the burden of the earth. Now, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira will be installed as the emperor of the world for the benefit of all living beings. You should not think of giving up your life due to hopelessness. Instead, you should pass your remaining days by performing austerities, for in that way you shall insure your future welfare."

After pondering over Śrīla Vyāsadeva's words for some time, Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "O Dvaipāyana, in spite of my unbearable grief, I will now give up the idea of committing suicide, and I shall try to restrain myself from further indulgence in lamentation."

Upon hearing this, Śrīla Vyāsadeva suddenly disappeared from view. Then, at the urging of Vidura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra prepared to perform the funeral ceremonies for his deceased relatives. After calling for his chariot, the old king set out, accompanied by Gāndhārī, Kuntī and thousands of Kaurava widows. Amidst the tumultuous sounds of those piteously wailing women, Dhṛtarāṣṭra swiftly proceeded toward Kurukṣetra. Then, after having gone about two miles, the king met Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavarmā coming from the opposite direction. Kṛpa then said, "My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, we are the only three survivors, now that your son has departed for heaven. However, the Pāṇḍava army has not met with any better fate. After Bhīma's unrighteous slaying of Duryodhana, we massacred Draupadi's and Drupada's sons along with all of the other Pañcāla and Pāṇḍava warriors as they slept in their camp at night. We are now fleeing, for there is always the chance that the Pāṇḍavas will pursue us, and we know that we are incapable of fighting with them."

Kṛpa then said, "O Gāndhārī, do not grieve for your sons, I can assure
you that they all died heroes' deaths."

Thereafter, Kṛpa, Aśvatthāmā, and Kṛtavarmā went to the banks of the Gaṅgā and then, after some time, they parted ways. Kṛpa returned to Hastināpura, Kṛtavarmā set out for Dvārakā, while Aśvatthāmā decided to take shelter at the āśrama of Śrīla Vyāsadeva.

When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra learned that Dhṛtarāṣṭra had set out from Hastināpura, he went to meet him along with his brothers, Kṛṣṇa, Śātyaki, Draupadī, and the other Pañcāla ladies. Thereafter, when he arrived at the banks of the Gaṅgā, Yudhiṣṭhīra saw a big crowd of Bhārata ladies there. Upon seeing the Pāṇḍavas, these women quickly surrounded them while pouring forth their pitiful lamentations. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra passed them by, however, and proceeded toward his old, blind uncle in order to offer his respects. When King Yudhiṣṭhīra came and bowed down before him, Dhṛtarāṣṭra reluctantly picked him up and embraced him.

Actually, Dhṛtarāṣṭra was burning with rage, eagerly awaiting the chance to embrace Bhīma next; not out of affection, but with the desire to crush him to death. Understanding the blind king's wicked intention, Lord Kṛṣṇa quickly came and dragged Bhīma away. Then, in an instant, the Lord put the iron statue of Bhīma which He had kept ready for that purpose right next to the old king. Dhṛtarāṣṭra had the strength of 10,000 elephants, and when he squeezed that iron statue of Bhīma in his arms, thinking it to be the real flesh and blood of Bhīma, he crushed it into fragments. Indeed, by this violent act, Dhṛtarāṣṭra severely bruised his chest and while vomiting blood, he fell down onto the ground due to exhaustion. Śaṅjaya rushed forward to pick up his master, and when Dhṛtarāṣṭra came to his senses, he began to weep for the 'slain' Bhīma.

Understanding that Dhṛtarāṣṭra was now repentant, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīma has not been slain. You have crushed the iron statue of Bhīma which was made by Duryodhana. Since you are the strongest man on earth and no one can escape your crushing embrace, I put that iron statue in the place of Bhīma just to save you from committing a very sinful act. Therefore, please forgive Me, and give up your unnecessary grief."

As a maidservant came and cleaned Dhṛtarāṣṭra's body, Lord Kṛṣṇa
continued, "O King, how can you hate the Pāṇḍavas when the slaughter of your relatives was the result of your own faults? Bhīṣma, Vidura, Myself, and so many others had warned you of what would happen. And yet, you repeatedly ignored us all. One who cannot see his own faults and thus does not accept the good advice of others, must surely meet with great suffering. Therefore, my dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you should humbly admit that Bhīma's slaying of your sons was the justifiable revenge for all of the cruel acts which they had performed in the past."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, what you say is true. Because of excessive parental affection, I fell away from the path of righteousness and thus I am suffering the consequences. I have given up my anger now, and so please let me embrace the real Bhīma. Now that my sons are no longer with me, I realized that my future welfare depends entirely upon the good will of the Pāṇḍavas."

After saying this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra tearfully embraced Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva. Then, at Dhṛtarāṣṭra's request, the Pāṇḍavas and Lord Kṛṣṇa went to see Gāndhārī. Actually, because of the intense grief which she felt on account of the loss of her sons, Gāndhārī wanted to curse Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Understanding this, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, who is able to see into the hearts of everyone by dint of his spiritual vision, came to Gāndhārī at the time when the Pāṇḍavas had arrived at the banks of the Gaṅgā. Śrīla Vyāsadeva then urged, "My dear daughter-in-law, you should not curse Yudhiṣṭhira. Instead, I request you to forgive the Pāṇḍavas. Remember how Duryodhana had approached you before the battle in order to beg for your blessings for victory over his enemies. At that time you said, 'My dear son, you can rest assured that victory will take the side of the righteous.' My dear Gāndhārī, because the Pāṇḍavas were far superior to your sons in terms of virtue, it is natural that they have come out victorious. Therefore, kindly restrain your sinful wrath and try to be forgiving."

Gāndhārī replied, "O Foremost of the āṇis, I have never had any ill feelings toward the Pāṇḍavas, and I know full well that the slaughter of my sons was the result of their evil doings. Still, there is one thing which greatly agitates my heart. In spite of Kṛṣṇa's presence, when Bhīma realized that he could never defeat Duryodhana in a fair fight, he struck my son below the navel in order to gain an unrighteous victory."
While Vyäsadeva and Gándhārī were thus conversing, the Pāṇḍavas had cautiously approached them. Bhīma heard these last words of Gándhārī, and so he fearfully replied, "My dear aunt, I had fought unfairly because it was the only way in which I could defeat Duryodhana. Yudhiṣṭhira's kingdom had been deceitfully taken away from him, and it so happened that unfair means have also been used for gaining it back. Considering all of the suffering which we had to endure because of Duryodhana's sinful acts, he deserved to be killed by any means."

Gándhārī replied, "O Bhīma, whatever he may have done, Duryodhana was a superior warrior, and thus he did not deserve to be slain by unfair means. No matter what you may say, your breaking of Duryodhana's thighs was abominable, just as your inhuman drinking of Duḥśāsana's blood!"

Bhīma then said, "O Gándhārī, I did not factually drink Duḥśāsana's blood. At that time, Nakula was in great danger because his horses had been slain by Vṛṣasena. Therefore, just to frighten the rejoicing Kauravas, as well as to fulfill the vow which I had angrily made upon seeing Duḥśāsana grab Draupadi's hair, I pretended to drink his blood. My dear aunt, how can you blame us now? Surely you must remember how you were never able to restrain your sons from their evil ways."

Gándhārī could not be pacified, however, and with great wrath and agitation, she asked, "O Bhīma, couldn't you have at least spared one of my sons whose offenses might have been less?"

Due to shame and fear, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had been standing in the background. Now, when Gándhārī inquired, "Bhīma, where is your elder brother?" Yudhiṣṭhira slowly came forward with folded hands. As his entire body trembled due to fright, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira softly announced, "My dear aunt, here is the cruel slayer of your sons who deserves to be cursed by you. Knowing myself to be the cause of this wholesale destruction, I no longer have any desire for an opulent kingdom or even life itself."

After hearing these words, which had been spoken with great humility, Gándhārī remained silent. Then, while strenuously repressing her burning grief, Gándhārī peered out from beneath the cloth which was covering her eyes and looked at the tips of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's toes, just as he was about to fall at her feet. Immediately, the beautiful
toenails of the Pāṇḍava king became deformed, and upon seeing this, Arjuna fearfully took shelter behind Lord Kṛṣṇa while Nakula and Sahadeva stepped back out of fright. Then, having gratified her desire for gaining revenge in this way, Gāndhārī cast off her wrath and began to console the Pāṇḍavas just like a mother.

Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas took their leave from Gāndhārī and eagerly went to see their mother. When Kuntīdevī saw her sons after such a long and anxiety-filled period of separation, she immediately began to weep out loud. While gazing wondrously at the many wounds upon the Pāṇḍavas' bodies, Kuntīdevī embraced them again and again and patted their heads affectionately. Then, while continuing to cry and cry, Kuntīdevī took Draupadī in her arms and lamented at great length about the loss of her grandsons. Finally, after becoming somewhat comforted, Queen Kunti took her sons and Draupadī and went to Gāndhārī, and thus all of them together commiserated their grief. At this time, Śrila Vyāsadeva gave Gāndhārī spiritual vision so that she could view the entire battlefield at Kurukṣetra. Thus, with great astonishment, the Queen saw how the vast plain, strewn over with innumerable dead bodies, had become a playground for flesh-eating Rākṣasas, animals and birds. Then, at Śrila Vyāsadeva's command, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the Pāṇḍavas, Lord Kṛṣṇa, and all the widows, went to the battlefield.

There, the ladies were able to behold the bodies of their slain husbands, brothers, and sons being devoured by ferocious beasts, Rākṣasas, and ghosts. Upon seeing this ghastly sight, the women screamed with horror, and after descending from their chariots, some of them fainted onto the ground while others ran about here and there, as if deranged. Gāndhārī then said to Lord Kṛṣṇa, "Just see how my tormented daughters-in-law are running about in the hopes of finding their slain relatives. O Kṛṣṇa, I feel unbearable anguish and disgust to see how the bodies of all these great heroes are now being dragged about by the carnivorous birds and animals which are hungrily devouring them. Just see how the wives of the slain warriors have become mad with grief! Some of them are feverishly joining the severed heads to their respective trunks! Others, upon realizing their mistakes, are exclaiming, 'Alas! This head does not belong to this body!'"

As Gāndhārī lamented in this way, Duryodhana's slain body suddenly
came within the view of her gifted vision, and as soon as she saw it, she fell down unconscious to the ground. At last, after coming to her senses, Gāndhārī ran and embraced the body of her dead son, and while wailing aloud, she lamented, "Oh, how cruel Destiny is! He who had formerly enjoyed life in the company of the most beautiful young ladies, and who was always surrounded by great kings that vied with one another for achieving his favor, is now lying down upon the bare ground, surrounded by vultures! He who was formerly fanned by lovely-limbed maidservants is now being fanned by the flapping wings of crows!"

Then, turning to Kṛṣṇa, Gāndhārī exclaimed, "My dear Lord, look at the wife of Duryodhana and mother of Lakṣmaṇa! How pitiably she is bewailing the loss of her dead husband and son. Behold as well the numerous other ladies. Some of these women have picked up the severed heads of their loved ones and are simply standing like statues, dumbstruck with grief. Look at the young wife of Vikarna! She is trying to keep away the vultures who are determined to tear apart the carcass of her dead husband. Just see how Uttarā is lamenting by the side of the slain Abhimanyu. The poor *matsya* princess was able to spend only six months in the association of Subhadra's heroic son!"

Indeed, Gāndhārī proceeded to point out all of her sons to Lord Kṛṣṇa, along with their anguished widows. Gāndhārī then said, "O Kṛṣṇa, look at how the body of Droṇa has been placed upon a funeral carrier and is being taken in procession to the Gāṅgā with Kṛpa at the head. And, there is the body of Śākuni being similarly carried in procession. I hope that the wicked son of Subala does not cause a quarrel among my sons in heaven like he did between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas here on earth!"

Gāndhārī became overwhelmed by hatred and anguish while describing the gruesome scene at Kurukṣetra to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Falling to the ground, the queen gave up all restraint and thus gave full vent to her anger and sorrow by challenging Lord Kṛṣṇa as follows with great agitation: "O Kṛṣṇa, You deserve to suffer the consequences for having caused so much suffering and destruction! By whatever power of austerity I have earned during this lifetime, I hereby curse You. During the thirty-sixth year from the present after having caused the slaughter of Your own relatives and sons, You shall have to meet with Your end by some ignoble means while residing in the forest. As a result, all the ladies of
Your dynasty will cry and lament, just as the Bhārata widows are doing today!"
With a faint smile, Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "O Gāndhārī, except for Myself, no one can cause the annihilation of the Vṛṣṇis. Still, I shall utilize your curse to help Me accomplish My mission. In order to fulfill your words, I shall arrange for the Yādavas to kill one another with their own hands, and thus relieve the Earth of her final burden. My dear Gāndhārī, it is foolish for you to blame Me like this, for it is you who had allowed your wicked and arrogant sons to create the hostilities which resulted in their own deaths."
After hearing this, Gāndhārī remained silent, and the Pāṇḍavas became very anxious and depressed. After hearing how Lord Kṛṣṇa would annihilate the Yadu dynasty, the Pāṇḍavas considered that their own ends must also be near.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then inquired, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, can you tell me exactly how many warriors were slain during this great battle, and how many managed to survive?"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O King, altogether 1,660,020,000 were killed, while 24,165 managed to escape with their lives."
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then inquired, "My dear nephew, what destinations were achieved by all these warriors after giving up their lives upon the battlefield?"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear uncle, all of those warriors who gave up their lives cheerfully, being confident of the great merit which is achieved by fulfilling their duties as kṣatriyas, have attained to Indraloka. Those who died in a depressed state, being unhappy at having to give up their lives, have attained to the planet of the Gandharvas. Those who died while fleeing, or after having surrendered themselves, have gone to the region of the Guhyakas. Those most heroic warriors who died while fearlessly rushing at their enemies after having become bereft of all weapons, have attained to the exalted region of Brahmā. Others, who, as bystanders, died accidentally on the outskirts of the battlefield, have gone to the Uttarā-Kuru province."
Out of curiosity, Dhṛtarāṣṭra next asked, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, how can you see all of these truths, just like a great ṛṣi?"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear king, I had received the benediction of spiritual vision from Lomasa Ṛṣi when he came to us during our period of exile."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then inquired, "My dear nephew, whom among all of these warriors should we perform the funeral ceremonies for?"

In response, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira ordered Sudharman, the priest of the Kauravas, as well as Dhaumya, Sañjaya, Vidura, Yuyutsu, and numerous servants headed by Indrasena, to make sure that the funeral rites were performed for each and every slain warrior. The compassionate Pāṇḍava king wanted to insure that no one had perished without anyone to look after his future welfare. After being thus commanded, the aforementioned persons procured huge quantities of sandalwood paste, ghee, perfumes, cloths, as well as heaps of dry wood. Innumerable massive funeral pyres were then constructed and thereafter, all of the dead bodies were burned in proper sequence, beginning with Duryodhana and his brothers. While the cremations were in progress, the lamentations of countless women mixed with the vibrations of the Vedic hymns which were being chanted by the brāhmaṇas. The bodies of those warriors who had come from far off kingdoms and thus had no surviving friends or relatives present, were piled up together by the thousands and then burnt to ashes. Night had already fallen when all of the cremations were completed, and at that time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira organized a procession to the banks of the Gaṅgā, placing Dhṛtarāṣṭra at the front. There, the Kaurava ladies offered oblations of Gaṅgā water to the departed souls of their relatives. At this time, Kuntīdevī, overwhelmed by unbearable grief, all of sudden announced, "My dear sons, your great enemy Karṇa was actually your elder brother, for he had been conceived by me prior to my marriage with Pāṇḍu. Therefore, all of you should go now and offer Gaṅgā water to him for his eternal well-being.

When the Pāṇḍavas heard this, they became practically stunned due to great shock. In a voice that was laden with intense grief, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "My dear mother, please tell us just how it came to be that you had given birth to Karṇa before your marriage, and how he came to be known as the son of a sūta."

After hearing the entire story form Kuntīdevī, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira called for all of Karṇa's surviving relatives. The Pāṇḍavas then went
with them and entered the river in order to offer the sacred water for the benefit of Karṇa's departed soul. Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas came out from the water, and all of them were exceedingly aggrieved at the thought of the countless warriors who had been slain.

After concluding the funeral ceremonies, the Pāṇḍavas continued to dwell on the banks of the Gaṅgā for the entire one month mourning period, along with Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vidura, and all of the Kaurava widows. During that time, many great ṛṣis came to visit Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, including Nārada Muni, Vyāsadeva, Devala, and Kanva, and they were all accompanied by their numerous disciples. Yudhiṣṭhira worshipped all of the ṛṣis with great respect, and in turn, they tried to dispel his mental anguish by imparting to him suitable instructions.

One day, as all of the ṛṣis sat surrounding the Pāṇḍava king, Nārada Muni inquired, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, are you now happy that, by the grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa, your enemies have been slain and your kingdom has been regained? I hope that you are not feeling aggrieved on any account."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Nārada, it is certainly true that we have come out successful after having crossed over innumerable obstacles by the grace of our eternal protector and friend, Lord Kṛṣṇa. However, because such a great slaughter was required to fulfill my greedy desire to regain my kingdom, I now feel a very heavy and painful sorrow within the core of my heart which I am not able to dispel. Indeed, my victory seems to be more like defeat, for all of my dear relatives and friends have been slain, especially Abhimanyu and Karṇa. How shall I be able to bear to continue living, knowing that I have unwittingly killed my own brother? Now I can remember how, at the time of the gambling match, when Karṇa had abused us with very harsh language, my anger immediately subsided when I looked at his feet and noticed how they exactly resembled those of my mother. I reflected upon this striking similarity for a long while, but at that time, I could not understand its cause. O Nārada, there is one thing which I am very curious to find out. How was it that Karṇa came to be cursed?"

In reply, Nārada related the incident as follows: Karṇa had always been
envious of the Pāṇḍavas' good qualities, and so, with this in common, he
and Duryodhana had naturally become very good friends. Considering
Arjuna to be superior to himself in the use of weapons, Karna one day
approached Droṇa and requested, "O Preceptor, please instruct me in
the use of the brahmāstra, for I desire to fight with Arjuna some day."
Being partial toward Arjuna, and also well aware of Karna's inherent
wickedness, Droṇa replied, "O sūta's son, only a brāhmaṇa or a kṣatriya
who has performed great austerities should be imparted the knowledge
of this weapon."
After hearing this, Karna took leave from Droṇa and traveled to Mount
Mahendra in the hopes of meeting Paraśurāma. After bowing down
before the great warrior incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, Karna falsely introduced
himself as a brāhmaṇa descendant of Bhṛgu Muni. Accepting this to be
factual, Paraśurāma welcomed Karna, who then began to reside at
Mahendra Mountain. Within a short time, Karna became a favorite of
the Gandharvas, Yakṣas, and demigods who frequented that area. Then,
one day, as he wandered alone in the forest, Karna accidentally killed a
calf which belonged to a brāhmaṇa. Being very sorry at heart, Karna
went to the brāhmaṇa, and after informing him of his mistake, he begged
for forgiveness. Instead of becoming pacified, however, the enraged
brāhmaṇa cursed Karna by saying, "One day, while engaged in fighting,
the earth will swallow up your chariot wheel! Taking advantage of your
plight, your enemy will then mercilessly cut off your head!"
After this, Karna continued living at Paraśurāma's āśrama, and in due
course of time, he received instructions in the use of the brahmāstra, as
well as many other celestial weapons. Then, one day, as Karna and
Paraśurāma were wandering together in the forest, the son of Jamadagni
became very weak and tired due to his prolonged fasting. Because of his
great affection for his disciple, Paraśurāma lay down to sleep by resting
his head upon Karna's lap. However, as Paraśurāma soundly slept, a
blood-sucking worm came there and began to eat his way through
Karna's thigh. Although that worm dug right through his leg, Karna
tolerated the excruciating pain so as not to disturb his preceptor's sleep.
Then, when Karna's blood began dripping onto his body, Paraśurāma
awoke with a start and exclaimed, "Alas! I have been contaminated by
the touch of this blood. How has this happened?"
Karṇa pointed to the worm, and when Parāśurāma looked up, he saw that the wonderful creature resembled a hog with eight feet, sharp teeth and bristles all over its body. As soon as Parāśurāma's glance fell upon it, the worm immediately died by melting into the blood which it had drawn from Karṇa's leg. Then, at the next moment, a Rākṣasa was seen stationed in the sky, who then said, "O son of Jamadagni, I am eternally indebted to you, for you have rescued me from hell."

Parāśurāma inquired, "Who are you, and how did you fall down into hell?" The Rākṣasa then explained, "O Lord, formerly I was the asura known as Dansa. During the Kṛta-yuga I had raped the wife of Bhṛgu Muni, and because of his curse, I became a worm on this earth, subsisting on blood, urine and other such abominable things. At the time of being cursed, I had begged Bhṛgu Muni to inform me of its duration. He then explained to me that someone in his dynasty named Parāśurāma would be the one who would one day temlinate my misery."

After saying this, the Rākṣasa respectfully bowed his head and then departed. Parāśurāma then angrily said to Karṇa, "O false disciple, no brāhmaṇa could bear so much pain with complete patience! Only a kṣatriya could do so. Therefore, I demand that you immediately tell me your real identity."

Karṇa then admitted, "My dear preceptor, I actually belong to the sūta class (mixed brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya castes). I had concealed my real parentage because of my strong desire to obtain superior weapons. O Lord, the guru is the real father because he provides one's second birth. Therefore, it was not really a lie when I had introduced myself as coming from the line of Bhṛgu."

Although highly enraged, Parāśurāma still smiled as he replied to Karṇa, who was standing before him with folded hands and trembling due to fear. The son of Jamadagni said, "O Sūta, as a consequence of your having lied to me, you will have to die in battle. While engaged in combat with a warrior of equal prowess, the knowledge of how to employ the brahmāstra will slip from your memory, and as a result, you will be slain."

Thereafter, Karṇa returned to Hastināpura, and he happily informed Duryodhana of how he had succeeded in mastering the use of all kinds of weapons. Then, once upon a time, Karṇa accompanied Duryodhana
to the svayaṁvara which the Kaliṅga king Citrāṅgadā had arranged for his beautiful daughter. Many other great kings were also present there, such as Śiśupāla, Jarāsandha, and Bhīṣmaka, and when the girl passed by Duryodhana without selecting him, the Kaurava king became so enraged that he took her away by force upon his chariot. Karna stayed close to Duryodhana, and when all of the outraged kings attacked, it was he who drove them off after smashing to pieces all of their weapons and severing the beads of their charioteers. Some time later on, Jarāsandha challenged Karna to a single combat, and the duel that ensued was so fierce that all of their arrows soon became exhausted. Finally, when all of their other weapons were also depleted, and their chariots had become smashed to pieces, Karna and Jarāsandha began to fight hand to hand. At last, when Karna was just about to bifurcate him into the two parts which had been united by Jara, the Māgadha king surrendered. Thereafter, the two became friends, and Jarāsandha rewarded Karna by presenting to him the town of Mālinī.

Hearing about Karna only caused Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's grief to become magnified. Although herself very aggrieved, Kuntīdevī then urged, "My dear son, please do not lament for Karna's death. Both myself and Śūrya had tried our best to persuade him to join with his real brothers, but we had failed. Since Karna had remained determined to continue his hostility toward you, even after being informed of his real identity, his death should not be lamented over."

Actually, the grief-stricken Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had become quite angry at his mother because her secrecy had caused him to become the unknowing slayer of his elder brother. Now, in order to give vent to his pent-up rage, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira uttered this curse: "From this time onward, may no woman ever again be able to keep a secret to herself!"

Then, as he continued to lament, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira turned to Arjuna and said, "My dear brother, if we had simply stuck to a life of mendicancy, then all of these troubles would have been avoided. The life of a kṣatriya is abominable, whereas a brāhmaṇa's life of forgiveness, humility, and nonviolence is glorious. I now hate that anger and greed which had impelled us to fight just like dogs over a piece of meat. Even though I have won my kingdom back, it is detestable to me now, and so I
shall discard it. At last, I can truly see the abominable condition of one who is materially attached! Because Dhṛtarāṣṭra had allowed his son to commit so many acts of aggression against us, I was forced to kill uncountable warriors in retaliation. Alas! Due to being caught up in materialistic affairs, I was forced to commit so many sinful acts, and as a result, I have brought immeasurable suffering to the surviving dependents of all the slain warriors. Anyway, better late than never! Since I have learned the great fault of material attachment, I shall renounce my kingdom and go to the forest in order to live an ascetic life."

Upon hearing this, Arjuna angrily rebuked his elder brother by saying, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, how can you dare to even talk of discarding that which we have attained after so much suffering and endeavor? If you are now going to act just like a fickle-minded eunuch, then why did you bother to fight in the first place? What do you think people will say about you if you renounce the kingdom after having sacrificed so much to regain it? How do you suppose that the citizens' welfare and the performance of sacrifice will be maintained if no one wants to take up the responsibility of leadership?"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was adamant, however, and in reply, he argued, "My dear Arjuna, the path of renunciation is far superior to the path of material attachment. This much I am firmly convinced of, and thus your words cannot deviate me from my determination to wander over the earth just like a madman, indifferent to material conditions, dependent upon no one, and freed from all feelings of malice toward other living creatures. The kṣatriya's aspiration to be elevated to heaven is less intelligent, for we see that even great demigods and rṣis sometimes fall back down to earth."

Bhima then took his turn to rebuke Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira as follows: "My dear brother, how can you dare to criticize the duties of a king and praise a life of idleness? If I had known that this was your actual intention, then I never would have taken up weapons and created such a great massacre. O Yudhiṣṭhira, your so-called renunciation is highly unbefitting, just as if a very lusty man, upon meeting a similarly inclined woman, were to refuse to enjoy her. If a kṣatriya's duties are open to criticism, then why not God, who has created them?"
Arjuna then related to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira the following ancient history in order to illustrate his point: Once upon a time, some immature brāhmaṇa boys left their parents and home in order to practice austerities in the forest. Taking compassion upon the boys, Indra assumed the form of a golden bird and then addressed them from the sky: "My dear brāhmaṇas, those who perform great austerities and then eat the remnants of food from sacrificial performances, achieve very great merit."
Upon hearing this, the boys exclaimed, "How wonderful it is that this golden bird is praising us so highly!"
The bird objected, however, by saying, "O sons of a brāhmaṇa, I am not praising you at all."
The wonder-struck boys then requested the bird to advise them for their welfare, and so Indra next said, "My dear brāhmaṇas, true austerity is performed when one lives a household life strictly according to Vedic injunctions by performing sacrifices, worshipping the demigods and forefathers, and maintaining other living entities."
Upon hearing this, the brāhmaṇa boys abandoned their life in the forest and returned home in order to enter the gṛha-āśrama. Arjuna then urged, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should also give up all false ideas of renunciation and take up the responsibility of ruling over the earth."
Nakula next said, "My dear elder brother, to live as a perfectly pious householder is far superior to the mere renunciation of duties. Once, household life was placed upon one side of a scale, and then in order to balance it, the other three orders (brahmacarya, vānaprastha, mel sannyāsa) had to be placed on the other side. Proper renunciation for a kṣatriya is the giving of his wealth in charity to the brāhmaṇas after the performance of sacrifice. A king who falsely renounces the rule of his kingdom, thus allowing it to become overrun by thieves and rogues, becomes an agent of Kali!"
Sahadeva then said, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, it is far superior to rule over the earth virtuously, without personal attachment, than to falsely renounce one's duties while at the same time maintaining internal attachment to the objects of the senses."
Draupadī then took her turn by saying, "O King, remember how, when we were living at Dvaitavana, you had vowed to end our miseries by
regaining your kingdom after vanquishing the Dhürăräśtras? Now that this has been accomplished, you should not render all of our efforts futile!"

Arjuna then argued, "My dear brother, the king's duties are considered to be highly sacred. When a kṣatriya kills an aggressor, it is not at all sinful, because such violence is neccessary for the upkeep of social order."

Being unable to remain silent, Bhīma interrupted by saying, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, you should rejoice now that our wicked enemies have been slain! Rule the kingdom with grandeur! Perform the aśvamedha-yajña and give profuse charity to the brähmaṇas! In this way, you will be able to give up all of your lamentation."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then replied, "My dear brothers, my dear princess of Pañcāla, even though you may be ignorant of the higher principles of religion, it is still a fact that engagement in self-realization is far superior to acting righteously as a king. The Vedas certainly instruct one how to execute duties properly according to the social system of varṇāśrama. However, such activities are all within the jurisdiction of the three modes of material nature: goodness, passion, and ignorance. At the same time, the Vedas point out that the ultimate goal of knowledge is liberation from the entanglement of material existence, which entails undergoing the repeated cycle of birth and death."

Arjuna then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, once upon a time, King Janaka, the ruler of the Videhas, shaved his head and put on the dress of a mendicant after having made up his mind to leave behind his kingdom, wife, children, and all the rest. Upon seeing her husband about to depart for the forest, the queen hurriedly approached him and began to reproach him with angry words as follows: "O King, how shameful it is that you wish to willfully neglect your duties in order to take up a life of inactivity! Instead of supporting the thousands of brähmaṇas who reside within your kingdom, you want to now maintain yourself by begging! My dear husband, why take the risk of becoming a false renunciate; one who remains attached to the objects of the senses after supposedly having rejected them? It is far superior to work piously within household life rather that become such a pretender!"

"O Yudhiṣṭhira, even the wise King Janaka became confused about his
real duty. Now, by learning his mistake, you can intelligently give up your intention to discard your duties as a God-conscious king." 

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear Arjuna, in the śāstra, two paths are expounded: the path of action (pravṛtti-mārga), and the path of renunciation (nivṛtti-mārga). The nivṛtti-mārga is clearly superior for it leads one to liberation, whereas the pravṛtti-mārga, leading to heaven, still keeps one within the boundary of repeated birth and death."

At this point, the ṛṣi Devasthāna spoke up, "My dear king, Arjuna is emphasizing dharma, artha, and kāma, whereas you are emphasizing mokṣa. However, we should understand how all four divisions of activity are important, and how they should be traversed one after another. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should not prematurely renounce your kingdom. Instead, rule over the earth piously and perform many sacrifices. Please carefully consider what Brahmā had once told Indra: 'When a kṣatriya rules his kingdom righteously, without undue personal attachment, and then, at the end of his life, transfers the royal crown onto the head of his eldest son so that he can retire to the forest, such a king earns the highest merit.'"

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna is speaking truthfully. A righteous household life is proper for you now, and not a life of renunciation in the forest. All other creatures depend upon the householder for existence. Therefore, since you are a kṣatriya, it will be better for you to fulfill your duties as a responsible king rather than to imitate the life of a brāhmaṇa. In this regard, please listen to the following story:

"There were once two brothers, Śaṅkha and Likhita, who lived in separate houses on the banks of the River Vahuda. One day, when Likhita came to visit Śaṅkha at his āśrama, he found that his brother had gone out. While waiting for him to return, Likhita picked many of the nice fruits that were growing there and began to eat them without any qualms. Śaṅkha then returned home, and when he saw that his brother was engaged in eating, he inquired, 'My dear Likhita, where did you get all these nice fruits?' Likhita replied, 'O Śaṅkha, I picked these fruits from the trees here in your āśrama.' At this, Śaṅkha became highly enraged and said, 'Likhita, you are a thief! Therefore, you should
go and confess your crime before the king and request him to give you suitable punishment.'
"Likhita obeyed his brother's order, and when he came before Mahārāja Sudyumna, the pious king got up from his throne in order to respectfully greet his brāhmaṇa guest. Likhita then said, 'O King, I have eaten some fruits belonging to my elder brother without his permission and so I request you to properly punish me for my crime.'
"Sudyumna replied, 'My dear brāhmaṇa, if the king is competent to chastise, then he must also be competent to forgive. Therefore, please request something else of me, and I shall gladly satisfy you.'
"Likhita insisted on being punished, however, and so at last the king dutifully cut off his two hands. Thereafter, Likhita returned to his elder brother and begged for forgiveness. Śāṅkha then said, 'My dear Likhita, I was not actually angry with you for taking my fruits. However, because you had fallen down from the path of virtue, I had ordered you to be punished for your purification. Go now to the river and offer oblations to the demigods and forefathers.'
"After arriving at the riverbank, as soon as Likhita offered oblations, his two hands miraculously reappeared. Filled with wonder, he rushed back to Śāṅkha's āśrama in order to show him the miracle. Śāṅkha then said, 'My dear brother, do not be astonished, for your hands have re-appeared on account of my great ascetic merit.'
"Likhita then asked, 'O Śāṅkha, if that be so, then why didn't you directly purify me with your ascetic power rather than have me painfully punished?'
"Śāṅkha replied, 'My dear Likhita, it is the duty of a king to chastise and correct wrongdoers, not mine. Indeed, by punishing you, both the king and yourself were purified. Because I was pleased to see how both you and Sudyumna had executed your duties, I restored your hands by utilizing my ascetic prowess.'
Śrīla Vyāsadeva then urged, 'My dear grandson, you should not lament for having to perform the duties of a kṣatriya. Such duties are never sinful. On the other hand, it is very sinful to neglect one's royal duties because this puts the citizens in great danger from being exploited by rogues and thieves. O Yudhiṣṭhira, you should satisfy your brothers. Just consider how they endured the miseries of forest life for so many years.
on your account, just waiting for the time to come when they would be reinstated as kings. I can assure you that later on, after having fulfilled your duties as emperor, you shall be able to renounce everything and achieve liberation from material bondage."

Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear grandfather, I no longer desire sovereignty over the earth. After hearing the piteous lamentations of all these women whose relatives had been slain, my heart has become pierced by an unbearable grief and I cannot find any peace or happiness in life."

At this, Śrīla Vyäsadeva next tried to preach from another angle as follows:

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, all activities are being directed by the eternal time factor, which acts instrumentally under the supervision of the Supreme Lord. Therefore, no one should consider himself to be the independent doer of activities. Because the Supreme Lord is the ultimate proprietor and controller of everything, we have no right to become attached to the fruits of our labor. We should not consider ourselves to be the gainers or the losers, and thus rejoice or lament. One should simply perform his prescribed duties faithfully, and remain indifferent to the resultant dualities of happiness and distress. In this way, one truly acts on the platform of renunciation and thus never becomes entangled in fruitive work."

Without directly replying to Śrīla Vyäsadeva, Mahäräja Yudhiṣṭhira turned to Arjuna and said, "My dear brother, even if a kṣatriya utilizes his acquired wealth and kingdom for performing sacrifices, it is still abominable because underlying his so-called piety is the insatiable greed for material opulence and reputation. The path of yoga is far superior since it entails cleansing oneself of all such worldly attachments. I know that the death of my kinsmen is the result of my greed. Due to material attachment, I have become the exterminator of my dynasty, and thus my heart burns with grief, especially when I think of how my childhood protector, Bhīṣma, and my worshipable preceptor have been slain. The death of Droṇācārya especially weighs heavily upon my conscience because it was my disgraceful lie which enabled him to be slain. Indeed, since I have performed so many grievous sins, I shall now sit down here and atone for them by fasting to death. I beg you all to give me
permission, for then I shall be able to set my mind upon this vow without
distraction."
Śrīla VyāsaDeva then said, "My dear Yudhīṣṭhīra, your determination is
not at all proper. Because the nature of your activities is determined by
Destiny, one only increases his misery if he attempts to avoid his duties.
The eternal living entity is wandering throughout the creation in
different forms of life. Thus, he acts in various ways according to his
acquired nature and the temporary relationships which he establishes
with similarly conditioned souls. Because of their temporary and
external nature, our relationship with kinsmen and friends can be
compared to the meeting of travelers at night in a hotel, who then
continue on toward their separate destinations the next morning. One
should not grieve for such temporary relationships since everyone is
following his own course, guided by the hand of Destiny."

Although Śrīla VyāsaDeva tried to dispel Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra's intense
grief, the king simply remained silent and morose. Seeing this, Arjuna
requested Lord Kṛṣṇa to speak next, since his elder brother's burning
grief had certainly placed them all in a very precarious position. Lord
Kṛṣṇa then turned toward Yudhīṣṭhīra, and after taking hold of the
king's hand, He urged, "My dear king, do not become overwhelmed by
grief. The appearance and disappearance of persons in this world is just
like the coming and going of those in our dreams. Besides, why should
you lament? All of the heroes who had died in the great battle are now
enjoying themselves in the heavenly regions. My dear Yudhīṣṭhīra,
please listen as I relate to you how Nārada Muni had once dispelled the
grief of Mahārāja Śṛṅjaya long ago."

"Parvata Rṣi was the son of Nārada Muni's sister, and they were very
good friends and constant companions. Once, while wandering over the
universe in a very affectionate relationship, Nārada and Parvata made
an agreement that whatever they might desire, whether it be good or
bad, must be disclosed to the other. Otherwise, it was agreed upon, if
either would keep some desire a secret, then he would be liable to be
cursed by the other. In the course of their wanderings, Nārada and
Parvata came to the palace of Mahārāja Śṛṅjaya, and they requested the
king's permission to reside there for some time. Śṛṅjaya happily
consented, and soon thereafter, he introduced his very beautiful daughter, Sukumārī, to the āñis, assuring them that she would look after their needs. Indeed, Śrīnjaya instructed Sukumārī to wait upon Nārada and Parvata just as if she were serving the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

"It so happened that Sukumārī's unrivaled beauty and faithful service soon endeared her to Nārada Muni, so much so that his love for her began to develop just like the waxing moon. Being very ashamed of this material attachment, Nārada did not disclose his mind to Parvata. By dint of his spiritual vision, as well as by various external signs, Parvata Muni could understand everything, and thus he became very angry. The excited āñi then said, 'O Nārada, formerly you had promised to disclose whatever was in your mind. Now, however, you have violated that agreement, and in spite of being an avowed brahmacārī, you have become afflicted with love for the king's daughter. Therefore, even though you are my spiritual master, I shall curse you as follows: Even though Sukumārī will certainly become your wife, as soon as your wedding is over, she and all others will see you as having the face of an ape!"

"When Nārada heard this, he also became enraged and counter-cursed Parvata by saying, 'O foolish āñi, although you have become very advanced in terms of piety and ascetic merit, you shall not be able to visit the heavenly planets anymore!"

"Thereafter, Nārada and Parvata continued living together for some time. Soon after being cursed, Nārada married Sukumārī, and as soon as the wedding ceremony was over, she saw that her newly-wedded husband had the face of a monkey. Yet, in spite of this, Sukumārī did not neglect Nārada Muni at all, but instead, she dedicated her heart wholly to him without letting herself desire anybody else. After some time, Nārada and Parvata took leave of King Śrīnjaya in order to go their separate ways. Then, one day, Parvata happened to see Nārada and his wife in the forest. After offering his obeisances, Parvata begged his uncle to retract his curse so that he could once again go to heaven. Upon seeing that his nephew was genuinely aggrieved and repentant, Nārada Muni became compassionate, although he still reminded Parvata that it was he who first uttered a curse. At last, after exchanging mutual
apologies, both rṣis retracted their curses. When Nārada regained his celestial form, Sukumārī began to fearfully run away, thinking him to be someone other than her husband. Parvata Muni then gave her assurances and thereafter, as he proceeded on to heaven, Nārada and Sukumārī happily returned home.

Then, at Lord Kṛṣṇa's request, Nārada Muni continued the narration as follows: "After living with Mahārāja Śrṅjayya for the four months of the rainy season, Parvata Muni suggested, 'My dear Nārada, we have stayed here long enough. We should depart now, after rewarding the king for his kind hospitality.' "We then called for Mahārāja Śrṅjayya in order to take our leave, and at that time, Parvata had offered the king a benediction. Śrṅjayya then very humbly replied, 'O foremost of the rṣis, your satisfaction with my hospitality is in itself an ample reward.' "In spite of this, Parvata urged, 'O King, you should ask for the fulfillment of the desire which has been paining your heart for a very long time.'

"Śrṅjayya then admitted, 'My dear ṛṣi, it is a fact that I have always wanted to have a son who would be long-lived and more glorious than the king of heaven.' "Parvata Muni granted this wish but then said, 'O King, your son will be as splendid as Indra, and he shall receive the name Suvamashthivin. However, because you had arrogantly desired to have a son who would surpass the king of heaven, he will be short-lived. Indeed, you had better always protect your son very carefully from the chief of the demigods.' "Upon hearing this, Mahārāja Śrṅjayya begged Parvata Muni to enable his son to be long-lived. However, the ṛṣi simply remained silent due to his partiality toward Indra. Then, as we were about to depart, I informed the depressed king, 'O Śrṅjayya, when you meet with distress, then just think of me. Rest assured that I shall come and help you, even to the extent of bringing your child back to life if he happens to die.'

"Thereafter, Parvata and I departed, and in due course of time, the king received a splendid son whose stool was made of pure gold. However, Indra soon came to hear about this wonderful child and how he had been begotten because of Parvata's benediction. Becoming very afraid that this superior child would humiliate him upon growing up, Indra ordered his thunderbolt to assume the form of a tiger and devour the
boy. Once thereafter, Mahārāja Śṛṅjaya went to live in the forest for some time, taking with him his wives and retinue. One day, while the little Suvamashthivin was playing on the banks of the Gaṅgā under the supervision of a nurse, a tiger suddenly pounced on him and mauled him to death. The horrified nurse screamed loudly and at this, the tiger instantly vanished while Mahārāja Śṛṅjaya anxiously came running to the spot. When the king saw his son lying lifelessly upon the ground, he quickly went and picked him up. Then, after placing the dead body of his son on his lap, Śṛṅjaya began to lament very piteously. At that time, the king remembered my words, and so he began to think of me with great concentration. I could immediately understand that Mahārāja Śṛṅjaya was summoning me, and so I quickly appeared there on the banks of the Gaṅgā.

"Thereafter, I mitigated Śṛṅjaya's grief by narrating to him the histories of many past illustrious kings. I vividly described how all of these great personalities still had to succumb to death, in spite of their having exhibited extraordinary character and performed legendary feats. Indeed, the king was able to realize that since death is inevitable, there is no use in lamenting over it. Still, I brought Śṛṅjaya's beloved son back to life and then bestowed upon him a life-span of 1,000 years.

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, like Śṛṅjaya, you should cast aside your grief. Rise up now and accept as your duty the burden of ruling over the earth. And yet, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira remained practically dumbfounded with grief, and so Śrīla VyāsaDeva next said, "My dear grandson, it is the duty of the king to chastise all miscreants. The Kauravas had committed so many offenses. That you have caused them to be slain in battle can therefore never be considered sinful." Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Grandfather, I cannot give up the conviction that it was my greed to rule over the earth, and not the noble execution of duty, which has caused the slaughter of so many fathers, sons, husbands, relatives, and friends. What will happen now to their dependents? Upon the deaths of their husbands, innumerable women will voluntarily give up their lives! As the killer of so many women, how is it possible that I shall not have to suffer in hell?"

Śrīla VyāsaDeva thought over Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's words for a few moments. He then said, "O King, in my opinion, you and the other
Pāṇḍava warriors have only acted instrumentally in the hands of eternal Time, which is the destroyer of everyone's duration of life. The kings who supported the cause of unrighteousness have met with destruction as a result of their own misdeeds. Therefore, your grief and guilty feelings are illusory. You consider yourself to be the cause of the war, but in reality, you have simply acted instrumentally. Still, if you feel that you have become implicated in sinful reactions, then you can properly atone for them by performing the aśvamedha-yajña. In response, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira requested Śrīla Vyāsa to describe the varieties of sinful acts and their respective atonements. In order to satisfy the king, Śrīla Vyāsa then spoke on that subject as follows:

"My dear king, these sinful persons must atone for their misdeeds: a brahmaçārī who rises from bed after sunrise or who goes to sleep while the sun is setting; one who has rotten nails or black teeth; one whose younger brother has married first, or who weds before his elder brother has done so; one who kills a brahma; one who speaks ill of others; one who weds a girl before her elder sister has married; one who has failed to fulfill a vow; one who imparts knowledge of the Vedas unto unworthy persons; one who sells meat; one who drinks liquor; one who charges money for teaching Vedic knowledge; one who kills a woman; one who kills an animal; one who sets fire to a house; one who lives by deceitful means; one who lives in disobedience of his gurus orders; one who breaks a promise; one who eats forbidden food; one who deserts a person who has appealed for protection; one who neglects to properly maintain servants; one who refuses to gratify a woman who has approached him for protection; one who fails to give dakṣiṇa when required; one who humiliates a brahma; one who quarrels with his father; one who indulges in sexual relations with the wife of his guru; and one who refuses to beget offspring in the womb of his wedded wife.

"O Yudhiṣṭhira, there are certain circumstances under which these above-mentioned acts can be performed without one's being touched by sinful reaction. It is not sinful to slay a brahma who has attacked one with the intent to kill. It is not sinful to drink alcohol at the advice of a physician. It is not sinful to steal for the sake of one's guru in times of dire emergency. It is not sinful to lie for the sake of saving one's own life, or the life of another, or for the benefit of the guru, or for the purpose of
attaining a woman’s hand in marriage. It is not sinful if a brahma-cārī passes semen in his sleep. It is not sinful for the younger brother to marry first if his elder brother has taken sannyāsa or has fallen down from the Vedic principles. It is not sinful to cast off an adulterous wife or to dismiss an incompetent servant.

"If one kills a brāhmaṇa, then he can atone for that sin in various ways. The twelve-year prescription involves eating only one meal a day of that food which has been acquired by begging, doing everything oneself without relying upon servants, sleeping upon the bare ground, giving up all malice toward others, and openly admitting before all the sin which one has committed. The six-year atonement is to eat very, very frugally, and the one-year penance is to eat only once in a month. If one fasts completely, he atones for the sin in a shorter time. and one can be immediately cleansed by giving away all of his property to the brāhmaṇas, performing the aśvamedha-yajña, or reciting the Vedas while walking continuously for 800 miles. If, on the verge of death, one gives away 1,000 cows to deserving persons, then he is at once freed from all kinds of sins.

"O King, if one drinks liquor, then the atonement is to give up the habit, donate some land in charity, and sincerely adopt a humble attitude toward others. If one has had sexual relations with the wife of his guru, then he must lie down upon a sheet of heated iron, and after cutting off his genitals, reside in the forest for the rest of his life in order to atone for his sin. One can become freed from all sins by throwing himself off of a high mountain or entering into fire. Women can become freed from all sinful reactions simply by leading strictly regulated lives for one year. One who lies to his guru, or displeases him in some other way, can perfectly atone by pleasing him thereafter. If, after stealing from someone, one returns something of equal value to that person, then that is the sufficient atonement. After killing an animal or a bird, or cutting down a living tree, one should publicly declare his sin and then fast for three days.

"Sins which are deliberately committed result in much graver consequences than those which are performed ignorantly or unintentionally. However, whether heavy or light, all sins can be atoned for, provided that one has faith in God. On the other hand, no kind of
atonement will ever prove effective for those who are atheists, malicious, or overly proud.

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then urged, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, if you simply take up your royal duties, then you will automatically become cleansed from all sinful reactions which you may have incurred during the battle at Kurukṣetra. And, if you still feel yourself to be contaminated, then you can perform the aśvamedha-yajña, for that is the specific means of atoning for all kinds of grievous sins."

Next, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired about different kinds of food, and from whom one should accept them. In summary, Śrīla Vyāsadeva said, "My dear king, foods which are inherently rajasic or tamasic, especially meat, fish, and eggs, should never be eaten under any circumstance. Even sattvic foods should be rejected if they have not been offered for the satisfaction of the Supreme Lord. One should never accept under any condition food from impious persons, especially if one is a brāhmaṇa, for such eating will reduce one's luster, energy, and duration of life. When one eats food which he has accepted from a prostitute, then it is equivalent to eating semen."

Thereafter, Yudhiṣṭhira proceeded to inquire about the duties of the four social orders, behavior that should be accepted in times of distress, and the means for reconciling the apparent contradictions between kingly duties and the practice of virtue. In response, Śrīla Vyāsadeva meaningfully glanced at Nārada Muni and suggested, "My dear king, you should hear about all of these topics from Bhīṣma, for only he is capable of removing all of the doubts which have arisen in your heart Bhīṣma has personally associated with all of the great demigods, headed by Indra, and he has received knowledge from many great rṣis such as Bṛhaspati and Sanat-kumāra."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Grandfather, how can I dare to approach Bhīṣma after having caused his death by unfair means and then slaughtered all of the Kauravas?"

At this, Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should not cling so tenaciously to your grief. Instead, just execute the wishes of Śrīla Vyāsadeva and your brothers."

Being so commanded, Yudhiṣṭhira finally threw off his senselessness and
got up from his seat after deciding what should be done. First of all, the king worshipped all of the brāhmaṇas who were present there, and then he mounted upon a new white chariot which was drawn by sixteen white bullocks. Bhima took up the reins of his elder brother's chariot, Arjuna held the white umbrella over his head, and Nakula and Sahadeva fanned him with cāmaras. Yuyutsu followed Mahārāja Yudhishthira on his own chariot, and behind him rode Lord Kṛṣṇa and Sātyaki. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī were in front, seated upon a palanquin carried by men, and in the back were all of the women who were being tended to by Vidura, and behind them were numerous soldiers. The procession proceeded toward Hastināpura, and when the citizens learned of this, they hurriedly decorated their city and then joyfully went out to greet the Pāṇḍavas. Indeed, as the Pāṇḍavas passed through the streets of Hastināpura, thousands upon thousands of people lined the avenues and sang of their glories. Mahārāja Yudhishthira then entered Dhṛtarāṣṭra's palace, where he first of all worshipped the household demigods and resident brāhmaṇas under the direction of Dhaumya. Duryodhana had had a Rākṣasa friend named Cārvāka. At this time, Cārvāka appeared there, disguised as one of the palace brāhmaṇas. Indeed, the Rākṣasa had a shaved head and śikhā, and he held a tridadā in one hand while chanting upon a japa-mālā with the other. While all of the brāhmaṇas assembled around Mahārāja Yudhishthira, offering him their blessings, Cārvāka suddenly spoke: "O King, all of the brāhmaṇas here have selected me to say something on their behalf. O Yudhishthira, we want you to know that you have acted very wickedly by becoming the slayer of your own kinsmen! Since you have killed your preceptor and other superiors, the only proper atonement for you is to immediately give up your life!"

When they heard Cārvāka's speech, all of the brāhmaṇas became highly agitated. However, due to the great shame which they felt, thinking that one of their own members had spoken so cruelly, none of the brāhmaṇas dared say anything in reply. Mahārāja Yudhishthira then bowed down to all the brāhmaṇas and said, "O best of the twice born, let me assure you that I shall certainly give up my life very shortly."

Then, upon realizing what had actually happened, the brāhmaṇas responded, "My dear king, rest assured that this is not at all our desire.
We have now understood by dint of our spiritual vision that this so-called brähmana who has insulted you is in reality the Rākṣasa, Cārvāka. He has spoken in this way just to do something agreeable for his friend Duryodhana. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, please give up any anxiety which you may be feeling after having heard this demon's words.

After saying this, the brähmaṇas uttered the mantra, "Hum," and as a result, Cārvāka was instantly killed because the sound had been infused with their ascetic merit.

Thereafter, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira once again worshipped the brähmaṇas with great happiness, and then Lord Kṛṣṇa related the history of Cārvāka as follows: "My dear king, long ago, during the Kṛta-yuga, Cārvāka had performed great austerities at Badarikāśrama. When Lord Brahmā appeared before him in order to offer a benediction, the Rākṣasa submitted his desire to become immune from fear on account of any living creature. Lord Brahmā replied, 'O Cārvāka, I agree to grant you freedom from fear of all creatures, with the exception of the brähmaṇas. Therefore, you had better be careful to never offend them.' After receiving this benediction, Cārvāka became very puffed-up, and as a result, he began to harass the demigods. The demigods then went to Lord Brahmā in order to find out the means for encompassing the Rākṣasa's destruction. In response to their pleas, Lord Brahmā then said, 'O residents of heaven, I have already devised the means for annihilating Cārvāka. After befriending Duryodhana, the Rākṣasa will offend the brähmaṇas, and as a result, he will be destroyed by their wrath.'

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then sat upon the golden royal throne which faced east in the Kuru's assembly hall. While surrounded by Lord Kṛṣṇa, his brothers, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and numerous others, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira felt somewhat relieved from his burning grief. Auspicious articles such as gold, silver, gems, and svastikas were then brought for him to touch, and one after another, many of the leading citizens came forward in order to present him the paraphernalia which was to be used for his coronation. Thereafter, under Lord Kṛṣṇa's direction, Dhaumya constructed the sacrificial altar. At last, when all preparations had been made, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira took his seat along with Draupadi in the sacrificial arena. Thereafter, when Dhaumya had concluded pouring the oblations of ghee into the sacrificial fire, Lord Kṛṣṇa got up from His seat, took up the
sanctified conchshell, and poured water over Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's head. Then, following Lord Kṛṣṇa's indications, all of the other citizens who were present there also bathed the king, beginning with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the Pāṇḍavas.

When the abhiṣeka was completed, drums were beaten in honor of the new emperor, and the subjects came forward in order to present him with valuable gifts. While accepting all these presentations, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira greatly honored the citizens in return. Finally, profuse charity was distributed to the brāhmaṇas, and in this way, the installation of Yudhiṣṭhira upon the royal throne was brought to a successful conclusion.

Thereafter, King Yudhiṣṭhira quieted the crowd and then delivered a short inauguration speech as follows:

"My dear citizens, if all who are present here sincerely wish to fulfill my desires, then I request that Dhṛtarāṣṭra, whom I consider to be the actual lord of the Pāṇḍavas and the emperor of the world, be shown every possible honor and respect. My only remaining purpose in life is to serve my elderly uncle, and so I request all others to continually bear this in mind. Now, I hereby announce that Bhīma will be installed as Yuvaraja (heir-apparent to the throne) and Vidura shall be appointed my minister. Sañjaya will act as the finance minister, and Arjuna will be in charge of chastising all enemies and criminals. Nakula shall supervise my army, and Sahadeva will act as my personal attendant."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then dismissed the assembly of citizens, and soon thereafter, he performed the śraddhā ceremony for all of his slain relatives. At the conclusion of the śraddhā ceremony, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī gave away vast amounts of wealth in charity to thousands of brāhmaṇas for the benefit of those departed souls. At last, with all of these formalities completed, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to set his mind to the task of ruling over the world. After being installed as emperor of the world, Yudhiṣṭhira made it a point to formally worship Lord Kṛṣṇa. At this time, the king glorified the lord with great love and devotion, and he expressed his eternal gratitude for His having allowed the Pāṇḍavas to regain their ringdom. Lord Kṛṣṇa became very pleased by Yudhiṣṭhira's prayers, and so He reciprocated the king's devotional sentiments by mercifully glancing over him while exhibiting His ever-
enchanting smile. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then thanked Bhīma and Arjuna for their having fought so heroically, and with Dhrūtarāṣṭra's permission, he had them take up residence in palaces which had been previously occupied by Duryodhana and Duḥśāsana. The superior palace of Durmaṛṣaṇa was allotted to Nakula, and Durmukha's palace was given to Sahadeva. At last, as the Pāṇḍavas retired for the evening, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Sātyaki entered Duḥśāsana's palace along with Arjuna, and there they enjoyed sumptuous feasting before taking rest.

Early the next morning, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira went to see Lord Kṛṣṇa. After entering Arjuna's palace, the king saw Lord Kṛṣṇa comfortably seated upon a valuable couch which was inlaid with precious jewels. The lord was dressed in yellow silk cloth, and His unique beauty appeared to be indescribable by any mundane comparison. When Yudhiṣṭhira began to address Lord Kṛṣṇa, however, he soon noticed that the lord did not respond due to being completely absorbed in meditation. Finally, when he could understand that the lord had resumed His external consciousness, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, if You think that I am fit to understand it, please disclose the reason for Your having gone into a trance of meditation."

In response, Lord Kṛṣṇa smiled softly and said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, while lying down upon his bed of arrows, Bhīma had been thinking of me, and thus My attention was irresistibly drawn toward him. O King, you should now approach Bhīma and inquire from him to your heart's content about the varṇāśrama social system and the four puruṣārthas: dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. Take advantage of his auspicious presence, for when Bhīma passes away, then a great quantity of knowledge will also disappear along with him."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "My dear lord, please accompany me when I approach Bhīma. O Kṛṣṇa, he is Your great devotee. Therefore, it is befitting that Bhīma be granted the opportunity of seeing You present before him when he at last gives up his material body."

At this, Lord Kṛṣṇa immediately ordered that His chariot be made ready, and so Sātyaki, who had been sitting by His side, went out and informed Dāruka. Meanwhile, Bhīma lay upon his bed of arrows, surrounded by
all the foremost rśis within the universe, including Nārada, Vyāsadeva, Maitreya, Vasiṣṭha, Brhaspati, Śukrācārya, Parasurāma, and Mārkaṇḍeya. In complete self-surrender, Bhīṣma had concentrated his full attention upon the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and in this state of pure consciousness, he uttered very poetic verses in glorification of his dear lord. Being conquered by his devotees' ecstatic devotional love, Lord Kṛṣṇa, from within, had enlightened Bhīṣma with a very high degree of spiritual potency which enabled him to have perfect knowledge of everything past, present, and future.

Meanwhile, after being informed by Dāruka that His chariot had arrived, Lord Kṛṣṇa quickly rose up from His seat. Then, after ascending His chariot along with Sātyaki, Lord Kṛṣṇa set out, followed by Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhira and Arjuna on a second chariot; Bhīma, Nakula, and Sahadeva on a third; and then Kṛpa, Yuyutsu, and Sañjaya on their own chariots. When the party arrived at Kurukṣetra, they saw numerous funeral pyres that rose up like small hills over the field, which was also strewn over with heaps of broken armor, smashed chariots, and spent weapons. Lord Kṛṣṇa then pointed out to Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhira the five lakes which had been constructed by Paraśurāma and said, "O King, this is where the great warrior incarnation of Godhead had offered the kṣatriyas' blood as oblations to his forefathers after having rid the earth of them 21 times."

Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhira then inquired, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, after being annihilated once, how was it possible that the kṣatriya order could be revived again and again so that it could be exterminated a total of 21 times?"

In reply, Lord Kṛṣṇa narrated the history as follows:

Long ago, the great King Kuśika underwent severe austerities with the desire of obtaining Indra as his child. The king of heaven became very pleased with the king's worship, and so he later on appeared as the son of Kuśika named Gādhi. After marrying, Gādhi begot a daughter named Satyavatī, and when she was grown up, he handed her over to the great sage Ricika, who had appeared in the line of Bhṛgu. In due course of time, Ricika became very pleased with his wife, and so he prepared to have a glorious son. Calling for his wife, Ricika said, "My dear Satyavatī, please take these two oblations of sweet rice. This portion is for you, and
by eating it you shall be enabled to give birth to a wonderful son who will grow up to become one of the foremost ṛṣis. This other portion is for your mother, and it will enable her to give birth to a fiercely powerful kṣatriya."

After saying this, Ricika departed for the forest and soon thereafter, King Gādhi and his wife came to his āśrama in the course of their travels to various places of pilgrimage. Satyavatī eagerly showed the two portions of sweet-rice to her mother while describing the sons which her husband had predicted they would bear. However, the wife of King Gādhi was convinced that Ricika must have favored Satyavatī, and thus she secretly exchanged portions with her daughter. Because of this, in due course of time, Satyavatī conceived a terrible kṣatriya whereas her mother conceived a highly elevated brāhmaṇa. Ricika could understand this by dint of his spiritual vision, and so he informed his wife, "My dear Satyavatī, you have been deceived by your mother. As a result, your son will be very cruel hearted whereas your brother will become a peaceful saintly person who is devoted to the performance of austerities."

Upon hearing this, Satyavatī began to tremble with fear. Then, while bowing down before her husband, she pleaded, "My dear lord, you had assured me that my offspring would be a qualified brāhmaṇa. I beg you to now do something in order to alter this perverse course of destiny."

However, Ricika replied, "O Satyavatī, what has happened was not at all my intention. This unexpected turn of events has been brought about because the sweet-rice oblations were not taken as directed."

Satyavatī then implored, "O Ṛṣi, if the results of our transgression cannot be completely nullified, then I beg you to still arrange for my son to be a gentle brāhmaṇa. If a fierce kṣatriya must be born, let him be my grandson."

Ricika agreed to this in consideration that there is no real difference between a son and a grandson, and thus he felt that his words were not being falsified. Thereafter, Satyavatī gave birth to the great sage Jamadagni, and the wife of Gādhi gave birth to Viśvāmitra. Later on, Jamadagni begot Paraśurāma while residing in the kingdom of the Haihayas, which at that time was ruled over by Arjuna, the son of Kṛtvāvīrya. Indeed, after receiving 1 that he easily conquered over the entire earth, and thus became her emperor.
Under the protection of Arjuna, Agni was able to devour many towns, villages, mountains, forests, and at last, 1,000 arms by the grace of Lord Dattātreya, Kārtavīryārjuna became so powerful the uninhabited āśrama of Apava Ṛṣi. This enraged the great sage, however, and so he cursed Kārtavīryārjuna to the effect that his arms would one day be cut off by Rāma in the line of Bhṛgu. Later on, the sons of Kārtavīryārjuna seized a calf belonging to Jamadagni, without their father's knowledge. When Paraśurāma learned of this, he became highly infuriated, and at once set out for the capital of the Haihayas. Paraśurāma soon found his father's calf wandering within the king's palace, and in retaliation, he severed Kārtavīryārjuna's 1,000 arms. Paraśurāma then returned home, and when the sons of Arjuna found out what had happened, they became mad with rage and departed for the āśrama of Jamadagni. Thereafter, when they learned that Paraśurāma had gone out to fetch some grass and wood, the sons of Arjuna angrily avenged the injury to their father by cutting off Jamadagni's head. When Paraśurāma returned home and saw that his father had been slain, he vowed to rid the entire earth of all kṣatriyas, and after doing so, he went and slaughtered Kārtavīryārjuna's sons and grandsons.

This did not serve to pacify his anger, however, and so Paraśurāma continued to wander over the earth, exterminating the entire race of kṣatriyas. At last, when his vow was accomplished, Paraśurāma gave up his anger and retired to the forest in order to perform austerities.

Thousands of years then passed until one day, Parāvasu, the grandson of Viśvāmitra, began to criticize Paraśurāma in public by saying, "Alas! The son of Jamadagni is a coward. Out of fear of the kṣatriyas, he has retired to the mountains!"

When Paraśurāma heard of this, he angrily took up his weapons and once again went on a rampage, slaughtering almost all of the kṣatriyas on earth. Those who somehow managed to survive then began diligently multiplying themselves, and thus it wasn't too long before the kṣatriyas once again ruled the earth. Upon seeing this, Paraśurāma again went on another killing spree, and this time he not only massacred all of the kṣatriyas, but also their children as soon as they came out of their mother's womb. Finally, after annihilating the kṣatriyas for the 21st time, Paraśurāma performed an aśvamedha-yajña and then gave away the
earth as *dakṣina* to his priest Kaśyapa. In the meantime, some of the *kṣatriya* ladies had managed to protect their children. Knowing of this, Kaśyapa ordered Paraśurāma to take up his residence on the shore of the Southern ocean and never again come within his acquired kingdom. Out of respect for Kaśyapa's order, the ocean created a special place of residence for the son of Jamadagni called Śūrparaka. After the departure of Paraśurāma, Kaśyapa distributed the earth to his assistant priests, and then retired to the forest in order to continue his life of austerities. Being without a ruler, however, anarchy began to set in, and as a result, the earth began to sink. Kaśyapa then protected the earth by keeping her upon his lap, and at this time she informed him, "O Ṛṣi, there are some *kṣatriya* women who are still protecting their sons. In addition, there is the son of Vidūratha, who is being brought up by bears at the Rikṣavat mountains; the son of Śibi, who is being brought up amongst cows in the forest; and numerous other sons of slain *kṣatriyas* who are being raised by Gautama Ṛṣi, the wolves; the ocean, artists, goldsmiths, and numerous other sympathizers. My dear Kaśyapa, please go now and urge these *kṣatriyas* to take up the responsibility of ruling over the citizens righteously."

Thereafter, Kaśyapa began to search for all these protected *kṣatriyas*, and after finding them, he installed them as kings. Indeed, all of the present day monarchs are descendants of these *kṣatriyas* who had somehow or other been saved from the wrath of Paraśurāma.

As Lord Kṛṣṇa was finishing this narration, the party arrived at the banks of the Oghavatī River where Bhīṣma was lying down upon a bed of arrows. Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas got down from their chariots at some distance and then approached Grandfather Bhīṣma on foot. After offering their obeisances unto all of the great ṛṣis who were present there, the Pāṇḍavas took their seats, surrounding the grandsire. Desiring to praise Bhīṣma very highly, Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "O son of Śantanu, your greatness is unique in the history of the world in that you maintained a life-long vow of celibacy, in spite of being surrounded by innumerable beautiful women and royal opulence. My dear Bhīṣma, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira has come here, burning with grief due to the slaughter of his kinsmen. Therefore, kindly dispel his sorrow by
delivering unto him relevant instructions according to the śāstra."

Upon hearing Kṛṣṇa’s words, Bhīṣma slowly raised his head a little and then said, "My dear lord, I request You to think of my welfare, for I am about to pass away from this mortal world, and I desire to achieve an exalted destination. O Kṛṣṇa, I am highly astonished, for as You stand here before me, I can view the entire universe situated within Your transcendental body."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Bhīṣma, because of your unalloyed devotion for Me, I have enabled you to perceive My universal form. I have shown you this favor just to help you to understand that even though there is nothing which exists separate from Me, I am still transcendental to everything as the cause of all causes. Sometimes, persons with a poor fund of knowledge think that because I include everything, I therefore cannot have a personal existence aside from everything. The truth is, however, that even if everything were taken away from Me, I would still continue to exist as the complete whole. This is a very mysterious understanding, but you have realized it by dint of your pure devotion unto Me. O son of Śantanu, you can rest assured that when you relinquish your material body on the fifty sixth day from today, you shall go directly back home, back to Godhead, without fail. Look up, just see how the Vasus are invisibly waiting in the sky until that time when the sun crosses over into its northern course. O Bhīṣma, along with your departure, all kinds of advanced knowledge will also disappear, and thus many great souls are now surrounding you, eagerly awaiting your discourses on virtue, duty, and yoga."

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Lord, what can I speak when He who is the origin of all the Vedas is personally present before me? Besides, due to the severe pain caused by my arrow-wounds, my mind has become unsteady and my limbs are so weak that my very life seems about to depart. My dear Kṛṣṇa, since my understanding has become clouded and my voice is almost indistinct, I request You to answer Yudhiṣṭhira's questions. How could I dare speak in Your presence? To do so would be like a foolish disciple impudently speaking in the presence of his spiritual master!"

In response, Lord Kṛṣṇa awarded the following benediction: "My dear Bhīṣma, henceforward you shall no longer feel the effects of pain,
hunger, thirst, or fatigue. Your memory will be unclouded and your understanding of everything perfectly clear, for your mind will remain fixed in the pure stage known as *suddha-sattva*, beyond the tinge of material influence. Indeed, as your pure consciousness shines forth, like the moon after having emerged from behind dense clouds, your spiritual vision, the eye of knowledge, will reveal to you all subjects effortlessly."

Upon hearing this, all of the ṛṣīs who were present there began to joyfully proclaim the good fortune of Bhīma while at the same time worship Lord Kṛṣṇa from the core of their hearts. The demigods showered down flowers from above, and those who had celestial vision could see the Gandharvas playing upon their musical instruments and the Apsarās dancing in ecstasy. Fragrant, auspicious breezes began to blow, all of the birds and animals became peaceful, and the four directions took on an exceedingly pleasing aspect. Because the sun was already setting, the ṛṣīs began to take their leave for the night and then return the next morning. Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas then also took leave and set out for Hastināpura.

Early the next morning, after performing His religious duties, Lord Kṛṣṇa sent Sātyaki to see if Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was ready to return to Kurukṣetra. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then ordered Arjuna to leave behind all of their soldiers and retinue so that there would be no disturbances during Bhīma's discourses on confidential subject matters. The Pāṇḍavas then went to Lord Kṛṣṇa's palace, and from there, they once again proceeded to where Bhīma was lying upon the battlefield, surrounded by all the great ṛṣīs.

As Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira fearfully approached the grandsire, Nārada Muni urged, "My dear king, you should now put forward all of the relevant questions whose answers can dispel your grave doubts." Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was too shy to speak to Bhīma, however, and so he said unto Kṛṣṇa, "My dear lord, You alone are competent to address the son of Gangā, and so I request You to do so on my behalf."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then approached Bhīma and inquired about his well-being. The son of Śantanu replied, "My dear Lord, by your grace, all of my fatigue, pain and mental agitation have completely subsided. In pure consciousness I can now behold all knowledge of past, present, and
future, as clearly as one can examine a piece of fruit while holding it in his hand. This is all the result of Your merciful benediction upon me. O my lord, why don't You speak to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira about the best of all knowledge? Although, by Your grace, I am also competent to do so, it is not befitting for me to speak in Your presence."

Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Bhīṣma, it is a fact that as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, I am the origin of all types of knowledge. Still, just to enhance your good reputation, I want you to speak to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. I know that as long as the earth continues to exist, these conversations will perpetuate your fame."

After being encouraged by Lord Kṛṣṇa in this way, Bhīṣma requested Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira to begin putting forward his questions. Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear Bhīṣma, Yudhiṣṭhira hesitates to approach you now because he is too ashamed of having pierced with his arrows those who were worthy of his worship. For this reason, he is afraid of being cursed by you."

Upon hearing this, Bhīṣma said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, it is the sacred duty of a kṣatriya to give up his life while engaged in battle. Indeed, a kṣatriya may even have to fight against his own relatives, or guru, when they oppose the path of righteousness."

Being reassured by these words, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira took courage and then approached Bhīṣma with great humility. Thereafter, when he saw how his grandson had taken hold of his feet, the grandsire became highly gratified. With great affection, Bhīṣma smelled Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's head and made him take his seat close-by. He then requested, "My dear king, do not be afraid. You may now begin to question me, as much as your heart desires."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira first of all bowed down to offer his respects unto Lord Kṛṣṇa. Then, after taking permission from all of the senior personalities who were assembled there, he inquired, "O Grandfather, please explain to me the duties of a righteous king. It is understood that everyone's fulfillment of dharma, artha and kāma depend upon the king's proper performance of his duties. Indeed, the execution of royal duties is what restrains the entire world, just as reins keep horses under control. If kings were to neglect their duties, then the whole world would be thrown into confusion. Just as the Sun dispels all darkness, so virtuous
kings rid the world of all kinds of evil influences."
Before replying, Bhīṣma first of all offered prayers and obeisances unto the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who predominates over all others, whether they be in the conditioned or liberated state. It is for this reason that the Supreme Lord is referred to in the sāstra as 'Parambrahma'. After properly glorifying Lord Kṛṣṇa, Bhīṣma spoke as follows:
"My dear king Yudhiṣṭhira, the first and foremost qualification of a king is that he must be a devotee of the Supreme Lord and a worshiper of the brāhmaṇas. Destiny and exertion are the two great factors which influence the lives of men. Of the two, however, exertion is the more important, because destiny is nothing more than the result of one's past endeavors. Therefore, even while achieving an unfavorable result, a king should continue to perform his duty conscientiously, without becoming overwhelmed by grief.
"To follow the vow of truthfulness is the next great qualification of a king, for nothing else can inspire the citizens to have so much confidence in him. Indeed, simply by adhering to truthfulness of speech, one becomes very eloquent and achieves tangible fame. A king should be humble and he should exhibit good behavior. His passions should be subdued and he should not be too meddlesome. A king should be very straightforward in his dealings, but he should also be very careful to conceal his own weaknesses. If a king is too mild, then people will treat him very casually. On the other hand, if he is too fierce, then the citizens will be put into unnecessary anxiety.
"A brāhmaṇa who commits a serious crime, such as killing another brāhmaṇa, having sexual relations with his guru's wife, causing a miscarriage, or engaging in treasonous activities, should be banished from one's kingdom but never inflicted with bodily punishment.
"The most valuable assets of a king are his properly selected servants and the respect and spontaneous service attitude of his subjects. Therefore, the citizens should always be dealt with very fairly and compassionately. If a king is too mild, however, then others will take advantage of him. For this reason, although the king should treat his subjects as affectionately as if they were his own children, he should nonetheless not mingle with them too freely nor joke with them. Such familiarity breeds contempt. Thus, if one is too intimate with his dependents, they
will hesitate to execute his orders, they will divulge his secrets, they will request things which should not be asked for and they will appropriate the food which is intended for him. Such spoiled servants will practice deceit in state affairs and accept bribes, and ultimately they will try to predominate over the king in so many ways. If one is too mild with servants or jokes with them too informally, they will begin to speak disrespectfully of him even in his presence. They will laugh aloud at his mistakes, and when he gets angry, they will not feel any sense of gratitude when he bestows favors upon them, and they will no longer feel anxiety if they are negligent in performing their duties. Indeed, innumerable other evils spring up as soon as a king treats his dependents too mildly or too frivolously.

"A king must always be ready to act decisively and not like a fickle and procrastinating woman. If a king discloses his plans and secrets, then he brings the greatest danger down upon his head. A king should never repose his confidence upon unknown persons, and indeed, he should never even repose full confidence upon highly-trusted servants. A king should administer justice like Yamarāja and amass wealth like Kuvera. He should always be careful to address others in a pleasing manner avoiding a sour countenance, and he should dress very gorgeously.

"A king should bind to his service those who are brave, devoted, incapable of being deceived by enemies, those who are respectful, expert in all areas, coming from families noted for good behavior, those who are experienced in the affairs of the world, honest, dutiful, steadfast, and disinclined to insult others. A king should be careful not to make the slightest distinction between such confidential servants and himself in terms of facilities, treatment, or objects of enjoyment, with the exception of the use of the royal umbrella, and the possession of the power to order others. A king should be so straightforward that he deals with his men in the same way behind their backs as when they are in his presence. A king who is always suspicious of others, and who taxes his citizens too heavily, soon meets with destruction. A king should not be overly proud and indulge in boasting. Once having started a project, he should diligently continue working at it until its completion. The best king is the one in whose kingdom the citizens live without fear and without the need of hiding their wealth. The subjects of an ideal king
know very well the distinction between right and wrong, and they are very attentive to the execution of their duties. They are peaceful, obedient, liberal and disinclined toward disputes. A king must by very devoted to the study of the śāstras, and he must honor knowledge very highly.

"It is said that one should first of all select a good king, and thereafter, he can accept a good wife and begin to earn wealth. Without a good king, one's wife and fortune remain unprotected. Six persons should be carefully avoided as much as a leaky boat at sea: a guru who does not speak, a priest who does not know the śāstra, a king who cannot grant protection, a wife who speaks disagreeably, a cowherd man who likes to stay in the village, and a barber who likes to go to the forest. Protection of the citizens is the highest duty of a king. A king should never take away the citizens' possessions capriciously or without sufficient cause. He should always treat his citizens without haughtiness, and he should promptly give them their dues. A king should never disregard even the weakest of his enemies, for a tiny spark can become the cause of a devastating forest fire."

At this point, Bhīṣma paused for a moment. Then, as the rṣis and other listeners highly praised his speech, Bhīṣma asked Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira if he wanted to inquire any further. The Pāṇḍava king replied, "O Grandfather, since the sun is already setting, I shall continue my inquiries tomorrow."

The Pāṇḍavas then offered their obeisances unto Bhīṣma, and at last, the rṣis, after performing their religious duties, returned to Hastināpura along with Lord Kṛṣṇa. The next morning, the Pāṇḍavas returned to where Bhīṣma was lying upon his bed of arrows. After worshipping the grandsire and the brāhmaṇas, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired with folded hands, "My dear Bhīṣma, how is it that one may become the emperor of the world, and is thus called 'rājan' and rules over innumerable other men? Actually, there is no difference between the ruler of the world and the ruled, because both have the same arms, legs, brain, hair, aspirations, etc."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, during the Satya-yuga, there was no government, no king, no chastiser, and no chastised. Everyone lived very righteously and protected one another so that there was no need
for institutionalized government. In due course of time, however, conditions deteriorated as men's perceptions and understandings became clouded. Virtue began to wane as people became more greedy for material possessions. Due to an increase in the influence of rajo-guṇa (the mode of passion), people became very lusty, and concomitantly, anger became prominent as well. Due to anger, people gradually lost all conception of what should be done and what should not be done. Due to lust, sexual indulgence became prominent, and practically no more distinction was made between clean and unclean foods. People began to speak whatever nonsense that came to their heads, and all distinction between virtue and vice became eradicated. Due to such confusion, Vedic knowledge was forgotten, and thus even the demigods became fearful."

"Indra then took the demigods to Lord Brahmā and said, 'O Grandsire, the human society has become exceedingly degraded, and due to having stopped all sacrificial performances, our own positions are being threatened.' Lord Brahmā replied, 'My dear residents of heaven, please return home now, and rest assured that I shall carefully consider that which should be done for your benefit.' Thereafter, Lord Brahmā composed a lengthy treatise consisting of 100,000 chapters dealing with dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa, as well as the military science and the duties of kings (rājā-dharma). Lord Brahmā then happily announced, 'My dear demigods, headed by Indra, I have composed a treatise which describes how the world of men should be governed. Because chastisement and the fear of chastisement is the governing force, I have named this science "dāṇḍanīti" (the science of chastisement).'

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, Lord Śiva was the first person to study and master this science, and in consideration of man's constantly diminishing life-span, he abridged the work into 10,000 lessons which he called 'vaisālakāsa'. Indra learned this treatise from Lord Śiva and then further condensed it to 5,000 lessons, calling it 'vahudaṇṭakā'. After learning the science from Indra, Bṛhaspati further summarized it to 3,000 lessons, and thus it became known as the 'bṛhaspatya'. Then, Kavi, the great teacher of yoga, reduced it further to 1,000 lessons, in consideration of man's decreasing duration of life and meager powers of comprehension.
Thereafter, the demigods approached Lord Viṣṇu and requested Him to choose one human being whom He considered to be deserving of holding a post superior to all others. The Lord also believed that human society needed a leader, and so He created a son out of his own will and named him Virajas. However, this son of Lord Nārāyaṇa did not want to become the ruler of the earth since he was more inclined toward renunciation. Later on, Virajas begot a son named Kṛttimāt, and he also had the same renounced temperament. Kṛttimāt's son, Kardama, also dedicated his life to the execution of austerities, but his son, Anāṅga, then took up the rule of the earth. Unfortunately, however, he became a slave to uncontrolled passions, and thus he agreed to marry the mind-born daughter of Mrtyu and Sunita. Their son was Vena, and because his nature was very wrathful and ambitious, he behaved very sinfully toward all classes of living creatures. Finally, the enraged brāhmaṇas killed the wicked Vena by means of an empowered blade of kuśa-grass. Vena's right thigh had been pierced by the brāhmaṇa's kuśa weapon, and from that wound emerged a person of short stature, black complexion and reddish eyes. The brāhmaṇas told him, 'niśāda' (sit down!), and so his descendants were known as the niśādas, and they became forest tribes. Then, from Vena's right arm, the brāhmaṇas brought forth a divine personality named Pṛthu. This incarnation of Godhead appeared clad in armor, with weapons in his hands, and he was fully conversant in all branches of Vedic knowledge. Immediately upon appearing, Pṛthu Mahārāja stood before the brāhmaṇas with folded hands and requested them to assign his duty. The brāhmaṇas then imparted the daṇḍanīti to him and ordered him to become the protector of the earth. Śukrācārīya became Mahārāja Pṛthu's priest, and Garga became his astrologer. Then, all of the demigods, headed by Lord Viṣṇu, assembled for Pṛthu's coronation, and while glorifying his transcendental qualities, they offered him many valuable presentations.

"During the reign of King Pṛthu, the citizens never suffered from invalidity due to old age, diseases, calamities, famine, or fear of thieves. When Mahārāja Pṛthu would approach the ocean, the water would immediately become solidified, and when he would come to the mountains, they would make a passage for him to proceed through. Mahārāja Pṛthu milked the earth in the shape of a cow in order to
supply all varieties of living beings with their necessities of life. Because he satisfied all of the citizens, Mahārāja Prthu was addressed as 'rājan', and because the earth became very celebrated during his rule, she earned the name 'Prthivi'.

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, when a person's pious credits become almost exhausted in heaven, he takes birth upon the earth as the son of a king. Because such a person is destined to become the ruler of men, Lord Viṣṇu empowers him so that he can assume that exalted position. It is for this reason that he becomes superior to all others. My dear grandson, what else would you like to inquire about?"

With folded hands, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira asked, "O Grandfather, please elaborate more on the duties of a kṣatriya, and then explain the activities of the other three orders as well."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear king, there are nine qualities which are to be cultivated by the members of all four social orders: suppression of anger, truthfulness, justice, forgiveness, begetting children only upon one's wedded wives, cleanliness, avoiding quarrels, simplicity and maintaining one's dependents. The foremost duty of a brāhmaṇa is to control his senses. If a brāhmaṇa controls his senses, even if he does nothing else except study the Vedas, he is to be considered qualified and the best friend of all creatures. However, if, due to pride of learning, a brāhmaṇa tries to use his acquired knowledge to destroy the good reputation of another, then he becomes fallen and cannot achieve a higher destination after death. If a king simply protects his subjects, then he is considered to have fulfilled his duty as a kṣatriya. The primary duty of a vaiśya is to care for domestic animals, especially the cows, and the profit which he earns from trade should be fixed at one-seventh. Actually, all of the duties performed by the four social orders are considered to be included in the kṣatriya's duties, just as all of the duties of the four spiritual orders are included in the duties of the grhaśta āśrama. Now, my dear king, please listen to the following ancient history."

Once, long ago, after the Dānavas had disrupted the established order on earth, Māṇḍhātṛ became the emperor. This king then performed a great sacrifice with the desire of achieving the audience of the Supreme Personality, Lord Nārāyaṇa. Lord Viṣṇu became very pleased with
Māndhātṛ, and so He assumed the form of Indra and then appeared before the emperor and inquired, "O King, why have you desired to see the Supreme Lord when neither myself nor Lord Brahmā can behold Him directly? My dear Māndhātṛ, you are the emblem of all good royal qualities, and you have pleased me by your performance of sacrifices. Therefore, I shall award you any other benediction which you may desire."

However, Māndhātṛ replied, "O king of heaven, I want to give up all material desires and learn directly from Lord Viṣṇu about the highest platform of duty, which only He is capable of expounding."

Lord Viṣṇu in the form of Indra then said, "O King, the duties of a kṣatriya have been directly enunciated by Lord Nārāyaṇa, and when He appears upon the earth as an incarnation, He personally executes them after killing all of the demons, thus bringing peace and prosperity to human society: Indeed, only when kṣatriya duties are being properly performed can the other social orders continue to exist. Persons who are overly controlled by lust and anger, and thus have no respect for the regulative principles of human life, do not overly commit sinful acts only due to fear of the king. Others, who are self-controlled, gentle and virtuous, are free to execute their duties peacefully because they are living under the protection of a good ruler. Even I highly respect and worship any person who regulates human society by performing kṣatriya duties conscientiously."

After saying this, Lord Viṣṇu in the form of Indra departed, followed by the Maruts. Bhīṣma then said, "My dear king, when a kṣatriya strictly follows his duties, he is rewarded with the goals of life which are attainable by members of all the other varṇas and āśramas. For example, the merit which is earned by a king for protecting his subjects is equal to the amount of merit obtained by as many sacrifices as persons he has protected. O Yudhiṣṭhira, you should not hesitate to take up the responsibility for ruling the world, because the merit which a king earns for simply protecting his subjects is 100 times greater than that which is achieved by the ascetics who are living in their forest āśramas. In this regard, I shall relate to you the following story."

Once, long ago, anarchy prevailed the earth, and thus the stronger devoured the weaker, just like fishes in the ocean. Indeed, the condition
of life was so wretched that even thieves could not enjoy their stolen wealth due to fear that another band of plunderers might immediately come and take it away. Finally, a great number of men assembled and worked out a system whereby they hoped to obtain peace. The agreement was that if anyone spoke harshly, stole, became violently angry, or abducted someone else's wife, then he would be cast off from the society. This system soon broke, however, and so these men at last went to Lord Brahmā. In great distress, they pleaded, "O Lord, because we are without a king, our destruction is near at hand! Therefore, kindly arrange to save us from this great danger!"

Lord Brahmā then requested his son, Manu, to rule over the earth. However, Manu refused out of fear of having to take responsibility for all of man's sinful activities. In response, the inhabitants of the earth assured Manu by saying, "O son of Brahmā, let responsibility for sinful acts rest only upon the shoulders of the performers. If you become our king, then in order to increase your prosperity, we shall give you one-fiftieth of our animals and precious metals, and one-tenth of our grains. In addition, we will give you the most beautiful girls of marriageable age, and the strongest men to serve in your army. And, to insure your future welfare, one-fourth of the merit earned for all of our pious activities will be credited to you, provided that you agree to become our king."

After hearing this, Manu gave his consent, and as he proceeded to rule over the earth, because of his prowess, all men refrained from sinful activities and remained steadfast in their respective duties. Indeed, just after being installed as emperor, Manu toured over all the world, and while doing so, he personally saw to it that everyone was engaged in a particular occupational duty according to religious principles.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then inquired, "My dear grandfather, how is it that the king became known as ‘nara-deva’ (earthly god)?) In reply, Bhīṣma related the following conversation which had taken place long ago between Vasumanaś, the king of Kośala, and Bṛhaspati. After circumambulating Bṛhaspati and then bowing down before him, Vasumanaś inquired, "O preceptor of the demigods, by what means can human society become very prosperous and happy?"

Bṛhaspati replied, "My dear Vasumanaś, the root of the performance of all kinds of duties is the king. Indeed, it is only due to fear of their king
that the citizens do not devour one another. In the animal kingdom it is seen that the different species eat one another according to their natural inclinations. They fight with each other over food and females simply on the base of brute strength. Similarly, if it were not restrained by a king, human society would be dominated by the strong, because the more powerful would take by force whatever they like from the weak and kill them if they offered any resistance. Thus, there would be no fixed possessions or wives. Just as animals gratify their urges without considering the good and bad effects of their actions, wicked persons act in the same way and thus destroy those who are virtuous. Without the strong arm of a king, all culture would cease so that life would become barbaric and fearful just like that of the animals. Considering all of this, who would fail to give the highest respect and worship unto his king? It is because of him alone that people can live happily, and in his absence, everything good becomes disrupted.

"The first duty of a king is to conquer over his own self, for without doing so there is no scope for his conquering over others. The king should extract as taxes from the citizens one-sixth of their income as compensation for the expenditures which are incurred while protecting them. When a king rules exactly according to the daṇḍanīti, the Satya-yuga automatically sets in. Because of their king's influence, the hearts of the citizens become fixed upon virtue, and thus their minds and voices are always decorated with the symptoms of happiness. Diseases disappear, and man's duration of life increases. The earth yields crops without even being tilled, all herbs and plants become very luxuriant and full of potency, and the six seasons become exceedingly delightful to the senses. Because everyone acquires the objects of desire very easily, no one is a miser. When a king utilizes three-fourths of the science of chastisement, the Tretā-yuga sets in, and when he puts to practice one-half, the Dvāpara-yuga ensues. However, when the king abandons the science of chastisement altogether and oppresses the citizens by evil means, then the Kali-yuga sets in.

"One should never employ greedy, foolish, unskilled, lusty or envious persons to execute one's work. If such persons are invested with the king's authority for executing the state business, they will oppress the people with their mischievous plans. Good men become very devoted to
a king who properly protects them and who is liberal, steady in his observance of virtue, always vigilant, and freed from lust and malice. In this regard, a king should imitate the activities of the gardener, not the manufacturer of charcoal. The gardener waters his plants and trees very carefully and takes from them only their fruits and flowers. On the other hand, the manufacturer of charcoal uproots the entire tree and then burns it in order to achieve his end.

"If a sinless person associates with those who are sinful, then he has to accept a share of their sinful reactions, just as water which is associated with wood also becomes destroyed when there is a fire. During this present lifetime, we see that the land holds the pious and wicked equally. The sun warms them both, water cleanses them without distinction, and the air blows on them equally. Their destinations are not the same, however, for the righteous go to heaven in order to live without invalidity or lamentation, whereas the sinful go to hell, which is full of darkness, pain and sorrow."

A king should appoint his brāhmaṇa priest even before his own coronation. The preservation and development of a kingdom depends on its king, but the preservation and growth of a king depends upon his priest. Thus, the brāhmaṇa class is ultimately the support of all society. However, if one who is born a brāhmaṇa engages in performing low work, discarding his own prescribed duties, then he no longer deserves the respect which is offered to a genuine brāhmaṇa.

"Once, after having conquered over the entire earth, King Mucukunda wanted to further test his might, and so he approached Kuvera in order to fight. When Kuvera sent forth his army of Rākṣasas, however, they easily vanquished Mucukunda's soldiers. At this, the king went to his priest, Vasiṣṭha, and rebuked him greatly, considering his lack of ascetic power to be the cause of the king's defeat. Vasiṣṭha then underwent severe austerities, and by his acquired brahminical prowess, he enabled Mucukunda to later on slaughter all of the Rākṣasas. The surprised Kuvera then came before Mucukunda and inquired, 'O King, why have you fought with the help of brahminical prowess and not just the strength of your weapons and arms?' "Mucukunda replied, 'O lord of wealth, the brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas were created by Lord Brahmā for the purpose of achieving success through mutual dependence.'"
Bhiṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, if the king does nothing more than protect his subjects, he receives one-fourth of the merit which they have acquired through Vedic study, giving in charity, worship of the demigods and performance of sacrifice. On the other hand, when a king neglects to give his subjects full protection and thus allows them to suffer because of sinful acts, he has to accept one-fourth of all their reactions. For example, if a thief steals the property of a citizen and the king is unable to recover it, then that king receives one-fourth of the sinful reaction for the act of stealing. However, if the king gives the value of the stolen property to the afflicted person, he is then absolved from having to suffer the sinful reaction. If a brāhmaṇa becomes a thief due to circumstances of extreme poverty, then the king should arrange for his adequate support. However, if that brāhmaṇa continues to steal, even after this arrangement has been made, then he should be banished from the kingdom along with his family.

"There are four kinds of sympathetic persons whom the king can employ to assist him: those who are related by birth, those who have the same objectives, those who are naturally devoted to him, and those who have been won over by kind behavior and gifts. There is also a fifth class of sympathizer. He is the virtuous person who is naturally inclined to act for the cause of righteousness. Such persons should only be utilized for virtuous undertakings, however, for they will never cooperate in order to perform the unrighteous dealings which kings are often forced to engage in. Of the other four, those who are naturally devoted and are related by birth can be trusted more, whereas those who share a common goal and who were won over by gifts must ever be regarded with suspicion. The minds of men are always subject to change, and thus at any time a friend can become an enemy and vice-versa. Therefore, no one should be completely trusted. At the same time, one should not be overly suspicious, and thus, every sympathizer must be simultaneously trusted and mistrusted.

"A king should always keep careful watch over his friends, and certain delicate matters should be done by him personally. If a person is seen to be genuinely pleased when a king is glorified and truly miserable when he meets with defeat, then he can be understood to be a real friend. If a person is in such a position that he would become ruined if the king met
with destruction, then he can be highly trusted. A king should assign each particular task to one person and not more, for people will always disagree with one another. The best qualities to be found in a friend are intelligence, good memory, nonviolence, freedom from anger, indifference to blame and praise, and expertise in business transactions. Such persons should be appointed as one's ministers. Relatives should always be feared as much as death itself, for they cannot bear to see one's prosperity. On the other hand, such kinsmen are a great refuge when outsiders attack one, for they consider this to be a personal affront. Thus, one should carefully honor relatives, but at the same time, regard them with a healthy mistrust.

Thereafter, Bhīṣma continued to illustrate the principles of kṣatriya duty by referring to numerous conversations which had taken place between illustrious personalities. For example, Bhīṣma told of how once, a Rākṣasa had captured the king of the Kaikeyas, intending to devour him. However, when the king fearlessly described how he was perfectly executing his royal duties, the Rākṣasa let him go and declared, "It is a fact that those who give protection to cows, brāhmaṇas, and the people in general, have nothing to fear from Rākṣasas!"

While talking with Nārada Muni, Lord Kṛṣṇa once confided, "O Ṛṣi, even in My own family life I have to suffer the pinpricks of harsh words which are uttered by My relatives. Akrūra and Ugrasena are especially critical of Me, and it is for this reason that I allowed the latter to become the king of the Yādavas."

Indra once inquired from Bṛhaspati, "My dear preceptor, what should one do in order to become well-liked by everyone?"

Bṛhaspati replied, "O King, pleasing speech is the one practice which endears a person to all others. One who speaks rudely or harshly becomes an object of hatred, whereas a man who greets others with a smiling face and agreeable words will please everyone. Even gifts, if they are not accompanied by pleasing speech, are not gratifying to the receiver."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear grandfather, how should one go about consolidating all of the diverse elements within his kingdom?"
Bhīṣma replied, "My dear king, each village must have a headman, and one person should be assigned to supervise ten villages. An officer should work along with two such superintendents, and a higher official will oversee five of these, and thus have jurisdiction over 100 villages. A deputy minister should supervise ten such high officials and then directly report to the king's prime-minister. The headman of a village must be able to ascertain the character of each and every resident, and when he sees a fault he should correct it. The various officers are supported by the produce of his village or the villages which he oversees. The king also maintains himself and his government by taking resources from his kingdom and its citizens, but he must do this just the way in which a man should milk a cow. If a calf is allowed to drink sufficient milk, then it will become very strong and thus be able to carry heavy burdens when it grows up. However, if the milkman takes away all of the milk and leaves practically nothing for the calf, then it will become lean and weak and thus incapable of doing anything for its master later on. In the same way, if a king drains his kingdom by taking away too much of its resources, then the citizens will not be able to accomplish very much. Therefore, a king should always be very kind and liberal toward the vaiśyās, since it is they who develop the kingdom, agriculture, trade and cow-population. If a king is desirous of increasing his wealth, then he should do so by gradually increasing the citizens' burden of responsibility and productivity, just as one gradually increases the burden of a young bullock. In this way, by taking more taxes from the citizens, bit by bit, the king's opulence progressively develops.

"In spite of his being the most powerful person, a king's restraint of his prowess is actually his greatest strength. If a king exploits, neglects, or offends the weaker sections of society, then he will unwittingly bring about his own ruination. After having punished a minister, a king should completely avoid him, because there will always remain in him the tendency for revenge.

"A warrior who dies upon the battlefield without having turned his back, immediately goes to heaven, where he is greeted by thousands of Apsarās who vie with each other for becoming his beloved. On the other hand, if one is slain while retreating from the battle, he goes to hell in order to suffer for an interminable period of time. It is for this reason that a
kṣatriya is rigorously trained to fight enthusiastically and without hesitation, making heaven his goal.

Bhiṣma next cited the following conversation which took place long ago between Indra and Bṛhaspati. Bṛhaspati said, "My dear Indra, a king should never quarrel with his enemies, because quarreling is for boys. One should never put an enemy on guard by showing anger, fear or joy. Externally, one should treat his enemies as if he has implicit faith in them. Then, when an enemy is off guard, he can easily be attacked and conquered."

Indra then said, "My dear preceptor, how can a wicked person easily be known as such?"

Bṛhaspati replied, "My dear king, a wicked person is one who proclaims the faults of another behind his back, who is envious of another's achievements, and who remains silent when others are being praised in his presence. Of course, mere silence at such a time is not in itself a sign of wickedness, but the envious person will also be seen to breathe heavily, shake his head negatively or bite his lip. Another characteristic of a wicked person is that he does not fulfill his promise, especially if repeatedly reminded."

After thus hearing from Bhiṣma about so many different aspects of duty and righteousness, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira remarked, "O Grandsire, the path of kingly duty is certainly long and many branched! Therefore, please tell me what is the most important of all duties, the practice of which will earn one the highest merit, both in this life and in the next."

Bhiṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, worship of the mother, father, and the spiritual master is the most important of all duties, and the commands of these three persons should be executed unhesitatingly. One should never see fault in them, and one should never eat before they do nor eat food which is better than theirs."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then asked, "By what means can one overcome all difficulties in life?"

Bhiṣma replied, "When one gives up all sinful activities by very strictly following the principles of religion, he gradually overcomes all difficulties in life. Better still, if one simply takes shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Nārāyaṇa, Who is now personally present as Kṛṣṇa, he at once very easily succeeds in stepping over the head of
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Bhīṣma, there are many persons who externally appear to be very tranquil, while internally they are actually in turmoil. Similarly, there are others who do not appear to be peaceful externally, and yet, internally they are quite self-satisfied. Considering all this, how can one actually distinguish who has attained peace of mind and who has not?"

Bhīṣma replied, "O King, I shall now narrate to you a story which will help you to understand the answer to your question."

Long ago, there was a wicked king named Paurīka who ruled from his capital city, Purīka. As a result of his very sinful and cruel acts, this king had to accept the body of a jackal in his next life. By the mercy of the Lord, however, Paurīka was able to remember his past royal prosperity, and because of this, he felt very morose on account of having become so degraded. Having become very repentant for his past sinful life, the jackal decided to completely abstain from meat as a penance. Furthermore, because he could directly see how suffering is brought about by a sinful life, he became truthful in speech and compassionate toward all others. The jackal remained living at the place of his birth, a large crematorium, and he subsisted upon whatever fruits happened to fall from the trees. However, the other jackals were unable to bear the sight of their brother's pure behavior. Thus, they tried to preach to him by saying, "My dear brother, your mode of behavior is perverse, for jackals are by nature meat-eaters. Just act like the rest of us, and as a reward, we shall supply you with all of your food."

The pious jackal then replied with sweet words, "My dear brothers, although I have taken this low birth, I do not wish to act in a lowly manner. Instead, I aspire to act piously and thus spread my good fame. The particular species in which one is born, or the occupational duty which he has therefore acquired, does not determine one's true merit. It is his understanding and behavior which qualifies a person as either elevated or degraded. For this reason, I do not wish to live like the other jackals who simply exist for the purpose of filling their bellies!"

A tiger happened to overhear this conversation. Considering the jackal to be a very pious and learned person, the tiger approached him, and
after worshipping him very respectfully, he humbly requested that the jackal become his minister. The jackal replied, "My dear king, I am very pleased by your noble words and the honor which you have shown me. However, I feel that I may not be properly suited for such a political post. I have no desire to alter my position for economic development, and indeed, I prefer the simple and anxiety-free forest life to the life of intrigue that invariably thrives in the royal palace. O King, you may highly respect me now, but there is no doubt that after some time, your other wicked ministers will sow seeds of dissension between us. However, in spite of all these drawbacks, I shall agree to become your minister, if you will accept the following conditions: I never want to be consulted along with your other ministers; I must always meet with you in private. In addition, I must never be called upon to give advice regarding your family members, and you must promise never to punish me or any of my dependents without sufficient cause."

In spite of all these conditions, the tiger happily accepted the jackal as his minister. Later on, however, when the other servants of the king saw how much honor and respect was being given to the jackal, they became very envious. Indeed, while talking among themselves, these wicked ministers openly expressed their hatred for the new minister. Because these other servants of the king lived by misappropriating the wealth of others, they saw the jackal as a great threat to their existence. First of all, they tried to bring the jackal to their side by offering him large bribes. The wise and pious jackal was never tempted, however, and as a result, the other ministers became even more envious and afraid of him. Finally, after conspiring together, they took some very special meat which was meant for the king, and placed it within the jackal's house. Although the jackal found out about this plot, he remained silent, remembering how the king had agreed to never mistrust him without sufficient cause. Then, when dinner time came, the tiger learned that the meat which been kept for his meal was missing. In a fit of anger, the king ordered his officers to go and catch the thief. Soon thereafter, the deceitful ministers returned and informed the tiger that it was the jackal who had stolen his meat. Upon hearing this, the enraged king ordered that the jackal be immediately put to death. This command greatly pleased the wicked ministers, and in order to further encourage the
tiger, they exclaimed, "O King, this jackal is righteous only in speech! In disposition, he is actually the most sinful of persons! Thus, we can understand that his vegetarianism and other austerities are just a make-show for achieving his nefarious ends!"

In order to provide proof for their accusations, the wicked ministers had paid someone to find the meat in the jackal's house and then bring it before the king. When he saw the stolen meat, the tiger more vehemently repeated his order, saying, "The jackal must be slain at once!"

At this time, the tiger's mother came to her son in order to awaken his good sense. She warned, "My dear king, you should not blindly accept these false accusations, for even the most pure individual will have enemies within this material world. Sinful persons naturally hate those who are virtuous, just as the lazy hate the active, the ugly hate the beautiful, the ignorant hate the learned, and the poor hate the rich. I know for a fact that the jackal never eats meat, even when it is offered to him. My dear son, it is a fact that good persons sometimes externally resemble those who are wicked, and evil persons sometimes adopt the garb of piety. However, for this very reason, careful scrutiny is required to find out the real truth, since first appearances can be very deceptive. One who makes a decision only after sufficient analysis does not have to lament later on for having made an error of judgment. The jackal is actually your well-wisher, and so it behooves you not to falsely consider him guilty."

After hearing this, an assistant to the jackal emerged from the crowd which had gathered, and he revealed everything about the conspiracy which had been enacted by the king's wicked ministers. When the jackal's innocence was at last firmly established, the king immediately summoned him. Indeed, after honoring the jackal greatly, the king embraced him with great affection, again and again. Being highly conversant with the science of diplomacy, however, the jackal's heart burned with grief. After offering his obeisances unto the tiger, the jackal said, "My dear king, kindly give me permission to dispel my sorrows by observing the vow of prāya (fasting until death)."

When he heard this, the surprised tiger very affectionately tried to dissuade the jackal from his determination. However, with a voice that
was choked up with tears, the jackal explained, "My dear king, at first I was highly honored by you, but now you have unwittingly insulted me. Because this type of behavior is just suitable for creating enemies, I am no longer a desirable asset for you, and thus I no longer deserve to reside within your kingdom. When a king's servant is driven out of office, or somehow becomes discontented, or is no longer shown honor as before, or is deceived by his master, or has had his property unfairly confiscated, or is deprived of the facilities that would enable him to achieve the greatness which he is capable of, he always burns with anger upon remembering the harm which was done to him, and thus he eagerly waits for some calamity to overtake his master. Indeed, such disillusioned servants often leave the king in order to become instruments in the hands of the enemy. Therefore, since you have insulted me, I should no longer be trusted.

"My dear king, if I were to remain with you, then I would always have to see you looking at me with suspicion. This would cause me constant anxiety, and because it would also give your enemies a weak point to strike at, your subjects would become fearful as well.

O King, from this analysis you can understand that when a servant is first of all honored and then later on dishonored, it creates a situation which is fraught with many perils. Indeed, once two persons have become separated by a breach of trust, it is extremely difficult to reunite them, just as much as two closely united persons are very difficult to separate. After such a breach of friendship, even if two persons are reunited, their affectionate relationship will never be the same as before."

After instructing the tiger in this way, the jackal took his leave and then retired to the forest. There, he gave up his body by fasting until death, and after doing so, he proceeded to heaven.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, how should a king act in order to become happy?"

Bhīṣma replied, "O King, he certainly should not act like the camel in the short story which I shall now relate to you."

Long ago, in the Satya-yuga, there was a huge camel who could remember the events of his former life. This camel could understand
that past sinful deeds were the cause of his present miserable condition, 
and so he began to perform severe austerities while residing in the forest. 
After some time, Lord Brahmā became pleased and thus appeared in 
order to offer him a benediction. However; in spite of obtaining such 
golden opportunity, the foolish camel requested, "My dear lord, please 
make my neck 100 yojanas long so that I shall be able to take food from 
any place I like, without exertion."
Lord Brahmā granted this boon and from that day forward, the camel 
became idle. Some time later on, as the camel was engaged in effortlessly 
picking up food with his long neck, a violent storm arose, creating a 
fearful situation for all living beings. At this time, the camel decided to 
take shelter by putting his head and neck into a deep cave until the 
storm had subsided. The storm continued to rage for a long time, 
however, flooding the entire earth. At last, a jackal and his wife, 
drenched to the bone and shivering due to the cold, took shelter in that 
same cave. Being exceedingly tired and hungry, when the jackals saw the 
camel's neck before them, they began to eat it with great relish. 
Although the camel felt unbearable pain and tried his best to withdraw 
its neck from the cave, because the jackals were so tenacious, he was 
unable to do so, and thus at last, he gave up his life.
Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, idleness is therefore said to be 
one's greatest enemy. On the other hand, one should not act feverishly 
or blindly, but everything should be done with the proper means. 
Because success ultimately depends upon utilizing one's good 
intelligence, those works which are accomplished by the brain are 
considered to be the best. Those works which are done by the use of 
arms are considered mediocre, those which are performed with the feet 
are considered inferior, and those which are performed by carrying 
heavy loads are considered the lowest."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O Grandsire, how should a king 
behave toward an enemy who is more powerful than himself?"
Bhīṣma replied, "Once, the ocean had inquired from the rivers: 'O 
Goddesses, why is it that with your strong currents you bring into me 
many great trees after tearing them from your banks, but never the 
weaker canes which also grow there? Is it out of contempt for the canes 
that you neglect them?"
"Gaṅgādevī then replied, 'My dear ocean, the great trees which stand upon our banks are unyielding, and because of their stiffness they are carried away by our raging currents. On the other hand, the canes bend with the currents, and when the water once again becomes calm, they resume their normal posture. It is because the canes are yielding rather than stiff that they are not carried away and thus suffer.'

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, when a king sees that his enemy is more powerful than himself, then he should adopt the behavior of the cane in order to avoid destruction."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then asked, "My dear grandfather, how should one behave when, in an assembly of men, one is addressed with harsh words by an ignorant and puffed-up person?"

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear grandson, if one does not become angry when abused by another, then he takes away all of that person's merit which had been achieved by that person's good deeds. In addition, he transfers unto the abuser the reactions of his own sinful actions. After all, what is the value of the praise or blame which is uttered by a vulgar fool? A person who praises a person in his presence but then speaks ill of him when his back is turned, is no better than a dog. One who is always engaged in speaking ill of others should be carefully avoided, for if one tries to counter such a person by coming down to his level, he becomes degraded by that attempt. In a debate, a virtuous person's tactics are limited, whereas a deceitful person can apply many abominable methods. And, if a truthful person tries to use degraded tactics which are more congenial to his opponent, he will find himself to be at even a greater disadvantage. Because of this, an honest and truthful man should always avoid an argument with an unscrupulous person. Now, my dear king, please listen attentively as I narrate to you a story which I had once heard from the ṛṣis who reside at the āśrama of Paraśurāma."

There was once an ascetic who lived upon fruits and roots within an uninhabited forest. Because of his severe austerities, this brāhmaṇa became highly purified at heart, and as a result of this, he exhibited great kindness toward all living creatures. All of the forest animals knew of the ṛṣi's goodness, and so they used to approach him with an attitude of friendship; even the lions, tigers, and elephants. Indeed, these ferocious animals used to act just like the brāhmaṇa's disciples by
questioning him in various ways. One dog used to live with the gentle ṛṣi, and it was so devoted to him that it continually sat at his feet without leaving for even a moment. By the ṛṣi's good association, the dog exhibited the gentle qualities of a human being, and it performed austerities as well. Indeed, due to fasting, the dog eventually became very weak and skinny. One day, a hungry leopard came to the ṛṣi's āśrama, hoping to eat the dog. Becoming exceedingly frightened, the dog begged its master to protect it, and so the brāhmaṇa, who knew the languages of all the animals, replied, "There is no need for you to be afraid, for I shall transform you into a leopard."

Instantly, the dog became a leopard with golden skin, black stripes and very sharp teeth. Upon seeing the dog turn into a leopard, the hungry leopard gave up his animosity and quietly left the ṛṣi's āśrama. Thereafter, the dog-turned-leopard continued to reside at the ṛṣi's āśrama without any fear, until one day, a hungry tiger came there in order to devour it. Once again, the dog-turned-leopard fearfully approached the ṛṣi for protection, and out of affection, the brāhmaṇa transformed it into a tiger. At this the hungry tiger went away, and thereafter, the dog-turned-tiger continued to reside fearlessly in that forest. However, due to this change of body, the former dog gave up eating fruits and roots and began to subsist upon the other animals of the forest.

Then, one day, as the dog-turned-tiger was sleeping peacefully in the āśrama of the ṛṣi, he suddenly awoke with a start to see a gigantic elephant rushing toward him through the forest. The frightened dog-turned-tiger again took shelter of the ṛṣi, and so the brāhmaṇa instantly transformed it into an elephant. Upon seeing this, the mad elephant went away, and thereafter, the dog-turned-elephant continued residing in the forest without fear. Soon after, however, a mighty lion who was accustomed to eating elephants came that way, and the transformed dog began to tremble with fear upon seeing him. This time, when the former dog took shelter of him, the brāhmaṇa transformed him into a more powerful lion, and so the real lion became very afraid and ran away. Thereafter, as the dog-turned-lion continued to reside at the ṛṣi's āśrama, all the other animals stayed far away out of fear. Then, one day, a great śarabha having eight legs and eyes upon its forehead came there,
desiring to kill the ṛṣi’s lion. Upon seeing this ferocious animal, which is the slayer of all other animals, the ṛṣi transformed the dog-turned-lion into a more powerful sarabha. The real sarabha ran away, and thereafter, the dog-turned-sarabha continued to live by the ṛṣi’s side, and since his nature was carnivorous, he subsisted upon the other animals of the forest.

Finally, however, that ungrateful beast who lived upon the flesh and blood of others got the idea of eating the ṛṣi. The brāhmaṇa could understand this by dint of his mystic power, and so he addressed the former dog as follows:

"Don't you remember how it was I who affectionately transformed you into so many different animal forms for your protection? Since you have become so ungrateful that you are prepared to kill your benefactor, I shall now punish you by turning you back into a dog!"

Immediately, the sarabha resumed his real feature as a dog, and upon seeing the change, he became exceedingly depressed. The ṛṣi then chastised him very severely, and at last, drove him away from the āśrama.

Bhiṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, from this story we learn that a king should very carefully examine the qualities of a servant before giving him the authority to perform any state function. Otherwise, if a king fails to scrutinize someone, that person may turn out to be his greatest enemy. In other words, one who is no better than a dog should never be given a position which is greater than what he is worthy of. Otherwise, he will certainly become intoxicated with pride and thus become a liability rather than an asset."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired., "O Grandsire, please enlighten me now on the subject of hope. The hope which people cling to appears to be so strong that there seems to be nothing which is capable of removing it. Everyone has strong hopes of achieving something, and if that hope is somehow destroyed, then the grief which follows is equivalent to death. I had hoped all along that when it would come down to fighting a war, Duryodhana would come to his senses and make peace with us. The son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra destroyed that foolish hope of mine, however, and now, the grief which I feel after the massacre of so many friends and relatives
continually burns my heart."
In reply, Bhīṣma related unto Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira the following story: There was once a king of the Haihayas name Sumitra. Once, while hunting in the forest, King Sumitra pierced a deer with his arrow. However, instead of being killed or wounded, the deer ran away very swiftly with the arrow sticking in its body. The king gave chase on foot, but the deer proceeded to elusively lead him far away, across fields, rivers, and woods. Sometimes the deer would come temptingly close to the king, as if it were doing it purposely. One such time, when the deer came nearby, Sumitra took up a powerful arrow. However, just as the king was about to release it, the deer suddenly bounded four miles ahead while apparently laughing at the attempt. Indeed, the arrow which was dispatched from Sumitra's bow fell far short.
Therefore, as the deer proceeded to enter a very dense forest, the king followed it with great determination, and after some time, he came to an āśrama of rṣis. Since he had become exceedingly fatigued, Sumitra sat down there, and so the rṣis came forward to greet him. Then, in response to their inquiries, Sumitra introduced himself and explained, "My dear brāhmaṇas, while hunting in the forest, I gave chase to a deer which proceeded to elude me again and again. Indeed, instead of being able to slay that deer, I have been led far away so that all I have gained is great fatigue and disappointment. I do not mind so much that I am far away from my capital, exhausted and hungry. However, because my great hopes for killing the deer have been frustrated, a terrible pang of grief is now burning my heart. Alas! It now appears to me as if a man's hope is as immeasurable as the unlimited sky! My dear learned brāhmaṇas, I request you to kindly dispel my frustrations by enlightening me on this subject."
One of the rṣis, named Rṣabha, stepped forward. While smiling slightly, he said, "O King, once, as I was engaged in making a tour of the holy places of pilgrimage, I came to the āśrama of Nara and Nārāyaṇa in Badarī. After bathing, I took up residence nearby, and at that time, a very tall and emaciated rṣi, who was dressed in rags and animal skins, happened to approach me. This rṣi was named Tanu, and it seemed that he was about eight times taller than any other human being although at the same time his body was as skinny as one's little finger. This rṣi was so
weak and frail due to having performed great austerities that his voice and movements were exceedingly feeble. Indeed, just by seeing him I became a little frightened and morose. Still, after offering my obeisances, I stood before Tanu with folded hands and introduced myself. The rṣi then motioned for me to take my seat, and at that time, numerous other great sages gathered around us in order to hear him speak on various subject matters.

"A king name Virāḍyumna then arrived at that spot on his chariot, and he was accompanied by his wives and soldiers. This king had been searching all over the world for his missing son, Bhūridyumna, and in the course of his travels, he had arrived at Badarī. Although he was exceedingly depressed on account of his inability to find his beloved son, Virāḍyumna was still full of hope, thinking, 'Maybe I shall be able to find Bhūridyumna here.'

"Dragged on and on by this hope, Virāḍyumna had been wandering for many days. After approaching the assembly of rṣis, the king said, 'O brāhmaṇas, my only son has been lost, and I cannot find him. Still, the hope that I shall some day be able to locate him is very great, in spite of the fact that I have been disappointed so much that I now feel like I am practically on the verge of death!'

"After hearing Virāḍyumna lament like this, Tanu bent his head low as he contemplated deeply for some time. When he saw how the sage appeared very concerned about his plight, the king very humbly requested, 'O great rṣi, please describe to me the vastness of hope, for it appears that one never finds its limit.'

"After raising his head, Tanu said, 'My dear king, a certain rṣi had once asked you for a golden jar and some herbs, but out of foolishness, you had replied contemptuously, refusing to give him this charity. O Virāḍyumna, being insulted in this way, the rṣi went away very disappointed.'

"Previously, Virāḍyumna had failed to honor Tanu when the rṣi had once come to him in the hopes of receiving charity. Because of this, the disappointed sage had decided to drive away all hope from his mind and never again ask for anything from a king. With this intention, Tanu retired to the forest in order to undergo severe penances, and he had been residing at Badarī ever since then. Now, after having tactfully
alluded this incident, Tanu said, 'O King, what you say is correct, for there is nothing which is more difficult to acquire then the image which hope places in one's mind.'
"Virāṇyumna then asked, 'O Rṣi, is there anything which is slenderer than your body?'
"Tanu replied, 'Yes, my dear king. The hope of an old woman to bear a child, the hope which one places in an ungrateful person, and the hope of a father to get back his lost son are three things which are more slender than my body.'
"After hearing this, Virāṇyumna very repentantly offered his obeisances unto Tanu by touching his head to his feet. The king then tearfully requested, 'O great sage, please be merciful unto me by enabling me to get back my son.' Upon hearing this, the compassionate Rṣi employed his mystic power to summon Bhūrīyumna to that spot. After the father and son were thus reunited, Tanu revealed his real form as the god of righteousness, and then immediately departed for the forest."
Ṛṣabha then said, "My dear king Sumitra, I now advise you to give up your hope for capturing the wounded deer, for it is even slenderer than those hopes which were mentioned by Tanu."
Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, after hearing this narration, Sumitra cast off the hope which had been troubling his heart. Now, you should also become steadfast and grave like the Himālayas and throw off all of your grief."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira exclaimed, "O Bhīṣma, your discourses are so interesting and highly enlightening as well! Just as one who is self-realized never becomes satiated while meditating upon the Supreme Lord, so I never tire of hearing your wonderful talks."

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear king, when a person becomes very sinful in behavior, his friends and relatives reject him, and thus he becomes overwhelmed by grief and humiliation. In order to rectify his position and free himself from sinful reactions, such a person should carefully study the Vedas; very humbly serve and worship the brāhmaṇas; give up all maliciousness; praise others and admit one's own worthlessness;
satisfy all persons whom he comes in contact with by pleasing glances, words, and actions; refrain from speaking very much; perform austerities; recite the Vedic mantras; and in general, assume a very mild behavior. In this way, a person can become cleansed of all sinful reactions, re-establish his good reputation within the world, and ultimately attain a good destination in his next life.

"My dear Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, in this regard, I shall now describe to you the life of a thief named Kayavya. Born of a kṣatriya father and niśāda mother, Kayavya practiced all of the kṣatriya duties, and he was a very courageous warrior. He was also very intelligent and learned in the śāstra, and he was highly devoted to the brāhmaṇas and ṛṣis. Kayavya used to hunt in the forest and then give away the animal flesh to the ṛṣis who were residing there. If any of the brāhmaṇas were reluctant to accept this gift due to his being a thief, then Kayavya would go before dawn and leave the meat at their doorstep. Once, thousands of thieves gathered together and decided to make Kayavya their chief, and because they had regard for his exceptional prowess and wisdom, they agreed to obediently follow all of his instructions.

"Kayavya accepted the post and then ordered the dacoits as follows: 'O Plunderers, you must never kill brāhmaṇas, women, children or anyone else who is unwilling to fight. Indeed, you should never even steal from the houses of brāhmaṇas. If you carefully follow these instructions, then in spite of leading the life of a dacoit, you will go to heaven after death.' "Thereafter, all of the thieves obeyed Kayavya's commands, and because of this, they became very prosperous. By instructing the other thieves in this way, and by practicing what he had preached, Kayavya earned great merit in this life and also attained an exalted destination after death."

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, a person who has great presence of mind and the foresight to adequately provide for the future, earns happiness, whereas the procrastinator meets with destruction. In this connection, I shall narrate unto you a very instructive story as follows."

There were once three Sākula fish who were very good friends and constant companions, and they lived in a shallow lake which was teeming with numerous species of aquatics. One of the Sākula fish had great foresight, and thus he always provided for the future. The second
Sākula fish had great presence of mind, but the third was always procrastinating. One day, a fisherman came to that lake and began to drain out all of the water. Upon seeing this, the fish possessing great foresight brought this to the attention of his two friends by saying, "Just see! There is a great danger which is about to overtake us, for the water level in this lake is steadily decreasing! I suggest that we leave here at once while there is still a chance to go elsewhere."

However, the procrastinating fish replied, "My dear friend, I agree with you, but since there is no immediate danger, let us worry about this when the time comes."

The fish with presence of mind then said, "O Friend, rest assured that when the danger comes, I shall be able to provide for our means of escape."

At this, the fish with great foresight took his leave and swam upstream to a lake of great depth. Soon thereafter, the fisherman cut off the only exit from the lake, having sufficiently drained it of water. Then, as the fisherman proceeded to easily catch the fish in the shallow water, the procrastinating Sākula was caught along with many others. The fisherman then tied all of the fish which he had caught onto a long string and began to depart. The Sākula with presence of mind put himself amongst the captured fish, and by biting onto the string, he gave the appearance of also having been caught. Then, when the fisherman put the string of fish into deep water in order to wash them, the feigning Sākula escaped while the procrastinating one soon met with his death.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "My dear grandsire, please tell me now what should be done when one falls into such great distress that he is attacked not only by his numerous enemies, but those who were supposed to have been friends as well."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear king, it is due to time and circumstance and nothing else that one becomes a friend or a foe. Therefore, a person who can intelligently judge how to act accordingly, by sometimes quarreling with so-called friends and sometimes making peace with so-called enemies, is far superior to a man who can simply foresee danger or has presence of mind. To illustrate this point, I shall now relate to you a very interesting story."

There was once a great banyan tree standing in the midst of a vast
forest, which was the resort of many animals. A wise mouse named Pālita lived at the base of that tree, in a hole which had 100 outlets. A cat named Lomasa also lived there in the branches, and every day he would devour a large number of birds who came to that banyan tree to rest. One day, a candāla hunter named Parigha arrived at that forest, and he built his cottage there. Every evening, after sunset, the hunter would spread his net beneath the banyan tree and then return to his home in order to take rest. During the night, many animals would fall into the trap, and each morning, the hunter would return at dawn in order to take them away. One night, in a moment of carelessness, Lomasa the cat fell into the hunter's net. Seeing that his enemy had become trapped, Palita the mouse fearlessly came out of his hole and began to roam about in search of food. The mouse then spotted a piece of meat which had been left by the hunter as bait, and so, after climbing up on top of the net, he began to happily eat it. Indeed, the playful mouse became so bold that he jumped right up onto the entangled cat and continued to eat the meat while laughing mischievously. Having become too absorbed in his eating and antics, however, the mouse failed to see the great danger which had befallen him until, suddenly, he looked up and saw his fierce enemy, Hārīta the mongoose, in front of him. Having been allured by the scent of the mouse, Hārīta now stood on his haunches, ready to pounce, and he was licking the comers of his mouth in great expectation. Then, while frantically looking around for a means of escape, Palita noticed another enemy of his, Candraka the sharp-beaked owl, who was sitting upon a branch in the tree. Overwhelmed by great fear, Palita thought as follows: "Alas! What can I do to save my life? If I run down from this net, surely the mongoose will seize me. And, if I remain here, then the owl will swoop down and catch me. Still, I know that if an intelligent person keeps his wits about him, and if he is conversant with the science of diplomacy, then he never meets with destruction, no matter how grave the danger may be. According to my understanding of diplomacy, it seems that, in spite of his being my enemy, the cat Lomasa is my only refuge under these circumstances. In danger, one must sometimes make peace with a stronger enemy. For this reason, it is better to have a learned person as one's enemy than fool for a friend!"
Having made this decision, the mouse then addressed the cat as follows: "My dear Lomasa, please listen to my words for I am trying to speak that which is meant for your self-interest. My dear friend, if you desire your own welfare, then in this dangerous situation you should also look after mine. I promise to rescue you from the hunter's net if, in return, you vow not to kill me. Just see how the mongoose and the owl are intently waiting to devour me! I will free you from your bondage by eating away the strings of the net, if, in return, you protect me from my two enemies. Just consider how a man takes the help of a dry piece of wood in order to cross a river. By doing so, the man carries the wood with him to the other side, just as much as the wood carries the man. A learned person never applauds an endeavor once the opportunity for executing it has passed away. Therefore, let us unite in friendship at once for our mutual benefit."

The intelligent and eloquent cat had good foresight, and so he replied, "My dear Palita, you have spoken very well, and I wholeheartedly agree to become your true friend. Rest assured that if you rescue me from this danger then I shall not only save you from your present precarious position, but will remain eternally grateful to you as well, and thus serve you always, just like a humble disciple."

The mouse then said, "O Lomasa, here is my plan. I will squat underneath your belly and then, after my enemies have departed out of frustration, I shall eat through the strings of the net in order to release you."

Lomasa replied, "O Palita, your idea is excellent! Now, please come underneath me quickly and rest assured that after my escape I and all of my relatives shall serve you forever after. Of course, our services will never be able to compensate for what you have done, for the service which is first rendered is considered to be unmotivated whereas service done in return is a kind of repayment."

After hearing these flowery words, Palita the mouse came and crouched underneath Lomasa the cat. When they saw this extraordinary turn of events, the mongoose and the owl were struck with wonder, and they became completely hopeless of catching their prey. Since they knew that it would be impossible to create dissension between the cat and the mouse because of their mutually beneficial treaty, the mongoose and the
owl left that place disappointed. Thereafter, Palita began to cut the strings of the net very slowly with his teeth, awaiting the proper time for completing his work. However, when he saw how slowly the mouse was working, the cat became very impatient, and thus he fervently implored, "My dear Palita, please work faster! Do not neglect me now that your own object has been achieved."

The mouse replied, "My dear Lomasa, kindly wait silently, and rest assured that I shall free you at the proper moment. Work which is accomplished at the wrong time is rendered unprofitable. If I were to release you prematurely, then I would be putting myself into a great danger. Therefore, I shall only free you when we see that the hunter is approaching, for at that time your only thought will be how to immediately jump up into the tree. In this way, I will be free to enter my hole safely."

At this, the cat said, "My dear Palita, please consider how I executed my part of the bargain quickly, for that is the behavior of a true friend. If you do not trust me on account of our former enmity, then I beg for your forgiveness and request you to give me this chance to prove my sincerity."

The mouse replied, "O Lomasa, I fully understand all that you have said, and it is in accordance with your own self-interest. Now, please listen to me as I speak that which is in line with my own welfare. Friendship that exists due to a condition of fear must be watched over very cautiously. If, out of fear, a person makes an alliance with a stronger person and then becomes inattentive, he will certainly come to be injured rather than benefited by his friend.

"My dear cat, no one is intrinsically one's friend, enemy, or well-wisher. A person becomes one of these due to being impelled by a particular motive. When friendship is thus established, one treats his friend very respectfully in the hopes of achieving his desired ends. However, after one's purpose has been fulfilled, one's so-called friend is not given the same regard. For this reason, when one is befriended due to a motive, he should act in such a way that his friend's object never becomes completely fulfilled. Now, my dear Lomasa, just see how there is only one more string which continues to bind you."

After the dawning light of morning became visible, a great fear entered
the heart of the cat. Then, when the caṇḍāla hunter Parigha arrived upon the scene, surrounded by his pack of yelping dogs, the cat began to panic. Just at that moment, the mouse cut the last string, and as Lomasa madly jumped up into the tree, Palita hurriedly entered his hole. When the hunter saw this, he experienced the pang of sorrow which one feels upon the frustration of his hopes. Thus, after angrily picking up his damaged net, Parigha returned home disappointed. After having sufficiently relished the great relief and joy which one feels after finding that his life has been saved from the jaws of death, the cat called down to the mouse, who was staying within his hole, "My dear friend, why have you run away without even having the courtesy to exchange parting words? I hope that you do not suspiciously think that I have any evil intentions! Now, since our friendship has been firmly established, please come out of your hole so that we can savor the sweetness of fraternal love. Only wicked persons make friendship and then break it later on. I am not like that! Since you have saved my life, I shall remain eternally indebted to you and indeed, I will worship you just like a preceptor, along with all of my friends and relatives. From now on, just consider my house and all of my possessions to be your very own."

After hearing this grandiose speech, the mouse, who was well aware of his self-interest, replied in similarly sweet words as follows:

"My dear cat, according to learned authorities, friends and enemies should be very carefully examined, for to discriminate between the two requires acute intelligence. Sometimes, friends appear to be more like enemies, and sometimes, enemies act in a very friendly manner. When a friendship has been contracted, it is very difficult to determine whether that relationship has been established for good purpose, or out of lust, anger, or greed.

"My dear Lomasa, in actuality, no one is intrinsically one's friend or enemy, for enmity and love are created according to the circumstances. When one sees that his welfare is dependent upon another, then he regards that person as a friend and considers him as such for as long as their self-interests do not clash. Because of this, there is no such thing as a permanent friendship or enmity, since one inevitably transforms into the other in due course of time. Therefore, one should never implicitly place his trust in his friends without having first of all adjusted
conditions according to the science of diplomacy. Indeed, one who
desires to have an affectionate relationship with another person without
considering that he must act diplomatically, should be considered a first-
class fool. Even if a person is genuinely deserving of trust, he should
never be relied upon implicitly, for even one's very near and dear
relatives are acting in that relationship out of self-interest or motive.
"O Lomasa, everyone considers his own self first. Therefore, even
though you have assured me with very sweet words that I am very dear
to you, I can understand with the eye of knowledge that there must be
some motive behind your eloquent speech. Even love between husband
and wife, or two brothers, is created by some adequate cause. Of course,
due to natural affection, a husband and wife or two brothers may reunite
after quarreling. However, our relationship cannot be considered to be
like that. Then again, there are instances where a person is endearing on
account of his virtuous nature, sweet speech, liberality, or other
attractive qualities. Generally speaking, however, a person is considered
dear simply because of the purpose which he serves.
"My dear Lomasa, the cause of our original friendship no longer exists.
Therefore, I can understand that your present expression of friendship
must be due to some other motive; perhaps that you desire to make me
your prey and eat me! You stupid cat! Why are you speaking to me as if I
am a fool who is ignorant of his self-interest? I know that cats are by
nature the enemy of mice, and therefore, I refuse your so-called offer of
friendship."
After thus being rebuked with strong words, the cat blushed with shame.
However, after a short pause, he said, "My dear Palita, you have got me
all wrong! I am genuinely grateful for your having saved my life, and
therefore, I deserve to be trusted by you."
After reflecting over this for awhile, the mouse replied, "My dear
Lomasa, I accept your words as genuine. I actually believe that your
intentions are noble. And yet, in spite of this, I shall never be able to
repose my trust in you. The wise have instructed that when a weaker
person cooperates with a stronger one, in order to serve some mutual
purpose, he should not continue to repose his trust in that friend after
the objective has been achieved. Actually, the most important principle
expounded by the science of diplomacy is mistrust. Of course, one should
always try his best to inspire confidence in others. At the same time, however, one should always mistrust his enemies, for if he does so, then no matter how weak he may be, they shall never be able bring him under their control. Therefore, my dear cat, I shall never repose my confidence upon you. Similarly, I advise you to be very careful of the caṇḍāla hunter, for his anger has now been aroused."

As soon as the mouse mentioned the hunter, the cat became so struck with fear that he immediately ran away from that banyan tree within the forest in order to take up residence elsewhere. His mission having been accomplished, Palita the mouse happily re-entered his hole. Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, when two parties are seen to make peace with one another, you can be sure that the motive of ultimately conquering each other is within both persons' hearts. A wise person should always appear to be fearless, even in a dangerous situation, and he should put forward an air of trust. Within, he must always fear and mistrust his enemies. When a cause for fear approaches, one should cheerfully make peace with his adversary. A person who advocates that one should never entertain the slightest fear, in any situation, gives the worst advice."

After hearing all this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira said, "O Grandsire, I have one doubt. If a king always mistrusts others, then how will he ever be able to get things accomplished?"

In reply, Bhīṣma narrated the following story: There was once a very wise female bird named Pūjanī who lived in the inner apartments of King Brahmādatta's palace at Kāmpilya. Pūjanī gave birth to a baby male bird the very same day that Brahmādatta's queen delivered a son. Pūjanī was very grateful for being able to live under the king's shelter, and so every day she would go to the seashore and bring back two fruits; one for her son and the other for the little prince. These fruits were as sweet as nectar, and they would greatly increase the strength of whoever ate them. Thus, the young prince became very powerful due to daily eating the fruit which was brought by Pūjanī. One day, while Pūjanī was away collecting the fruit, the young prince spotted her son. Then, after making his nurse put him down, the boy began to play with the little bird. Unfortunately, however, due to his childish proclivities, as the prince held the baby bird in his hand, he squeezed out its very life, and
then returned to the lap of his nurse. When Pújanī returned home and saw that her son was lying dead upon the palace floor, she became overwhelmed with burning grief. While piteously lamenting, she exclaimed, "Oh, what a great misfortune that I have associated with cruel ksatriyas, for they treat one in a friendly manner just to achieve some objective. Then, when that aim is fulfilled, they feel no qualms in injuring their benefactor."

Gradually, Pújanī became determined to take revenge for the slaying of her son, and so at last went to where the young prince was sleeping and angrily scratched out his eyes with her sharp talons. After blinding the murderer of her son, Pújanī felt some relief from the unbearable sorrow that had overwhelmed her. King Brahmadatta had seen this act of revenge, and he considered it to be just punishment for his son's cruelty. Thus, he said "My dear Pújanī, please consider that what you have done is sufficient punishment for my son. Now, just continue to live here peacefully as before."

However, Pújanī replied, "O King, the wise have instructed that after having injured someone, one should never continue to reside in his house. One should never place his trust in the person whom he has injured, even if that person gives very soothing assurances, for animosity is not to be soon forgotten. The father and mother can generally be trusted as the best of friends, but the wife is merely a vessel in which one plants his seed, and the son is the expansion of that seed. A brother invariably becomes one's enemy, and other friends and companions constantly need to be rewarded if a person wants them to remain favorable. My dear king, especially in consideration of how I am the weaker party, I shall now take my leave, for a cause of enmity has now arisen after a term of friendship."

Brahmadatta then argued, "O Pújanī, I have a great deal of natural affection for you due to having lived with you for so long as a friend. Therefore, any animosity which may have been created will soon be forgotten."

Pújanī then replied, "O King, animosity arises from five causes; a woman, land, harsh words, natural incompatibility, and injury. (Examples of these are: Lord Kṛṣṇa and Śiśupāla, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, Droṇācārya and King Drupada, the cat and the mouse, and King
Brahmadatta and Püjanî, respectively.) Even if it is with a dear friend that hostility arises, one should no longer trust him as before. Feelings of animosity always lie dormant in the heart, just as fire is there within wood, and once ignited, it can never be extinguished except by the destruction of the opposing party.

Brahmadatta then argued, "My dear Püjanî, no one should consider himself to be the doer of activities, for Time is the supreme cause of everything. We, the living beings, are only Time's instruments, and thus neither you nor I have really injured each other. For this reason, we should forgive and forget."

Püjanî replied, "O King, if everyone were to accept that Time is the only doer, then it is a fact that there would be no more animosity within the world. In fact, there would also be no more medicines administered to the sick, and no more performance of religious acts for acquiring merit."

After soundly defeating Brahmadatta's Māyāvāda (impersonalist) argument, Püjanî said, "My dear king, enmity which is caused by injury can never be completely forgotten. Therefore, whenever you would think of your son, hatred for me would spring up in your heart. Indeed, such enmity is so strong that it survives even after the death of the one who has caused an injury. It is practically seen that the injured party continues to mention animosity to the deceased injurer's relatives. Destiny and exertion are both causes, and only a eunuch thinks that destiny alone is important. Knowledge, courage, cleverness, strength, and patience are one's natural friends, whereas the wife, relatives, companions, and possessions are all secondary, and can be achieved by anyone who possesses the former.

"Great souls always praise those actions which are good and which are performed with intelligence. Since one is advised to live in his own country only for as long as respected by all, and then depart when there is adversity, I shall now take my leave."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "O Bhīṣma, what is the duty of a brāhmaṇa during a period of total irreligiousness, when thieves run rampant and anarchy prevails?"

In reply, Bhīṣma narrated the following history: Once, during the transitional period between the end of the Tretā-yuga and the beginning
of the Dvāpara-yuga, a frightful drought ensued which lasted for twelve years. During this period, there was not even a single dew-drop, and so what to speak of a gathering of clouds in the sky. Even the greatest of rivers shrank down to mere streams, and all of the lakes and wells disappeared. Due to scarcity of water, the entire surface of the earth appeared exceedingly desolate, and even the brāhmaṇas became so disturbed that they gave up the performance of their religious duties. Agriculture and cow protection were abandoned altogether, and everywhere shops remained closed. Heaps of bones were seen wherever the eye would turn, and the shrill cries of carnivorous birds and beasts were all that could be heard. Elderly persons were forcibly thrown out of their houses, and towns gradually became abandoned. Cows, goats, sheep, and buffaloes fought with each other for food, and the citizens became easy prey for dacoits. All vegetation finally dried up, and thus the entire earth became bereft of her natural beauty. Ultimately, as men began to go mad on account of hunger, they ate each other out of desperation. Even the ōṣīs abandoned their vows and left their āśramas in order to wander over the earth in search of food.

One such ōṣi was Viśvāmitra. After leaving his wife and son at home, he began to wander here and there, greatly afflicted by hunger, and thus he no longer considered which food was clean or unclean. One day, Viśvāmitra came to a small village in the middle of a forest which was inhabited by cruel hunters. Dog-skins were spread everywhere, and bones and skulls had been gathered together in heaps. The inhabitants of this village filled the air with the sounds of their harsh voices as they engaged in quarreling among themselves, and packs of dogs were seen loitering on all sides. Being extremely famished, Viśvāmitra entered that village in search of something to eat. And yet, even though he begged from door to door, no one was willing to give him anything. Finally, the ōṣi exclaimed, "Alas! How much distress has overcome me!" and then he fell down to the ground on account of weakness. Thereafter, as he lay there, Viśvāmitra began to think, "What can I do in order to avoid death by starvation?"

Just then, Viśvāmitra spied some meat of a freshly slain dog which was lying on the floor of one of the caṇḍāla's huts. After due consideration, the ōṣi decided to steal the meat, knowing that any act becomes
 permissible for the purpose of saving one's life. The principle is: In times of dire necessity, one should first of all try to steal from a low person, then an equal, and only as a last resort should he steal from an elevated person. Having made up his mind in that way, Viśvāmitra slept for awhile. Then, when night had fallen and all of the villagers were in bed, he got up and stealthily entered the caṇḍāla's hut. Although lying down, the caṇḍāla had not yet fallen asleep, and in great anger he addressed the intruder, "Whoever has illegally entered my house shall be slain by me!"
Viśvāmitra became filled with shame at having been caught in the act. Then, in response, he fearfully identified himself and said, "O Hunter, I had attempted this desperate act because I am on the verge of death due to hunger. Therefore, please do not kill me." Upon hearing that it was an illustrious ṛṣi whom he had threatened, the caṇḍāla also became very fearful. After quickly getting up from his bed, he approached Viśvāmitra with folded hands. Then, with tears in his eyes, the caṇḍāla respectfully said, "My dear great sage, please forgive me, for I did not know that you were a brāhmaṇa. Now, please tell me what it is that you want."
Viśvāmitra replied, "O Hunter, being driven by extreme hunger, I had desired to steal your dog-meat. Hunger has already destroyed all of my righteousness, and so I have given up all consideration as what food is to be eaten and what is not."
Desiring to preserve Viśvāmitra's ascetic merit, the caṇḍāla implored, "My dear sir, please do not degrade yourself by eating dog-meat. Instead, look for some other food."
Viśvāmitra replied, "My dear hunter, I have not eaten anything for a very long time, and I do not see any other type of food available. Therefore, for the preservation of my life, I am justified in adopting any means without consideration of propriety. Now, I beg you to allow me to eat your meat. With the extended duration of life which I shall gain, I will be able to perform austerities that will burn to ashes any circumstantial sinful reactions which I may have incurred."
Still, the caṇḍāla tried to dissuade Viśvāmitra because he considered dog-meat to be unfit for the brāhmaṇa's consumption. Finally, the ṛṣi pleaded, "O Hunter, I have no other alternative, and in my helpless condition, this dog-meat appears to be just like nectar." The caṇḍāla
then said, "O Rṣi, according to the śāstra, a brāhmaṇa is allowed to eat only five kinds of five clawed animals."

Viśvāmitra argued, "You must have heard how the great ṛṣi Agastya had eaten the asura Vātāpi. Now, in a similarly distressed condition, I shall eat this dog-meat."

The caṇḍāla then said, "My dear ṛṣi, I feel that it is my duty to try as hard as possible to save you from falling down from the path of religious principles. It is only for this reason that I have been arguing with you."

Viśvāmitra replied, "O Hunter, you should not be so self-righteous as to think that you can instruct a brāhmaṇa on the subject of morality!"

At this, the caṇḍāla retorted, "I am not willing to voluntarily give you this meat, for then I would also become implicated in your sinful act. Indeed, I might very well attain a hellish destination in my next life, along with you."

In this way, the discussion continued for some time, and the caṇḍāla refused to admit that Viśvāmitra could eat the dog's flesh without incurring a sinful reaction. Finally, however, the caṇḍāla became silent, and so Viśvāmitra just took away the dog's meat, which consisted of its haunches, the lowest and most unclean portion of that animal.

Viśvāmitra then hurried home, desiring to share the meat with his wife and child after having cooked it and duly offered it in sacrifice to the demigods. When he arrived home, Viśvāmitra ignited the sacrificial fire and then divided the meat into various portions for offering to the demigods and pītras. Just at that time, Indra resumed pouring down rain, and in a very short time, the earth once again became covered over by vegetation. Still, after completing the rituals, Viśvāmitra ate the meat and then returned to his life of austerities, burning up any sinful contamination which he had incurred.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear Bhīṣma, I feel very disturbed upon hearing how morality which is traditionally understood can be contradicted. It appears to me that thieves, dog-eaters, and all sorts of other sinful persons will try to justify their activities by referring to such stories as these."

Bhishmṅra replied, "My dear king, the instructions on morality which I am delivering to you are not limited to the śāstric injunctions. What I am describing is also the fruit of wisdom which has been harvested after a
great deal of experience. One cannot ascertain his duty in all circumstances simply by referring to the rules and regulations of the śāstra. One has to be very intelligent, wise, and he must possess a mature understanding of the subtleties of virtue, for sometimes so-called morality becomes immorality, and vice-versa. Of course, persons who altogether disregard the śāstra or find fault with it, are no better than Rākṣasas. Still, above and beyond knowledge of the śāstra, once must understand how that knowledge is to be practically applied."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O Grandsire, is there any rule at all which should never be violated under any condition?"

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear grandson, the worship of true brāhmaṇas, and giving to them all kinds of respect, must never be given up under any circumstance, for the brāhmaṇas' dissatisfaction is the most dangerous type of poison."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "O Bhīṣma, please describe to me the merit which is acquired by giving shelter to those who beg for it."

In reply, Bhīṣma narrated the following story: There was once a fierce hunter of birds who had a very black complexion, reddish eyes, a large mouth, and protruding cheeks. Indeed, all of his relatives and friends had abandoned him because of his excessively cruel nature, and thus he used to wander alone in the forest, carrying his nets. For many years, this hunter maintained himself by killing birds and then selling their meat, and due to ignorance, he could not understand that his activities were sinful. As a result of his destiny, he used to live in the forest along with his wife, and no other occupation attracted his mind. One day, while this hunter was wandering alone in the forest, a great storm suddenly came up and the wind became so violent that all of the trees were in danger of being uprooted. As lightning flashed and thunder roared, torrents of rain soon flooded the entire surface of the earth, and thus the hunter became overwhelmed by fear. While trembling due to the cold, he wandered throughout the forest but could not find any place of shelter. All of the other forest residents were also filled with great fear. Many of the animals were able to find high ground, but innumerable birds fell down dead, due to the great force of that storm. While wandering here and there, the hunter came upon a female pigeon lying upon the ground, stunned due to the cold. Although both the
hunter and the pigeon were in the same predicament, the hunter picked up the bird and put her into his cage. Thus, even though the hunter was himself suffering greatly, he did not hesitate to put another living being into more suffering, because that was his habit. After proceeding on, the hunter soon came to a great tree in which many, many birds had taken shelter. By this time, the sky had already begun to clear and night was approaching. The hunter thus decided to spend the night there since he was a long way from home. After bowing down with folded hands to any spirits which might be inhabiting that tree, the hunter made a bed of leaves upon the ground. Then, after laying down, he rested his head upon a stone and very soon fell asleep. Upon one of the branches of that great tree lived a pigeon along with his family. The wife had gone out in the morning to search for food, but now that night had fallen and she had not yet returned, the pigeon began to fear for the worst. Thinking that she must have been killed in the terrible storm, the pigeon lamented, "Oh, what great misfortune! Even though I am surrounded by all of my children and grandchildren, without my dear wife, I shall no longer be able to bear continuing my life. if one has the company of his beloved wife, the foot of a tree can be a happy home, whereas without her, even a palace is no better than a desolate wilderness!"

Being held captive in the hunter's cage, the female pigeon could hear the lamentations of the male pigeon, and so she replied, "My dear husband, you should offer this hunter a warm welcome and respectfully provide him with all kinds of hospitality, for by chance he has become your guest. If you neglect to perform your duties as a householder, then surely you will incur sin. Neither lament for me nor for yourself, because you can always find another wife."

When the pigeon thus learned that his wife was still alive, he became overwhelmed with joy, and thereafter, he began to honor the hunter as his guest. When the pigeon welcomed him and asked to be of service, the hunter replied, "I am very stiff and cold. Thus, I would appreciate it very much if you could arrange to provide me with some warmth."

At this, the pigeon first of all gathered up some dry leaves. Then, taking a single leaf in his beak, he flew to where a fire was being maintained. After igniting that leaf, the pigeon returned, and when he finished
setting the other leaves on fire, he invited his guest to come and warm himself. Thereafter, when the hunter became a little relieved from the cold, he said, "My dear pigeon, I am very hungry, and thus I would very much appreciate some food." The pigeon replied, "My dear sir, I do not keep any stock of food, for I maintain myself by eating whatever I can find each day."

The pigeon then became very ashamed on account of his inability, and thus he began to condemn his lifestyle for not allowing him to receive guests properly. At last, after carefully considering what should be done, the pigeon came to a conclusion and then assured the hunter that he would satisfy him very shortly. After saying this, the pigeon proceeded to light another fire with some leaves, and when this was done, he said, "My dear hunter, I am determined to earn that merit which is acquired by honoring guests."

After declaring this, the pigeon smilingly circumambulated the fire three times and entered its flames. When the hunter saw how the noble bird had given up his life in order to feed him, he came to his senses regarding his abominable profession, and he began to feel compassion for other living beings. While condemning his hard-heartedness, the hunter became determined to give up all sinful life and begin a practice of righteousness. By seeing the wonderful example of the pigeon, who had given up his life for the cause of virtue, the hunter decided to also gradually give up his body by fasting and executing very severe austerities. Having thus made up his mind, the hunter threw away his weapons and nets, set the female pigeon free, and then left that place. However, after the departure of the hunter, the female pigeon began to weep piteously and lament for the death of her husband. While considering her position as a widow, the female pigeon concluded that her life was an unbearable burden without her husband. Thus, she also threw herself into the fire, in order to follow her lord to his destination. Indeed, after entering the fire, the female pigeon saw her husband decorated with ornaments and seated upon a celestial chariot in the sky, and they were occupied by those who had acted meritoriously in this world. The female pigeon then mounted upon her husband's chariot and together, they ascended to heaven in order to continue sporting there in great joy.
The hunter was able to see the pigeons seated upon their celestial chariot, and as a result, he became momentarily depressed while thinking about his own misfortune. Then, throwing off all weakness of heart, the hunter became very determined to also attain such an exalted destination. Giving up all material attachments, he thereafter began to perform very difficult austerities. Indeed, while wandering over the earth, the hunter subsisted upon air alone, for he made no endeavor whatsoever to obtain food. Once, in the course of his wanderings, the former hunter came to a large lake filled with lotus flowers. Although he was very hungry and thirsty the hunter passed by that lake and then entered a dense forest. While pushing his way through the bushes and vines, the hunter's body became pricked all over by numerous thoms, and so he soon became covered with blood. A strong wind then came up, and due to the friction of branches, a raging fire began to consume everything. The hunter was burnt in that forest fire, and as a result, he became freed from all sinful contamination and thus proceeded on to heaven without impediment.

Bhiṣma then said, "My dear king, I have thus described to you the great merit which is earned by giving shelter to someone who asks for it. Even a killer of cows can become cleansed of his sins by engaging in this noble practice."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "O Grandsire, has there ever been an instance where one has been restored to life after having succumbed to death?"

In reply, Bhīṣma narrated the following story: Once, there was a brāhmaṇa who, after a long period of disappointment, received a very beautiful son. That child died in infancy, however, and so the aggrieved relatives picked up his body and carried it to the crematorium. After arriving there, the relatives began to cry very piteously and lament as they passed the dead child's body from one person's arms to another. Indeed, due to remembering the endearing pastimes and speeches of the little boy, the kinsmen were unwilling to finish their business and return home. Upon seeing this situation, a vulture came there and advised, "O relatives of this deceased brāhmaṇa boy, you should give up your grief now, for death is the inevitable end of everyone. Before you, thousands
of people had come here, and after leaving the body of their dead relative, they had departed."

After hearing the vulture's words, the relatives of the dead boy found that their grief had become somewhat abated. Thus, they placed the lifeless body upon the bare ground and then departed for home. A black jackal then came out of his hole and began to rebuke the departing kinsmen as follows:
"Alas! How can you heartlessly leave your dear son lying here? If you have any affection for this boy at all, then you should not give up the hope that he may return to life. Do not give up so easily! Go back now and continue to shed tears of lamentation for some time."

Taking heed of these words, the relatives returned to the crematorium, but upon arriving there, they were chastised by the vulture, who said, "O foolish ones, why are you lamenting over a lump of dead matter from which the living soul has already departed?"

The jackal then interrupted and said, "Don't be influenced by this wicked vulture! If you remain here, then there is always the chance that your dear son may come back from the dead."

The vulture then exclaimed, "What stupidity! On this very day I am observing my 100th birthday, and never did I see that a person who had died was restored to life. O relatives of this dead boy, heed my words of wisdom. Leave this stiff, cold, and lifeless body here and return home."

After hearing this, the relatives of the dead boy once again began to leave the crematorium. Just then, however, the jackal reappeared and asked, "My dear friends, how can you desert your beautiful child simply on the advice of a vulture? Long ago, during the rule of Lord Rāmacandra, there were no premature deaths on account of His righteousness. Indeed, once, a brāhmaṇa came to Lord Rāmacandra's royal assembly and complained about the premature death of his son. Lord Rāmacandra then made inquiries about the cause of the boy's death, suspecting that it had been due to sinful activities being performed in His kingdom. Sure enough, Lord Rāmacandra soon discovered that there was a śūdra named Śamvuka who was engaged in executing austerities within a dense forest. Because śūdras have no right to engage in those acts which are reserved for higher classes, Lord Rāmacandra immediately went there and cut off his head. And, as soon
as righteousness had been upheld in this way, the brāhmaṇa's dead son instantly came back to life. Therefore, you should remain here, for it is possible that a demigod or rṣi may take compassion upon hearing your piteous cries, and thus revive your dead son."

After hearing the jackal's words, the relatives retraced their steps to the crematorium and then placed the head of the dead boy upon their laps. Then, as they continued to cry out in grief, the vulture once again carne there and convinced them of the futility of their lamentations. Then, as the relatives set out for home, the jackal once more rebuked them by saying, "Oh, how cold-hearted you must be for casting off your parental affections so easily! When I look at this beautiful child I cannot believe that he is really dead!"

By this time, the relatives of the dead boy had become so confused by the conflicting arguments of the vulture and the jackal that they could no longer decide what to do. The vulture then warned, "My dear friends, the sun is now setting, and so you will be in very great danger on account of the wild animals, Rākṣasas, and spirits who come here after dark."

At this, the jackal warned, "If you accept the words of this vulture, then you will lose all chance of having your son come back to life."

An argument then ensued as the vulture claimed that the sun had already set, and the jackal insisted that it actually had not. Actually, both the vulture and the jackal were famished. The vulture wanted to eat the dead body of the child, and the jackal wanted to devour the relatives after it had become dark. It was for this reason that they put forward their opposing arguments. Meanwhile, being swayed to alternatively stay and then go, the relatives finally decided to wait at the crematorium and continue to indulge in their lamentations. Then, as the vulture and the jackal continued to argue, Lord Śiva came there, having been urged to do so by his compassionate wife. After introducing himself to the relatives of the deceased boy, Lord Śiva offered them a benediction. Being exceedingly surprised and gladdened, the relatives offered their obeisances unto Śiva and then begged him to bring their dead child back to life. In response, Lord Śiva instantly caused the dead boy to rise up, and after doing so, he bestowed upon the child a duration of life of 100 years. Lord Śiva also blessed the vulture and the jackal so
that their hunger would become appeased, and thereafter, he departed. The thankful relatives also left that place, taking their rejuvenated son with them.

Bhiṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, one can achieve success in his endeavor if he has persistent hope, firm resolution, and if he receives the mercy of the Supreme Lord."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then asked, "What should a weak person do if, out of foolishness and pride, he provokes a stronger enemy to angrily attack him?"

Bhiṣma replied by narrating this story: There was once a great śālmali tree in the Himālayas, and because of its great size, it was the resort for many birds and animals, as well as weary travelers who would rest in its shade. One day, Nārada Muni came there, and upon seeing the greatness of the tree, he said, "My dear śālmali, you are so large, majestic and beautiful, and you are magnanimously providing the necessities of life for innumerable living beings. Since none of your branches have been broken by Vāyu, I can understand that you must be a very intimate friend of the wind-god. The all powerful wind cannot only destroy any tree, but mountain peaks as well, and thus I can understand that you are living under his protection."

Upon hearing this, the śālmali tree arrogantly replied, "O Rṣi, the wind is neither my friend nor my well-wisher, nor do I require protection from him. As far as I am concerned, the wind's power does not equal even one-sixteenth of my own. Whenever the raging wind comes here, it is I who am able to curb him down by my superior strength."

When Nārada Muni heard these boasting words, he became very angry and said, "O foolish śālmali, there are many trees which are far greater than you who have submissively bowed down before Vāyu. The lord of the air deserves the respect of all creatures, and I am now going to inform him of your conceit. Thus, you shall very soon witness the result of your arrogance!"
Närada Muni then went to Vāyu and informed him of how the śālmaţi tree had insulted him. After hearing Närada's words, Vāyu became highly enraged. Immediately going to the śālmaţi tree, the wind-god exclaimed, "You wretch! During the creation, Lord Brahmā had once rested beneath you, and for that reason I have always spared you. Now, however, since you have become falsely puffed-up, I shall give you an exhibition of my great prowess that you will never forget!"

In response, the tree simply laughed derisively and then challenged, "O Vāyu, you can display your full might if you so desire. However, rest assured that I am not at all afraid of you."

The wind-god then declared, "O śālmaţi, I will test your strength tomorrow!" and then departed. That night, the śālmaţi tree began to repent, for he could understand that he had foolishly incurred the wrath of a person of superior prowess. At last, the śālmaţi devised a means to save himself from being uprooted, and for this purpose, he made all of his branches, leaves and flowers fall to the ground. Thus, when the wind-god came raging toward him the next morning, knocking down many large trees which stood in his path, he saw how the śālmaţi tree had already become deprived of its splendor. Vāyu then smilingly said, "O śālmaţi, since you have already done that which I would have angrily accomplished, I shall spare you."

The śālmaţi tree felt very ashamed on account of his defeat, and while remembering the words of Närada Muni, he bitterly repented for his foolishness. Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, repentance is the result when a weaker person creates enmity with a stronger person."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, please tell me: What is the origin of all sin?"

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear king, greed or covetousness, which is the hankering to possess more than one's naturally ordained quota, is the origin of all sin. This covetousness is called trṣṇā (thirst), for the desire to possess that which belongs to another is insatiable. Greed is the cause of all kinds of hypocrisy and cunning behavior, and thus it is the force which drives men to commit sinful acts. From greed comes anger, lust, loss of judgment, arrogance, miserliness, lack of compassion, enviousness, mistrust of others, insincerity, theft, adultery, habitual lying, gluttony, harsh speech, fault-finding, procrastination, as well as
pride of birth, wealth, learning, and beauty. Greed cannot easily be given up, and it does not diminish with the decay of the body. Like an ocean which cannot be filled by the influx of innumerable rivers, greed can never become gratified by any amount of acquisitions.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "O Grandsire, please explain to me about ignorance."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, ignorance is made up of the same substance as greed, and it is the cause of all kinds of suffering. Both greed and ignorance give the same result, although ultimately, it can be analyzed that ignorance originally sprang up from greed. When greed increases, ignorance also becomes more dense."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, what produces the śreya, the highest merit?"

Bhīṣma replied, "O King, self-restraint surpasses all other acts in this regard, and it is therefore considered to be the highest virtue. Self-restraint comprises forgiveness, patience, nonviolence, impartiality, truthfulness, sincerity, control of the senses, mildness, steadiness, freedom from anger, contentment, freedom from envy, and benevolence. Because self-restraint purifies and controls every aspect of one's existence, it is more important than the mere giving in charity or study of the Vedas. By self-restraint alone one can attain liberation from this material world and thus not have to come back for undergoing repeated births and deaths. The essential quality of self-restraint is tapasya (austerity), and no good result in any field can be achieved without it. Lord Brahmā created this entire universe by dint of the prowess which he gained from his austerities. Therefore, tapasya is considered to be the root cause of everything in existence."

After saying this, Bhīṣma became silent, and because the sun had already set, the Pāṇḍavas offered their obeisances unto their grandfather and returned home. That evening, at Hastināpura, Vidura and the Pāṇḍavas engaged in discussion, hoping to encourage Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira in the matter of accepting the worldly aspirations of dharma, artha, and kāma. Vidura stressed the importance of virtue and Arjuna stressed the importance of acquiring wealth. Nakula and Sahadeva stressed the importance of all three, whereas Bhīma advocated that kāma was the
most important objective. With this in mind, Bhīma said, "My dear elder brother, now that you have won back your kingdom as a result of having acted virtuously, you should enjoy yourself. Keep yourself surrounded by the most beautiful of women who are gorgeously dressed and ornamented, and who have become intoxicated on account of drinking sweet wine!"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear uncle and brothers, there is no doubt that each of you possess a particular conviction which you have gained after a lifetime of experience and a careful study of the śāstra. Although understandings may thus be various, my view is that the real purpose of human life is to detach oneself from matter altogether, including the goals of dharma, artha and kāma. One must become freed from the dualities of materialistic life and thus attain to the fourth and highest stage, which is mokṣa (liberation)."

Vidura and the Pāṇḍavas at last admitted the superiority of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's assertions, and indeed, they bowed down to him while praising his words highly. The next morning, the Pāṇḍavas returned to Kurukṣetra, and after offering obeisances unto Bhīṣma, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired, "My dear grandfather, please tell me about the nature of true friendship. It seems to be exceedingly rare that a friend is found who listens to good advice and always endeavors for one's benefit. However, if such a true friend is acquired, I feel that he is more valuable than fabulous wealth or numerous relatives."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear king, the following persons are unfit for being accepted as friends: one who is addicted to sinful life, one who is a slave of lust, one who denies the existence of God, one who has fallen down from the duties of his social order, and one who is envious, idle, without compassion, crooked, suspicious, dishonest, and untruthful. All of these persons are ungrateful and thus they ultimately become the injurers of their friends."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then expressed his great eagerness to hear more on this subject, and so Bhīṣma narrated the following story: There was once a brāhmaṇa named Gautama who was practically devoid of all learning. Desiring to receive charity, he traveled to the country of the Mlecchas in the North, and there, he entered one particularly prosperous village of hunters. In that village there happened to reside a
thief who was not only fully conversant with the characteristics pertaining to the four social orders, but very devoted to the brāhmaṇas as well. After arriving at this thief’s house, Gautama requested that he be provided with a residence and all necessities of life for one full year. In response, the charitable thief gave Gautama a cottage and also a young widow, and thereafter, the brāhmaṇa began to reside in that village very happily. Due to living with hunters, Gautama soon took up practicing archery, and then, after gaining some skill, he went daily to the forest in order to kill many cranes. Having thus become very adept in the art of killing, Gautama gave up all sense of compassion, for due to the association of hunters, he had become just like them.

Then, one day, another brāhmaṇa arrived at this village. This brāhmaṇa had formerly been a friend of Gautama's because they both came from the same native place. Unlike Gautama, however, this brāhmaṇa was very pure, humble, and learned, and he was fully observant of the vows of brahmacarya. Since this brāhmaṇa had never accepted food from a śūdra, he began to search for the house of a brāhmaṇa, and in this way he at last came to Gautama's door. Indeed, just at this moment, Gautama was returning from the forest. He was armed with bow and sword, and blood trickled down his body from the bag of slain cranes which he carried over his shoulder. The brāhmaṇa recognized his old friend, and when he saw how he had fallen away from the duties of his order, he inquired with great shock, "My dear Gautama, what is this that you are now doing? Certainly such an occupation is quite unbefitting your noble birth and education. My dear brāhmaṇa, please give up this abominable profession and go elsewhere in order to resume your proper duties."

Gautama felt very pained at heart upon hearing these well-intentioned words. He then replied, "My dear friend, being without knowledge and practically destitute, I had taken up residence here in the hopes of becoming prosperous. Your words have brought me to my senses, however, and so I am very grateful that you have come here. I can assure you that I shall heed your good advice. Now, please spend the night here with me. Then, in the morning, we can depart for our separate destinations."

Out of compassion, the brāhmaṇa agreed, but while residing at Gautama's house, he did not touch anything unclean nor eat any food,
even though he was very hungry. The next morning, the brāhmaṇa departed, and Gautama also set out for the seashore. Then, on the way, Gautama met a caravan of merchants who were going in the same direction, and so he joined the party. Thereafter, as the caravan was passing through a valley, it was attacked by a mad elephant and as a result, almost all of the merchants were killed. Gautama managed to escape, however, and he ran away quickly toward the north. Then, having become lost, Gautama continued to wander through the forest until he at last came to a road which led to the ocean.

This path soon led Gautama to a heavenly forest which was filled with mango trees, and the sweet songs of the birds there delighted the mind of the hearer. After passing through this forest, Gautama came to a flatland where a great banyan tree stood. Indeed, all around were seen heavenly trees and flowers, and thus that place looked as if it could have been Brahmaloka. Gautama became very joyful upon arriving at this spot, and when he sat down there, a perfumed breeze began to blow which made his entire body tingle with celestial pleasure. Gautama was exhausted, and while being fanned by these breezes, he soon fell asleep.

Meanwhile, the sun sank below the western horizon, and during this twilight period, a prince of the cranes named Nādijāṅghā came there, having returned home from Brahmaloka. This crane was a son of Kaśyapa and Dakṣa's daughter, and he was a friend of the Creator as well. Thus, his splendidous form had a celestial appearance, and he surpassed all other creatures on earth in terms of wisdom.

After awakening, when Gautama saw Nādijāṅghā (who was also called Rāja-Dharmān), he became struck with wonder. At the same time, however, because he was famished and exhausted, Gautama began to look at him with hungry eyes. The crane welcomed Gautama by saying, "My dear sir, I feel that I am very fortunate to have a brāhmaṇa such as you as my guest. Therefore, please honor me by spending the night here."

Gautama became even more struck with wonder when he heard the crane speak, and due to great curiosity, he was unable to withdraw his eyes from the remarkable bird. The crane then introduced himself and thereafter, he hospitably provided Gautama with some fish which he had caught from the Gaṅgā. When Gautama finished eating, Rāja-Dharmān fanned him with his wings in order to relieve him from his
fatigue. The crane then asked, "My dear brāhmaṇa, please tell me about your lineage. And, what is your reason for coming to this place?"
In reply, Gautama introduced himself and then said, "O Crane, I am very poor, and so I am on my way to the seashore in the hopes of gaining wealth."
Rāja-Dharmān then said, "My dear brāhmaṇa, I can guarantee that your journey will prove successful, and thus you shall return home a prosperous man. According to the great authority Bṛhaspati, there are four means of acquiring wealth: by inheritance, by labor, by the mercy of the demigods, and by the kindness of a friend. Since you have now become my friend, I shall exert myself in such a way that you will easily be able to acquire wealth."
Thereafter, the crane prepared a bed of leaves for his guest to lie upon. Then, when the brāhmaṇa awoke the next morning, Rāja-Dharmān said, "My dear friend, just continue along this road as you were traveling, and at a distance of three yojanas you shall meet a king of the Rākṣasas named Virūpākṣa. He is a good friend of mine, and if you mention my name he will surely give you as much wealth as you desire."
After healing this, Gautama cheerfully departed, and while going along the road, he ate the nectareous fruits which be found growing everywhere. In this way, he reached the city of Meruvraja, and by introducing himself as being sent by Rāja-Dharmān, Gautama was received very respectfully by the Rākṣasa's king. After worshipping his brāhmaṇa guest and having him comfortably seated, Virūpākṣa inquired about his birth, study of the Vedas, ascetic vows, and other practices. However, in reply, Gautama simply gave his name and indicated his dynasty. Virūpākṣa noted how his guest appeared to be devoid of all brahminical splendor and knowledge, and be next inquired about Gautama's birthplace and residence. Gautama frankly explained how he had been born in the middle country, but that he had taken up residence in a village of hunters and had married the widow of a śūdra.
After hearing this, Virūpākṣa began to carefully reflect upon what he should do for achieving his own merit. The Rākṣasa king then came to the following conclusion: "This man is a brāhmaṇa by birth, and he is a friend of my very dear relative, Rāja-Dharmān. Today is the very auspicious full moon day of Kārṭika, and I have invited 1,000 brāhmaṇas
to come here in order to receive charity. By destiny, this Gautama has also arrived at the urging of my dear friend, and so I shall honor him along with the rest of the brähmaṇas."

While Virūpākṣa was thinking in this way, the 1,000 brähmaṇas arrived, and all of them were very highly qualified. The king worshipped his guests according to the proper rituals and then invited them to take their seats upon kuśa mats which had been placed on the ground. Food was then served to the brähmaṇas upon golden plates, and when they had finished eating, the king brought before them piles of gold, jewels, and other valuables. Virūpākṣa then said, "My dear brähmaṇas, you may take away as much of this wealth as you are able to carry, and for this one day you need not have any fear of Rākṣasas. Therefore, please feel free to remain here for awhile and enjoy yourselves as you like before departing."

However, in spite of his assurances, the brähmaṇas quickly departed after having received their charity, and so did Gautama, who took away a large quantity of gold. After carrying the burden with great difficulty, Gautama once again arrived at the banyan tree where he had met Rāja-Dharmāṇ, the crane. Being very tired and hungry, Gautama decided to sit down and rest for awhile. Just then, Rāja-Dharmāṇ returned home, and because he was by nature very devoted to his friends, he cheerfully welcomed the brähmaṇa and then arranged for his food. As the crane very humbly engaged in fanning him with his wings, Gautama finished eating and then sat back very comfortably. He then thought to himself as follows:

"Alas! Being impelled by greed and foolishness, I have traveled a long way with a heavy load. I still have such a long way to walk, and so I wonder how I shall be able to survive. While coming here, I had not found any food along the way."

While thinking like this, the ungrateful brähmaṇa looked at Rāja-Dharmāṇ, who was resting trustfully by his side. Gautama then thought, "I could kill this big bird and then eat his ample flesh along the way."

After making up his mind in that way, Gautama brutally killed the crane. Then, after skinning it, he roasted its flesh on the fire which his host had prepared for him. After he had finished cooking, Gautama packed up the meat, picked up his gold, and happily departed, not even
imagining that he had acted sinfully. The next day, Virūpākṣa told his son, "My dear prince, I have not seen my friend Rāja-Dharmān today, although it is his fixed habit to daily go to Brahmaloka and then visit me while returning home. I am afraid that that unqualified brāhmaṇa has slain him, for I could understand that he had a wicked and heartless nature."

Fearing the worst, Virūpākṣa sent his son to look for the crane, and so, accompanied by other Rākṣasas, the prince quickly departed. Very soon, they reached the banyan tree, and there they saw the remains of the slain crane. While crying out with grief, the Rākṣasa prince began to follow Gautama's path, and after some time, he caught up with the wretched brāhmaṇa and captured him alive. Then, upon his return, the prince dragged Gautama before the king and displayed the remains of Rāja-Dharmān. Upon seeing the crane's skin and bones, the king and his ministers began to weep aloud, and when the news was spread, the entire city of Meruvraja became plunged into grief. Virūpākṣa then angrily ordered the Rākṣasas to kill and devour Gautama. They all refused, however, by saying, "O Lord, we do not consider that such a sinful person is fit to eat. Therefore, we suggest that you hand him over to the dacoits in this area, for they are also man-eaters."

The Rākṣasas then hacked up Gautama's body into pieces, but when they offered the flesh to the dacoits, they also refused to eat it on the same grounds. Thus, the flesh was simply left to rot, since no living being would touch it. Virūpākṣa then performed the funeral ceremonies for his friend, Rāja-Dharmān. At that time, Surabhi, the daughter of Dakṣa, appeared above the funeral pyre. From the sky, milk flowed from Surabhi's mouth into the fire, and as a result, Rāja-Dharmān was immediately brought back to life. After rising out of the fire, the crane approached Virūpākṣa, and just then, Indra appeared there and announced, "Once, when Rāja-Dharmān was late in coming to Brahmaloka at his appointed time, Lord Brahma angrily cursed him by saying, 'O Crane, you shall not die very soon. Thus, it will be a long time before you are able to leave the earth in order to come and live in heaven!' It is because of this curse that Rāja-Dharmān has been revived." Rāja-Dharmān then approached Indra and pleaded, "O king of heaven, please enable my dear friend Gautama to also be restored to life."
At this, Indra sprinkled some nectar onto the cut-up pieces of Gautama's flesh, and as a consequence, he was also instantly revived. Seeing how his friend had come back from the dead, Rāja-Dharmān ran to Gautama and embraced him with great joy. Thereafter, everyone took leave from one another and parted ways. Gautama returned home with his gold, and year after year, he continued to beget many sinful children upon his śūdra wife. In consideration of his overall abominable behavior, the demigods cursed Gautama so that after giving up his body at the time of death, he had to reside in hell in order to suffer for a long, long time. Bhiṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I had heard this story directly from the great sage, Nārada. O King, just consider the position of such an ungrateful person, and how unsuitable he is for becoming an object of friendship! There are means of atonement for all kinds of sins, including the killing of a brāhmaṇa, but there is no expiation for an ungrateful person. For this reason, even the Rākṣasas and other man-eaters refused to eat the flesh of such an ungrateful slayer of his own friend."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next said, "My dear grandsire, please describe to me the supreme duty in life, and the results which are obtained by its performance."
Bhiṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, religious duties are innumerable and diverse, and the correct performance of anyone of them can never prove to be rutile. Still, dedication to the path of self-realization is the supreme religious duty which stands above all others. If one thinks over it a little deeply, he can understand that the things of this world are all temporary, and for this reason they have no inherent value. This realization automatically results in a gradual detachment from all desires for material enjoyment. In other words, when one comes to the stage of comprehending the basic defect of material existence, he should strive for self-realization and liberation from material bondage."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "My dear grandsire, when a person loses the object of his attachment, especially upon the death of a near and dear one, the grief which he feels is very great. How can this sorrow be mitigated?"
Bhiṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, once upon a time a brāhmaṇa
came to the royal court of his friend, Mahārāja Senajit. When he saw how the king was absorbed in bitterly lamenting over the death of his dear son, the brāhmaṇa spoke to him as follows: 'My dear friend, how is it that, even though you yourself are an object of pity, you are grieving for the condition of another? Soon, others will lament on account of your death, and then later on, these people will cause still others to lament when they pass away. O King, you are falsely lamenting for the condition of the body because you fail to understand that the real person is eternal and unchanging.'

"The material body is just an external covering of the living soul. As the eternal self remains situated within his material body, he gradually sees that it undergoes the transformations of birth, growth, maturity, dwindling, and at last, death, one after another. The material body is a wonderful replica of a living being, like an astonishingly realistic doll, and it has been constructed with incredible ingenuity. Just try to appreciate the complex brain, the automatically focusing eyes, the ever-beating heart, and the self-contained reproductive system! And yet, all of these are simply combinations of earth, water, fire, air, and ether. The body, although resembling a living being, is just a combination of material elements and thus it is in actuality a very sophisticated machine. Like any other machine, the body is useless without a living operator. That eternal living entity is situated within the region of the heart, and it is he who activates all of the various sensual functions."

"One can easily feel his own existence within the body, just as a man sees himself in relationship to the chariot which he is driving. A chariot cannot understand its own existence because it is not conscious; it is simply dull matter. The body is also like that, and it is a separate entity, the soul within the body, who is conscious of his existence. O King, one must gradually see himself within the body by taking help of his good intelligence. One can think over the matter very cool-headedly as follows: "I used to have a small child's body, and in that body I observed my childish activities. Now, my body has completely changed, and it is a mature adult body in which I am witnessing a different set of activities. As time passes, my body will continue to change, and eventually, I shall have an old and invalid body with wrinkled skin. And yet, in spite of the change of body, I will still be there to witness the activities of old age"
and ultimately, death. Now, who am 'I'? Who is that 'I' which has not been lost in spite of the change of head, hair, face, chest, arms, legs, feet, and all of the internal organs? Medical science confirms that the cells which make up the body change their material content, moment by moment. Every day we consume food which is then transformed into new cells and cell-parts. As a result, after about a seven-year period, all of the matter within our body becomes completely replaced. As a crude example, suppose you have a new chariot, but then gradually, over the years, you have to replace all of the parts, one after another. At last, is it still the same chariot which you had once possessed? Truthfully speaking, it is a different chariot because not a single atom of the original chariot has remained.

"The change of body is something like this. A vivid example is seen in some varieties of lizards which have the ability to grow back a completely new tail if the original tail is severed. Is the newly grown tail the same as the original tail? It certainly looks the same, but it is all newly made. Similarly, the body which we possess today is completely different in content from the body we had as a small child. And yet, in spite of this, we can positively declare, "I was present there in the small child's body. I can remember doing such and such thing when I was three years old." Where is that child's body now? It is gone and I have a different body, and yet "I" have remained. "I" was present in the child's body and "I" am present in this grown-up body. Now, what is that "I" which has not been lost in spite of the change of body? That is the eternal conscious living entity, or soul, existing within the body, witnessing all of its activities.

"O King, just consider: The body, minus "you", is not conscious, for it is made of dull matter. At the time of death, the same body remains, but in one second we can immediately understand, "He is now dead." Why? The same head, trunk, and legs are all there. What is missing? Consciousness. He who activates the body, feels pleasure and pain, who is aware of others, and responds to them with his bodily senses, is now gone. There is no longer anyone to see the images which enter the bodily eye, nor hear the vibrations of sound which enter the ear. The eternal, conscious self has gone away, covered by the subtle body consisting of mind, intelligence, and false ego, in order to develop another material body
within the womb of his next mother.

"In this way, one receives a new mother and father, brothers and sisters, a new nationality, family tree and a new opportunity to create some temporary name, fame and profit which will all be taken away at death. In this way, the eternal souls who are wandering throughout the universe repeatedly come together in bodily relationships for a few days and then once again separate. This is just like pieces of straw and wood which assemble on the surface of the ocean but then are dashed irrevocably apart by the next wave.

"My dear Senajit, because such bodily relationships are illusory, why should an intelligent man lament at the time of their termination? O King, the state of real happiness is attained when one becomes detached from all flickering material conditions. An example often cited in this connection is that of Piṅgalā the prostitute. This unfortunate woman became so anxious upon failing to attract any customers that she could not sleep at night. Finally, however, when she understood that all such men who lustily approach her are in fact personified forms of hell, she gave up placing her hopes in such so-called lovers. By realizing the futility of searching for happiness in such an illusory condition, Piṅgalā gave up her burning desire for sense gratification and thus she was able to sleep peacefully."

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, after hearing the excellent discourse of his brāhmaṇa friend, King Senajit also gave up his grief and became highly delighted at heart."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "O Bhīṣma, since time appears to destroy everything, what is it that should be sought after?"
Bhīṣma replied, "My dear king, in this regard, I shall describe to you the following conversation which once took place between a certain brāhmaṇa and his son, Medhāvin."
One day, Medhāvin inquired, "My dear father, since human life passes away so quickly, what essential duty should a person make sure that he performs without fail?"
The brāhmaṇa replied, "My dear son, during childhood and youth, one should observe the vow of brahmacarya and apply himself very diligently
to the study of the Vedas. When one becomes mature, he should marry in order to beget children who can rescue him and his ancestors, and he should also perform the required sacrifices. Finally, as old age approaches, one should retire to the forest in order to engage in meditation for achieving self-realization and ultimate liberation."

However, Medhävin replied, "O Father, I disagree with you, for death can snatch us away at any time when we are unaware, just as a tiger seizes a sleeping deer at night. Because of this, our life may be finished before our mission has been fulfilled. Why should we live ignorantly throughout our entire life, thinking that in our old age we shall cultivate real knowledge? Death may come at any moment. My dear father, what is the need for having children to rescue me when I can achieve the highest destination by means of self-realization? What is the use in maintaining a wife, children, and other relatives when I can establish my eternal relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead?"

After hearing these words from his perfectly intelligent son, the brāhmaṇa also became more interested in self-realization than material arrangements. Thereafter, Bhīṣma referred to many conversations which had taken place between illustrious personalities, showing how the renunciation of desires for material gain is better than the cultivation of them. Bhīṣma then related the following short story:

There was once a man named Manki. Even after having made numerous attempts to acquire wealth, this poor fellow only ended up with disappointment. Finally, with the little bit of money which remained, Manki purchased two young bulls and a yoke and then began to train them how to plow the fields. One day, after yoking his bulls, as Manki was escorting them to the agricultural field, they came upon a camel that was lying down in the middle of the road. At the sight of the camel, the bulls became frightened, and as they proceeded to run helter-skelter, they fell down when the yoke struck the camel's neck. At this, the camel angrily got up and quickly ran away, taking the bulls with him. When Manki saw how the bulls were dangling from either side of the camel's long neck, and thus were on the verge of death due to being dragged along the ground, he exclaimed, "Alas! If one is not destined to gain wealth, then he shall not be able to attain it even with the greatest exertion! I can now realize that what appears to be an accident, the bulls
being dragged away by the camel to their deaths, is actually the result of Destiny. To say that something happens by chance is no better than claiming that the falling of an over-ripe fruit from a tree was caused by a crow which happened to be perched upon the same branch."

After coming to this conclusion, Manki gave up all material aspirations and commenced a life of meditation for the purpose of achieving self-realization and ultimate liberation.

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, material hopes are very strong and they always agitate one's heart. On the other hand, the renunciation of all such false hopes brings about genuine peace and happiness. For this reason, wisdom is said to be the best of all acquisitions. Now, in order to illustrate this point, I shall narrate to you the following story:

There was once a very prosperous vaiśya who became puffed-up due to his great wealth and prestigious position. One day, as he rode in his chariot, this vaiśya accidentally knocked down a young brāhmaṇa named Kaśyapa. As he lay there, writhing in pain, the brāhmaṇa exclaimed, "What misfortune! I shall now give up my life, for it is not even worth living if one is as poor and miserable as myself!"

Taking the form of a jackal, Indra then came before Kaśyapa and said, "My dear brāhmaṇa, you are so fortunate to have gotten the human form of life! We lower creatures are very envious of you human beings. With your hands you can pick out the thorns from your body, crush the insects that bite you, and build nice houses to sleep in. The brāhmaṇas are the topmost class of human beings. Therefore, you should appreciate how much you have struggled while passing through innumerable lower births in order to gain your present exalted position. Now, if you destroy your body by the sinful act of suicide, you will be making a horrible mistake.

"In my last life, I was an atheist, I blasphemed the Vedas, and I always treated the brāhmaṇas with disrespect. As a result, I have been degraded to such an abominable condition of life! When I once again have the good fortune to attain the human form, I shall be very careful to act piously, since I have been lucky enough to learn from my mistakes. My dear brāhmaṇa, aside from this ordinary understanding, there is a higher principle of knowledge which you should be aware of. Why should you
lament on account of your present suffering and thus aspire for a more comfortable condition of life? You should realize that such material aspirations are never satisfied. When one experiences that little bit of sweetness which is obtained by contacting desirable objects, he develops a great hankering to possess them. A person who has never had the experience of a certain sense pleasure cannot desire it, but, once acquired, such aspirations only serve to burn the heart. Therefore, a wise person withdraws his mind and senses from the sense objects and the flickering pleasure which can be derived from them. In this way, the intelligent person actually achieves real peace and happiness.

"O brahma, others, who are bewildered by maya, even when they are born in very abominable conditions, such as having physical defects or being obliged to execute low professions, never wish to give up their lives. Therefore, get up! Throw off all of your lamentations and thoughts of suicide and begin a detached life of virtue."

After hearing all this, the brahma Kaśyapa raised himself up off the ground and then thanked the jackal for his good advice. In response, Indra revealed his true celestial form, and after worshipping the king of heaven with great respect, the brahma took his leave and returned borne. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next requested,

"My dear Bhīśma, please describe to me the origin of the universe."

Bhīśma replied, "O King, Lord Viṣṇu is the original cause of this material manifestation, and the original created being, Lord Brahmā, took birth directly from His transcendental body. Lord Brahmā was born upon the lotus flower which grew from the navel of Lord Viṣṇu, and within the stem of that gigantic lotus, the Lord manifested His universal form. Bhāradvāja Ṛṣi had once inquired from Bhṛgu Muni, 'O great sage, why isn't the lotus considered to be the first-born instead of Lord Brahmā?'

'Bhṛgu Muni replied, 'O Ṛṣi, when the earth was manifested from that lotus flower, Mount Meru became the pericarp. From his seat atop Mount Meru, Lord Brahmā recreated the universe as it had existed previously in the last millennium. In the very beginning of the creation, the universe was just like an empty shell. From the body of Lord Viṣṇu, water was the first element to spring up, and as it rushed in, sound and wind were created, just as they are when water is poured into an empty clay pot. From the friction of water and wind, fire was produced, and the
solidified portion of the water became the earth. Later on, the created bodies of the living beings were made from these five elements, and because of this, the bodily senses partake of these elements' qualities. The ear has the quality of space, the nose has the quality of earth, the tongue has the quality of water, touch has the quality of wind, and the eyes have the quality of fire or light.'

"Bhäradvāja then said, 'O Bhṛgu, it appears to me that the nonmoving entities, such as trees and plants, are devoid of senses.'

"Bhṛgu Muni replied, 'O Rṣi, this is not a fact. The trees can hear, smell, see, taste, and feel. When trees are cut, they feel pain. A creeper which grows around a tree-trunk can see the correct path. Fruits and flowers fall off from a tree that becomes startled by loud sounds such as thunder. Trees grow better and produce superior fruits and flowers when they perceive sweet incense and perfumes. When trees are diseased, they respond to water and medicines due to having the sense of taste.'

"'My dear Bhāradvāja, when the four varṇas were created, the brāhmaṇas were given a white complexion; the kṣatriya, red; the vaiṣyās, dark golden; and the śūdras, black. Varṇa means color as well as class, and thus the colors of white, red and black are taken to represent the modes of nature: goodness, passion, and ignorance.'"

"Bhäradvāja then asked, 'O Muni, since the qualities of lust, anger, anxiety, greed, and hunger are possessed by all men, how can the human beings be distinguished into four classes?'

"Bhṛgu Muni then replied, 'My dear Rṣi, all human beings are essentially one, but they become distinguishable by their actions. Originally, all men were created with brahminical qualities. Then, later on, those who developed the qualities of passion became kṣatriyas; those who developed the qualities of both passion and ignorance became vaiṣyās; and those who developed the quality of ignorance alone became śūdras. In other words, the other three classes have been created out of the brāhmaṇas who fell away from their order. From this explanation, we can understand that qualification is the important indicator and not birth. If a śūdra manifests higher qualities, then he should no longer be considered a śūdra, just as a brāhmaṇa who lacks the qualities of goodness should no longer be respected as a brāhmaṇa.' "
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next requested, "My dear Bhīṣma, please describe to me the merit of chanting mantras, or japa, as a means of meditation." In reply, Bhīṣma narrated the following story: Once, there was a very learned brāhmaṇa who regularly practiced the chanting of the Gāyatrī mantra along with his ascetic vows. At last, after this brāhmaṇa had resided for 1,000 years in the Himālayas, Gāyatrīdevī (Sāvitrī) mercifully appeared before him. Even though Gāyatrīdevī expressed her pleasure with him, this brāhmaṇa made no response at first, but simply continued his japa. At last, after finishing his prescribed amount of chanting, the brāhmaṇa stood up with folded hands and then fell down at Gāyatrīdevī’s feet in order to offer his respectful obeisances. With tears in his eyes, the brāhmaṇa then said, "My dear goddess, I am unable to express my joy and gratitude for the great mercy which you have shown me. O Devi, may my heart forever take pleasure in the recitation of the Gāyatrī mantra so that my absorption in meditation upon it shall ever increase."

Goddess Sāvitrī happily replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, rest assured that your wish is granted. I have come here to inform you that one day Dharma, Mṛtyu, Yamarāja, and Time will come here in order to engage you in debate on the subject of morality. O brāhmaṇa, continue to have full faith in your life of devotion, knowing that at the end of this lifetime, you will attain Brahmāloka."

After saying this, Sāvitrī departed, and the brāhmaṇa once again sat down in order to continue his meditation upon the Gāyatrī mantra. Finally, after the expiry of another 1,000 years, Dharma appeared before this brāhmaṇa due to having become very satisfied with his activities. After introducing himself, Dharma said, "My dear brāhmaṇa, as a reward for your recitation of the Gāyatrī mantra and execution of severe austerities, you can now cast off your material body and go to an exalted destination which is even higher than the planets wherein the great demigods reside."

The brāhmaṇa replied, "O lord of righteousness, I have no desire to cast off my material body nor to attain an exalted destination. Therefore, you may take your leave and return to wherever you have come from."

With great surprise, Dharma responded, "My dear brāhmaṇa, do not act so foolishly! Give up this miserable body and at once attain the highest
planet within the universe. If there is anything else which you may happen to desire, then I am also prepared to reward you accordingly."
The brähmaṇa then replied, "My dear sir, I do not want to go to heaven without taking my body with me. Thus, there is no need for you to further waste your time here."
At this, Dharma replied, "O brähmaṇa, don't you know that if you give up your body and go to heaven, then you shall be freed from all miserable conditions of earthly life?"
Still, the brähmaṇa said, "O Dharma, my only happiness is in the recitation of the Gāyatrī mantra. It is for this reason that I do not want to go to heaven by giving up the body which enables me to chant it."
With some irritation, Dharma then said, "O brähmaṇa, even if you do not want to give up your body, you will have to do so because Yamarāja, Time, and Mṛtyu are approaching you nonetheless!"
Indeed, as Dharma was speaking, these three persons came to that spot. Yamarāja first of all addressed the brähmaṇa saying, "O fortunate one, I have come here to assure you that a very great reward awaits you as a result of your exalted activities."
Time and Mṛtyu, who appeared as an old lady, next said, "My dear brähmaṇa, we have also come here just to take you to an exalted destination which you have earned."
The brähmaṇa worshipped his four guests by washing their feet and presenting them arghya. At this time, Mahārāja Ikṣvāku happened to arrive at that place in the course of his pilgrimage. The king also very respectfully worshipped the four deities, and in turn, the brähmaṇa worshipped the king and offered him a nice seat. The brähmaṇa then inquired, "My dear ruler of the earth, of what service can I be?"
Mahārāja Ikṣvāku then replied, "My dear sir, I cannot take anything from a brähmaṇa. Rather, I wish to give you something in charity. Therefore, please tell me what you desire."
The brähmaṇa replied, "My dear king, there are two classes of brähmaṇas, just as there are two paths of virtue: pravṛtti and nivṛtti, addiction to work and abstention from work. Since I belong to the latter class of brähmaṇas, I have given up the practice of accepting gifts. My dear king, you can give in charity to those brähmaṇas of the former group, and take from me some benediction which will benefit you."
Mahārāja Ikṣvāku requested, "My dear brāhmaṇa, as a kṣatriya, I do not even know how to utter the word 'give' except in the challenge, 'Give me battle!''

At this, the brāhmaṇa remarked, "O King, there appears to be little difference between you and I, because both of us are satisfied with the performance of our respective duties."

King Ikṣvāku then remained silent for a moment, as if considering something very deeply within his mind. Finally, he said, "O brāhmaṇa, since you have offered me something, I have decided to take from you the results of your recitation of the Gāyatrī mantra, just to honor your request." With great surprise, the brāhmaṇa exclaimed, "O King, do you not remember how just a moment ago you had bragged that the only thing which you ever ask for is battle? Why not request that of me?"

Mahārāja Ikṣvāku replied, "My dear sir, the power of a brāhmaṇa lies in his words, whereas the power of a kṣatriya is in his arms. Therefore, in order to be fair, I shall engage in a duel of words with you."

The brāhmaṇa then said, "My dear king, please do not misunderstand me. If you wish to ask for anything more than just an argument, then I will happily grant the fulfillment of your desires."

Upon hearing this, Mahārāja Ikṣvāku once again requested, "My dear brāhmaṇa, if this be the case, then give me the results which you have earned by dint of chanting the Gāyatrī mantra and executing austerities during the last 1,000 years."

The brāhmaṇa immediately gave his consent, but then, paradoxically, the king suddenly changed his mind and declined the gift by saying, "My dear brāhmaṇa, in actuality, I have no need for whatever it is that you may have gained by reciting your mantra or performing austerities. However, since I am curious, please explain to me exactly what the fruits of your practices are."

The brāhmaṇa replied, "O King, to tell you the truth, I have no clear idea of what result I have gained by chanting the Gāyatrī mantra. Still, whatever the fruit may be, I have given it to you as requested, and Dharma, Time, Mrtyu, and Yamarāja are the witnesses. Therefore, you must accept it."

At this, Ikṣvāku protested, "O brāhmaṇa, if you do not know what results you have gained by your actions, then I am unwilling to accept such a
The brahma insisted, however, by saying, "I have already given to you the fruits of many mantra recitations and because of this, I shall never accept them back nor even hear another word on the subject. For all these years I have recited the Gayatri mantra without any motive of receiving benefit. For this reason, I have no idea exactly what that benefit is which I have obtained. My dear king, you clearly told me 'give', and so I gave you what you had requested. Your words must not prove false, for such falsity of speech is a great sin. Truth is the supreme virtue because all other qualities of goodness rest upon it. Once, Truth was placed upon one side of a scale, and all other religious performances were placed upon the other. Truth was seen to be heavier in weight, and thus my dear king, I beg you not to become degraded by going back on your word."

Maharaja Ikshvaku then argued, "My dear brahma, in spite of whatever you may say, kshatriyas are strictly forbidden to accept any kind of charity, and for this reason I shall never take your gift!"

However, the brahma countered, "Just remember, my dear king, that you came here of your own accord, and you had made your request freely. Now, how can you dare to refuse what I am offering?"

At this point, Dharma intervened by saying, "This argument has gone far enough! Let the brahma receive that merit which is attached to giving in charity, and let Ikshvaku gain the merit of being truthful." Just then, Heaven personified appeared there and declared, "The merit which shall be awarded to the brahma and the king is equal. Therefore, let this dispute end once and for all."

Ikshvaku replied, "O Svarga, I have no use for you, and so you can return to wherever you have come from. And, if the brahma wants to accompany you to your destination, then he can take his acquired merit with him."

At this, the brahma said, "O King, in my earlier life, I had foolishly accepted charity. Now, however, I have abstained from all such materialistic activities by engaging myself completely in the recitation of the Gayatri mantra. Why then are you tempting me like this? I have no intention of taking any gift from you. I simply wish to continue my chanting."
Mahārāja Ikṣvāku replied, "O brāhmaṇa, if you insist that I must accept your gift, then let us compromise. I shall take half of your acquired merit if you take half of mine. In this way, both of our positions will remain equal. And, if you are unhappy at the thought of being equal with me, then you may take all of my accumulated merit, for after all, it is the duty of a king to give and the duty of a brāhmaṇa to receive."

Just then, two very misshapen and ill-dressed persons came upon the scene, walking with their arms around each other's shoulders. They were arguing very hotly and both of them declared, "You do not owe me anything! It is I who owe you!"

While speaking like this, the two approached Mahārāja Ikṣvāku and requested, "My dear king, please settle our dispute so that neither of us will become tainted with sin."

One of the two, named Virūpa then explained, "O King, I owe my companion, Vikrīta, the merit which is achieved by giving one cow in charity. And yet, he refuses to accept a gift from me as payment."

At this, Vikrīta exclaimed, "Virūpa is lying! He does not owe me anything!"

Mahārāja Ikṣvāku then asked Virūpa what it was that he owed his friend. Virūpa then explained the situation as follows: "My dear king, once, Vikrīta gave away a cow in charity to a brāhmaṇa for the purpose of gaining religious merit. I then went to Vikrīta and begged him to give me the merit which he had earned. He gladly did so, and thereafter, I bought two cows with calves and gave them away in charity to a poor brāhmaṇa, desiring to give Vikrīta the acquired merit as repayment for his previous gift. It is in this way that our dispute has arisen, for now, Vikrīta refuses to accept my gift. O King, we have come here in the hopes that you will be able to resolve our quarrel."

Mahārāja Ikṣvāku then inquired, "My dear Vikrīta, why don't you accept what Virūpa is offering you as repayment for your gift? You should take his gift and thus make peace with your friend."

Vikrīta then replied, "O King, I had given away my gift without expectation of return. It is for this reason that I do not wish to accept Virūpa's acquired merit."

Mahārāja Ikṣvāku argued, "O Vikrīta, because your friend is freely offering his gift, it is not as if you are demanding repayment. Indeed,
your refusal of such a friendly offer is sinful and deserves to be punished!"

Vikrīta countered, "O King, having once made a gift, how could I dare accept something in return, as if I were a merchant? If you feel that I am acting sinfully, then I am ready to accept whatever punishment you consider to be proper."

At this point, Virūpa exclaimed, "O Vikrīta, you should be punished for refusing to accept my gift!"

The brāhmaṇa then spoke up, "My dear king, in the same way, you should also accept my gift. Just consider how you have made this judgment yourself after hearing the dispute between Virūpa and Vikrīta!"

Ikṣvāku then said, "My dear Virūpa and Vikrīta, you should accept my judgment because it is the duty of a king to resolve all disputes within his realm. And yet, what a lamentable position I have been put into! Although I talk of kṣatriya duty, I have been forced to give up the proper behavior of a king by accepting gifts like a brāhmaṇa!"

The brāhmaṇa then threatened, "O King, you had better accept my gift right now, for if you do not do so, then I shall curse you!"

Feeling completely defeated, Mahārāja Ikṣvāku extended his hand and said, "O brāhmaṇa, I hereby agree to take the results which you have received on account of reciting the Gāyatrī mantra."

Then, while accepting the gift, Mahārāja Ikṣvāku requested, "My dear brāhmaṇa, I beg that in return, you take as a gift all of the merit which I have earned within my lifetime, for in this way, we shall remain equal."

Just then, Virūpa declared, "My dear king, Vikrīta and I are Wrath and Desire personified! We purposely came here to induce you to accept the brāhmaṇa's gift. Vikrīta does not owe me anything. We came here in order to benefit you, as did Dharma, Mṛtyu, Yamarāja and Time. Now that you have passed our examination, you are free to attain your excellent destination, which will be equal to that of this brāhmaṇa who continually recites the Gāyatrī mantra."

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, when one regularly utters the Gāyatrī mantra while maintaining material attachments, he attains to one of the planets of the demigods. If a person chants the Gāyatrī mantra purely, without any material attachment, then he becomes..."
liberated from the cycle of birth and death. And, if a person not only renounces the aspiration for heavenly elevation due to understanding its disadvantages, but also has re-established his eternal relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, then he goes back home, back to Godhead. This destination is superior to even the abode of Lord Brahmā, because one who goes to the spiritual planets never again has to come back to this material world."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O Grandsire, what happened after King Ikṣvāku was blessed by Time, Dharma, Yamarāja, and Mṛtyu?"

In response, Bhīṣma continued the narration as follows: The brāhmaṇa then worshipped the four deities and informed Mahārāja Ikṣvāku, "O King, I shall now return to my practice of continually uttering the Gāyatrī mantra."

Mahārāja Ikṣvāku replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, if you have become bereft of the merit which you had acquired by chanting the Gāyatrī mantra due to giving it to me in charity, then I beg you to take half of all my accumulated piety so that we can enjoy the results equally."

At this, the brāhmaṇa relented by saying, "O King, since you have so strenuously endeavored to make me the sharer of your acquired merit, I hereby agree to accept your gift. In this way, we shall both attain our deserved destinations."

Understanding that this reconciliation had been achieved, Indra suddenly appeared there, accompanied by all of the demigods. As the Gandharvas sang, the Apsarās danced, and flowers rained down from the sky. Heaven personified returned to that spot and said, "Your lives have now become successful and thus, without further delay, you can both go and enjoy your heavenly rewards."

Upon hearing this, the king and the brāhmaṇa made up their minds to turn their senses away from all material engagement. After sitting down tightly, they commenced the practice of the yogic system of breath restraint and sensual withdrawal. Thereafter when their bodies had become perfectly inactive upon the attainment of samādhi (trance), their life airs ascended to the top of their heads. At last, the life air of the brāhmaṇa pierced through his skull, and everyone could see it rise upward into the sky. Lord Brahmā then appeared overhead, and at this time, the soul of the brāhmaṇa entered into his mouth. Soon thereafter,
the king achieved the same destination, and upon seeing this wonder, the assembled demigods began to glorify the Creator as an expression of their profound appreciation for the exalted destination which is achieved by reciters of the Gāyatrī mantra. Lord Brahmā then departed, and thereafter, all of the other demigods returned to their respective abodes.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear Bhīṣma, you have described to me the liberation of the soul from material entanglement by means of the impersonal process of negation, which is called 'neti, neti' (Not this, not this). By giving up all connection with material sense objects and withdrawing the mind from all aspirations for material happiness, one can become fixed in meditation upon the impersonal Brahman, which is devoid of all material qualities. In this way, one can ultimately attain liberation by entering into the brahmajyoti, the bodily effulgence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. O Grand sire, I now request you to speak about the higher objective of spiritual realization, the lotus-eyed Govinda, who is the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and the cause of all causes."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, throughout my lifetime, I had extensively heard about the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa from many great authorities, such as Paraśurāma, Nārada Muni, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, Vālmiki, and Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi. These infallible self-realized souls all described Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord of all demigods, and the eternal divine Puruṣa. It is Lord Kṛṣṇa who is the soul of all souls, and He is the original seed of the created universe. Those who are the most advanced transcendentalists aspire to enter Lord Kṛṣṇa’s eternal abode, which is called Goloka Vṛndāvana, and which is situated above even the Vaikuṇṭha planets in the spiritual sky. The Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Kṛṣṇa is achieved by means of unalloyed devotion and by no other process. Those who have served Lord Kṛṣṇa in devotion out of spontaneous love can achieve residence in His Supreme abode. Those who serve the Supreme Lord with devotion which is inspired by awe and reverence, however, attain to Vaikuṇṭha. Those who cannot understand that the Absolute Truth is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and thus are absorbed in an impersonal conception, if they
purify themselves of all material contamination, they become merged within the *brahmajyoti*. This is an imperfect destination, however, because one's original personal existence and constitutional activity remain undiscovered. There is every chance of once again falling down from the *brahmajyoti*, because senselessness and inactivity cannot stand forever. Besides these, all other destinations are temporary, from the topmost planet within the universe, Brahmaloka, down to the lowest, Pātāla."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear grandfather, what should a king intelligently do after having lost all of his prosperity? Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, when one has fallen into a very distressed condition of life, being bereft of friends, relations, wealth and reputation, he should practice fortitude and not give way to grief under any circumstances. Indulgence in grief destroys one's personal beauty, duration of life, prosperity and virtue. One who constantly dwells upon his misfortune loses all enthusiasm, mental equilibrium, and bodily strength. In this way, he meets with total defeat in life. On the other hand, if a distressed person remains fixed and undisturbed, he can easily regain his position when the next opportunity arises. In this regard, I shall relate to you a conversation which once took place between Bali Mahārāja and Indra."

Once, Bali Mahārāja became the unrivaled ruler of the three worlds after the demons had soundly defeated the demigods in battle. The Supreme Lord Viṣṇu then appeared as Lord Vāmanadeva, and by an act of deceit, He returned the kingdom of the three worlds to Indra. Some time later on, while touring the earth, riding upon the back of Airāvata and surrounded by many demigods, Indra happened to come to where Bali Mahārāja was staying within a cave by the seashore. When he saw Indra and the demigods approaching, Bali Mahārāja did not at all become agitated, nor did he show the slightest sign of grief. From the back of his elephant carrier Indra then inquired, "O Bali, how can you remain so fearless and untroubled, in spite of having been defeated by your enemies? Who else could be able to bear the burden of grief which one feels after having his kingdom, wives, and wealth taken away?"

After hearing these cutting words, Bali Mahārāja replied, "O Indra, it is very foolish for a person to become proud of his prosperity, because all
positions within the material world are reversed in due course of time. Before me, there were many great rulers, but now they are all dead and gone. Therefore, my dear Indra, you should cast off your false pride and the great attachment which you have for the objects of affection. If you do this, then you shall also be able to bear the great burden of grief when your hour of misfortune arrives. Grief is useless, for it never dispels an adverse condition. Patience and forbearance are what is required, for everything can be attained in Time's due course. Time sweeps away one who is thinking, 'I will do this today and I will do that tomorrow.' After the death of such a person, people exclaim, 'I saw him just a little while ago! How is it that he died?'

Indra highly appreciated Bali Mahārāja's good instructions and after praising him, the king of heaven departed with the feeling that he had learned something.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, by what symptoms can a person ascertain the future greatness or fall of a person?"

Bhīṣma replied, "O King, the mind is the indicator of one's future prosperity or degradation, and in this regard, I shall narrate to you the following story:"

Once upon a time, Nārada Muni went to the banks of the Gaṅgā in order to take his morning bath. At the same time, Indra also came there, and when these two illustrious personalities finished bathing, they sat down on the shore in order to listen to the discourses of the celestial ṛṣis who had also come there. Soon thereafter, when the sun rose, everyone stood up in order to offer prayers unto Sūrya, and as they were doing so, a blazingly luminous object could be seen approaching them through the sky. After a moment, that splendid object revealed itself to be the chariot of Lord Viṣṇu, adorned with the flag of Garuḍa, and occupied by the goddess of fortune, Lakṣmī, who was surrounded by numerous Apsarās. After getting down from Lord Nārāyaṇa's chariot, Lakṣmīdevī began to approach Indra, and so the king of heaven also came forward in order to meet her. With folded hands, Indra worshipped Lakṣmīdevī, and then he inquired about her purpose for coming to the banks of the Gaṅgā. Lakṣmīdevī replied, "O King, formerly I had dwelt with the asuras on account of their meritorious behavior. Now, however, since they have acted unrighteously, I am coming here in order to reside with
Indra then requested, "My dear goddess, please describe to us the behavior of the asuras which had formerly obliged you to reside with them, as well as the behavior which induced you to leave them."

Lakṣṇī replied, "My dear king of heaven, I become attached to those persons who strictly follow their occupational duties and who act according to religious principles. Formerly, the Dānavas were very clean, charitable, and they carefully controlled their passions. They performed sacrifices and studied the Vedas, they were respectful to their superiors, and they were sweet in speech. They had a sense of shame, they rose before sunrise, they were compassionate toward the weak, and in general, they were distinguished by all good qualities. Because of this, I had dwelt with the Dānavas for many millenniums, ever since the very beginning of the creation.

"In due course of time, however, the behavior of the Dānavas began to change as they became victims of lust and anger. The young became so disrespectful toward their superiors that they would not even stand up when elders entered the room. In the Dānavas' society, those persons who attained wealth by unrighteous means became highly esteemed. Sons began to lord it over their parents, and wives did the same with their husbands. Cooks no longer observed the rules of purity, and everyone simply ate without offering their food unto the demigods or the Supreme Lord. Animals were eaten without having been first of all offered in sacrifice, and parents abandoned their unwanted offspring after begetting them irresponsibly. Śūdrās studied the Vedas and performed austerities and everyone continued to sleep after the sun had already risen. Learned brāhmaṇas were no longer given respect, disciples no longer honored their preceptors, and the gurus treated their disciples as friends. In general, the bounds of good behavior were transgressed, and for this reason, I have left the Dānavas' association in order to come here. My dear Indra, I hope that you will receive me respectfully and maintain me by righteous behavior."

Indra and Nārada Muni then welcomed Lakṣṇīdevī with great joy, as did the other demigods, and at that time, all auspicious signs became visible. From that day on, the demigods began to observe virtuous behavior without deviation, and as a result, they quickly became endowed with
every sort of prosperity.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "O Bhīṣma, what sort of man is dear to all persons and endowed with all virtuous qualities?"

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, one day, as He conversed with King Ugrasena, Lord Kṛṣṇa described Nārada Muni as follows: 'O Grandfather, the great devaṁṛi Nārada has no yearning whatsoever for objects which are related to artha and kāma. He is sinless, he loves all creatures and thus, he views all with an equal eye. He is devoid of enviousness and malice, and therefore, he never rejoices at the misfortune of others. Nārada Muni is perfectly truthful in speech, and he never indulges in self-glorification. His speech is always very mild, and although he has the capacity of seeing within the hearts of all, he never unnecessarily blames anyone nor divulges the secrets of others. Because of all these wonderful qualities, Nārada Muni is forever the object of respect and worship for all others."

Next, Bhīṣma related this story: There was once a brāhmaṇa named Jājali who became very powerful on account of his austerities. Since he was able to travel in his subtle body anywhere throughout the universe while his gross body remained standing within water, Jājali considered that no one could be equal to him. While executing his life of austerities, Jājali used to sleep outside during the rainy season. Then, later on, he simply stood immovably, like a wooden post, while completely abstaining from food. One day, as Jājali stood like this, a pair of kuliṅga birds made their nest in his thickly matted hair by adding pieces of straw and grass. Desiring to exhibit perfect nonviolence and compassion, the rṣi did not move even an inch, and thus the birds continued to live there without any fear or anxiety.

When autumn came, the birds had sexual union, and the female's eggs were laid in the nest. The rṣi knew of this, and so he never moved the slightest bit, being intent upon earning great ascetic merit. As a result, the birds were so confident of their eggs' safety that they used to leave the nest during the day and then return in the evening. In due course of time, the eggs hatched, and as the baby birds proceeded to grow up in the nest, Jājali continued to stand immobile. After some time, the small birds developed their wings, and so they also began to leave the nest during the day. Then, soon thereafter, the birds began to stay away for
days at a time, returning to their nest every fifth or sixth evening. Still, the rṣi remained perfectly still all the while. Finally, the kuliṅga birds left their nest and then did not return home for an entire month. After waiting all this time, Jājali left that spot, considering himself to have completed his particular vow. Indeed, being extremely proud of his accomplishment, the rṣi joyfully praised himself as follows while departing: "By performing the wonderful act of allowing these birds to grow upon my head, I have certainly earned incomparable ascetic merit. Who could be more fortunate than myself?"

Just then, a voice from an unseen person in the sky declared, "O Rṣi, you are not even equal in religious merit to the merchant Tulādhāra who lives in the city of Benaras. And yet, even that person does not have the right to boast as you are doing!"

When Jājali heard these words, he felt insulted and angry, and so, out of envy, he desired to meet Tulādhāra. After wandering over the earth for some time, Jājali finally reached Benaras, and there, he saw the merchant Tulādhāra engaged in selling his wares. As soon as the shop-keeper saw the brāhmaṇa before him, he stood up in order to respectfully welcome his guest. Tulādhāra then said, "My dear Jājali, I knew that you would come to see me, and I am also aware of how you had performed great austerities by the seashore. When you had attained ascetic success, two kuliṅga birds came and nested upon your head. Then, when the baby birds were grown up, you felt very proud of your accomplishment. At this time, you heard a voice from the sky, and now you have come here in an angry mood due to the words which had been spoken. My dear rṣi, please tell me what it is that I can do for you."

The astonished Jājali asked, "O Tulādhāra, how could you, a son of a merchant, and a mere seller of fruits, vegetables and herbs, have attained such an exalted platform of knowledge?"

The vaiśya replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, the highest morality is to exhibit friendliness toward all living entities. Simply by following this principle, one will automatically reduce violence to a minimum. With spiritual vision, I am able to see the true equality of all living beings. Due to having become completely detached from all sorts of desires for material sense enjoyment, I no longer feel any hankering or lamentation, no matter what my condition of life may be. Because I view the world from
the absolute platform, I am fully conversant with all the subtleties of morality. When one is an enlightened soul, he can understand that all kinds of animal sacrifices are abominable because of the violence which is committed. The recommendations for such sacrifices which are found in the Vedas are to be understood as inferior religious principles, whereas nonviolence and renunciation are superior. Even farming is an abominable profession because of the innumerable small creatures which are killed as one plows the fields. The only sacrifice which is actually fit for a brāhmaṇa is the practice of yoga, and all others are essentially meant for kṣatriyas."

Upon hearing this, Jājali protested by saying, "My dear Tulādhāra, if your philosophy were to be adopted by everyone, then it would deprive people of their very subsistence."

Tulādhāra then explained, "My dear brāhmaṇa, when people are highly righteous, the earth automatically yields crops, without even being tilled, and all other necessities of life are provided as well by the blessings of the demigods and great ṛṣis."

Tulādhāra then pointed up into the sky and said, "O ṛṣi, just look! The birds which were raised by you have now come here, and so you should welcome them. Verily, they are your own children, and they have affection for you as if you were their own father."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhir then inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, when a person is trying to decide whether an act is to be performed or not, should haste or caution be exercised?"

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear king, an intelligent person will reflect for a long time before acting. In order to illustrate this point, I shall now narrate to you the following story:" There was once a ṛṣī named Medhātithi in the line of Gautama, and thus he was also called Gautama. This brāhmaṇa had a son named Cīrakārīn who always reflected for a long time before carrying out any task. Indeed, because it took him such a long time to even begin some work, Cīrakārīn gained a reputation for being very idle and foolish. One day, after finding a great fault with his wife, Gautama angrily ordered Cīrakārīn to kill her, and after doing so, he hastily departed for the forest. As was his custom, Cīrakārīn simply stood there, thinking over the matter for a long time. Then, finally he replied, "So be it," even
though his father had long since departed. Still, as was his habit, Ciraṅkārin once again began to reflect over the propriety of the act which he had been ordered to accomplish. While doing so, the boy thought as follows: "How can I obey my father and at the same time avoid the sin of killing my mother? After all, the mother is the giver of her son's body. There is no shelter like one's mother and therefore, no one is more dear than she. According to the dictates of morality, women are not to be punished for their sinful actions in consideration of the natural weakness of their sex and the ease with which they are seduced. Therefore, since I consider my mother to be innocent, I cannot even conceive of killing her."

In this way, Ciraṅkārin thought and thought for a long, long time. Meanwhile, after many days had passed, Gautama returned to his aśrama, convinced after long reflection that he had been wrong in condemning his wife to death. While burning with grief and shedding profuse tears, Gautama thought to himself as follows: "Indra had come to my aśrama in the guise of a brāhmaṇa, and thus I worshipped him with great respect. I cannot really blame Indra for having become infatuated with Ahalyā's beauty while passing overhead in his celestial chariot. Indeed, it is my own fault that the king of heaven misbehaved, for I had foolishly given him the opportunity to do so. Indra had requested permission to take some rest, and so I led him into my cottage and had my wife attend to his comforts."

Due to his great purity of heart, Gautama thought like this, and thus he was very repentant, considering himself to be the slayer of a woman. Still, as he hurried home, the rṣi hoped that his son would once again live up to his name as he had done so many times in the past. When Gautama entered his aśrama, he eagerly inquired from his son about his wife. Upon seeing his father's return, Ciraṅkārin threw away the weapon he had taken up and ran to meet him. When Gautama saw his son standing before him, ashamed at having failed to execute his order, and then saw his wife, petrified with fear, he became overjoyed. With great relief, he embraced his son tightly and smelled his head with great affection. Then, while pronouncing numerous blessings upon him, Gautama declared, "My dear Ciraṅkārin, may you always reflect for a long time before acting, because by doing so, you have made me a very happy
man this day."
Bhiṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, a person should always delay before engaging himself in acts which involve wrath, pride, disputes, sins, or the performance of disagreeable work. One should reflect for a long time before inflicting punishment upon one's relatives, friends, servants, or wife, especially if the offense is not clearly proven. A project which has already been started should only be abandoned after a lot of careful thought."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "O Grandsire, which is to be regarded as superior: the attainment of dharma, artha, or kāma?" In reply, Bhiṣma narrated the following story:
Once there was a very poor brähmaṇa who, in order to obtain wealth, began to execute austerities and worship of the demigods. However, after some time, when his worship appeared to be fruitless, the brähmaṇa thought to himself: "Perhaps there is some minor demigod who is not worshipped by anyone. If I were to worship such a deity, then surely he would become quickly pleased and thus grant me my desire."
While thinking like this, the brähmaṇa saw a cloud named Kuṇḍadhāra in the sky, and immediately, his devotional sentiment became aroused. He then thought: "This cloud is a servant of the demigods, and I am sure that no one else worships him. Therefore, I shall accept him as my deity and certainly, he will reward me with great wealth."
Thus, the brähmaṇa began to worship Kuṇḍadhāra with various offerings, and as a result, the cloud soon became very pleased with him. Indeed, that very night, as the brähmaṇa was sleeping, he saw a wonderful dream. Surrounded by a host of Yakṣas, Mañībhadra was engaged in ordering the bestowal of diverse wealth and kingdoms upon men who deserved such opulence due to their good deeds. Mañībhadra was also taking away those things from persons who had taken to sinful practices and thus had fallen away from a life of goodness. Next, the brähmaṇa saw the cloud, Kuṇḍadhāra, offering obeisances unto the demigods. Then, upon being requested to speak, Kuṇḍadhāra said, "O residents of heaven, I desire that happiness be awarded to my brähmaṇa worshiper. My dear lords, if you are pleased to do so, then grant me my wish."
At the command of the demigods, Mañībhadra replied, "O Kuṇḍadhāra,
please get up! Rest assured that we shall reward your worshiper with any amount of wealth, according to your desire."

However, Kuṇḍadhāra then thought to himself, "Alas! Human life is very flickering. Therefore, I would rather see my brāhmaṇa worshiper become highly virtuous than merely weathy."

Having come to this conclusion, Kuṇḍadhāra requested, "O Maṇibhadra, may my worshiper always find pleasure in righteousness rather than achieve any kind of material prosperity."

Maṇibhadra replied, "My dear Kuṇḍadhāra, since the results of pious behavior are material happiness and sovereignty, these shall be given to the brāhmaṇa."

Kuṇḍadhāra was not pleased with this, however, and so he repeatedly requested that virtue alone be awarded to his worshiper. Actually, the demigods became very pleased with Kuṇḍadhāra for his noble intention. and so at last, they granted that the brāhmaṇa would become highly devoted to righteousness and nothing else. At this, Kuṇḍadhāra became very satisfied and thereafter, the brāhmaṇa’s heart became endowed with a true spirit of renunciation. After entering the forest, he began to perform very severe austerities, and in time, he reduced his eating so much that he lived simply upon leaves from the trees. At last, the brāhmaṇa renounced even leaves and began to maintain his life simply by drinking water. Then, even that was finally given up, and for many years thereafter, the brāhmaṇa’s physical strength never diminished.

Finally, when his spiritual vision was awakened, the brāhmaṇa could realize that his speech would never prove false. In other words, the brāhmaṇa had gained the power that whatever he would grant with his speech would materialize without a doubt. Thus, the brāhmaṇa mused, "I were to become pleased with someone, then, by my benediction, that person could immediately become a great king."

In this way, the brāhmaṇa became a bit proud of his ascetic prowess, and thus he forgot how he had attained his exalted position by the mercy of the cloud, Kuṇḍadhāra. The wellwishing Kuṇḍadhāra could understand the mentality of his worshiper, however, and so he appeared before the brāhmaṇa. After being respectfully received and worshipped Kuṇḍadhāra said, "My dear devotee, utilize your spiritual vision now, and see the end which kings have to meet with if they do not execute their
duties very scrupulously!"
As soon as this was said, the brâhmaṇa could immediately see with his spiritual vision thousands of kings who had fallen into hell. Kuṇḍadhāra then said, "My dear brâhmaṇa, originally, you had worshipped me just to obtain such misery, for this is the destination of those who become overly attached to sense gratification. Now, you are proud due to possessing the power to award such material opulence. However, you should consider: what is the value of such a benediction?"
The brâhmaṇa then had a vision of the earth, and he saw how innumerable men were embracing lust, anger, fear, pride, sleep, and other abominable conditions. Kuṇḍadhāra then said, "O brâhmaṇa, the demigods are afraid of human beings because the virtuous ones will come to occupy their positions later on. For this reason, the demigods ruin men's chances for attaining to heaven by making them addicted to all these vices. Without the blessings of the demigods, no one can become virtuous. Therefore, my dear brâhmaṇa, you should remember how your success had also been achieved in this way."
After hearing this, the brâhmaṇa offered his obeisances unto Kuṇḍadhāra, and admitted that whatever he had achieved was all due to his grace alone. The brâhmaṇa also admitted that he had become most ungrateful, and Kuṇḍadhāra excused him. Finally, after embracing his worshiper, Kuṇḍadhāra the cloud disappeared then and there. Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, in this way, you can see how virtue is of far more importance than mere economic development and sense gratification."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O Bhīṣma, which sacrifice is performed simply for the sake of virtue, and not for artha or kāma?"
In reply, Bhīṣma related this story: There was once a brâhmaṇa named Satya who lived within a very pious kingdom. Along with his wife, Puṣkaradhārīṇī, he performed sacrifices for the satisfaction of the demigods, headed by Lord Viṣṇu. In these sacrifices, Satya offered only fruits and vegetables, and never animal flesh, for he lived a life of nonviolence. Puṣkaradhārīṇī was very pure-hearted, and while observing a forest life of austerity along with her husband, she dressed herself only with fallen peacock feathers. However, Puṣkaradhārīṇī did not approve
of the sacrifices which were being performed by her husband. First of all, she did not like that they were meant for heavenly elevation. And, besides this, even though her husband substituted fruits and flowers, she did not like the fact that such sacrifices actually prescribed the flesh of animals as offerings. Still, Puṣkaradhrāṇī would obediently sit by the side of her husband during his sacrificial performances because she was afraid of his curse.

Near to Satya’s āśrama lived a rṣi named Pāmadā who kept himself in the form of a deer. Once, Pāmadā came to Satya and said, "My dear friend, you are not performing your sacrifices properly. Therefore, you should kill me and use the cut-up flesh as an offering. In this way, by your faultless performance of sacrifice, you shall be able to ascend to heaven."

Just then, the daughter of Śūrya named Śāvitrī came there and insisted, "O brāhmaṇa, you should do as this deer is requesting."

However, when Satya refused her order, Śāvitrī immediately disappeared by entering into the sacrificial fire so that she would avoid further witnessing his faulty sacrificial performance. Pāmadā then once again urged Satya to use his flesh as an offering, but in response, the brāhmaṇa embraced the deer and begged him to depart. At this, Pāmadā started to leave but then, at the next moment, be returned and pleaded, "My dear Satya, kindly kill me for my own sake, for after being employed as a sacrificial offering, I shall attain to a heavenly destination."

After saying this, Pāmadā gave Satya celestial vision and then said, "O brāhmaṇa, just see how the Gandharvas and Apsarās are traveling through the sky in their beautiful airplanes, taking with them the souls of sacrificial animals."

As Satya beheld this vision, the deer once again begged that he be offered in sacrifice. Thus, at last, the brāhmaṇa became convinced by Pāmadā’s words and concluded, "It certainly does seem that only by becoming a sacrificial offering can a mere animal immediately reach heaven."

Actually, it was Dharma himself who had taken the form of a deer and thus disguised himself as the rṣi Pāmadā. At this point, Dharma revealed his original celestial form to Satya and said, "My dear brāhmaṇa, the killing of animals, even for sacrificial purposes as you had just now
intended to do, is never really virtuous, in spite of the fact that it awards one a heavenly destination. The abstention from animal killing and meat eating is a higher principle of virtue and it is more meritorious than following the vow of brahmacarya. My dear Satya, you should keep in mind that materially elevated positions are all temporary, and thus you should aspire only for the highest goal of life, which is liberation from material bondage. Eternal life can be attained only by one who completely abstains from injuring others, and thus nonviolence is the highest principle of religion."

Thereafter, Dharma personally assisted Satya in his sacrificial performances, and by assimilating the god of righteousness' good instructions, the brāhmaṇa gradually gained the same pure mentality which was possessed by his wife.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was becoming more and more eager to adopt a life of renunciation in order to achieve liberation from material bondage. He then anxiously inquired, "O Grandfather, will I ever be able to abandon the sovereignty of the earth in order to follow this supreme path?"

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear grandson, you should not take it that because my discourses have glorified the path of detachment that I am urging you to prematurely renounce your royal position. Even as a kṣatriya, one can work for his ultimate benefit. No one should ever be in a hurry to renounce his occupational duty. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, please remain patient, for I can assure you that the time will come when you shall give up all worldly attachment and attain ultimate success."

Next, Bhīṣma related the following story: During the Satya-yuga, there once lived a ruler of Mithilā named Dharmadhyaja. This king was a descendent of Janaka and thus he was also called Janaka, and he was widely recognized as a liberated soul who was executing the duties of a king. There was also at this time a woman named Sulabhā who wandered over the earth as a mendicant, and when she heard of Janaka's reputation, she decided to pay him a visit in order to determine whether he was a genuinely liberated soul or not. By utilizing her mystic power, Sulabhā assumed the form of a very beautiful young woman and then, in an instant, she presented herself before the king in the garb of a
mendicant. Mahārāja Janaka then welcomed Sulabhā with great respect and worshipped her according to the proper etiquette.
Sulabhā seriously doubted that the king could have completely given up material attachment and thus attained the platform of liberation. In order to test Mahārāja Janaka, she employed her mystic power in order to enter his body through his eyes by manipulating the rays of his vision with her own vision. However, when he saw that Sulabhā was subtly intruding into his body, Mahārāja Janaka confronted her in his own subtle body by utilizing his mystic power. Then, as the two faced each other, Janaka without his royal umbrella and scepter, and Sulabhā without her trident, the king harshly challenged, "O ascetic lady, you are committing a great offense by aggressively attempting to gain entry into my body like this. You should believe that I have attained the stage of liberation, which is above the interaction of the three modes of material nature. When the great sage Pañcaśikha remained here for the four months of the rainy season, I received perfect transcendental knowledge from him. You should know that if a king is truly renounced, devoid of all attachment and aversion, then he is as good as any sannyāsī. On the other hand, a sannyāsī who is under the sway of attachment and aversion is no better than a gṛhasṭha. O Sulabhā, your aggressive approach appears to be just like that of a female who desires to sexually unite with a male. However, I do not know whether such contact with you is at all proper, for your origin in unknown to me. Who are you, and in which family did you take birth? It is a great fault that you have approached me with duplicity, and thus you had better explain your action."
Although rebuked by Mahārāja Janaka, Sulabhā was undisturbed, and with complete assurance she refuted his words as follows: "O King, due to the faults in your speech, I can understand that you are not at all a liberated person. First of all, your concept of the self is materially conceived, for the pure soul is without any designation of male or female. In addition, the mere fact that you have become offended by my action is another indication of your material conditioning. Now, since you are obviously devoid of spiritual vision, I shall speak to you on the subject of transcendental knowledge.
"My dear king, it is our practical observation that the form of the
material body continually undergoes change, right from the time of conception. Indeed, not only is the form of the material body changing, but its constituent elements are also constantly being replaced. These changes are continuously going on, but because the process is so gradual, it goes practically unnoticed. The change of body which the soul experiences is something like the flame that appears upon a wick when oil is burned in a lamp. In a windless place, such a flame appears to be unchanging. The truth is, however, that the flame is continually changing, for at any particular instant it consists of the oil which is being freshly burned. Because the body is just like this, what actual connection do we have with it? My dear king, due to pride you had hoped to gain an intellectual victory over me. However, you should know that a person who takes pleasure in such intellectual duels cannot possibly be a liberated soul.

After hearing all this, Mahārāja Dharmadhyaja could not utter any response. Sulabhā then said, "O King, your body is just like an empty cottage because it is devoid of true knowledge. Since a mendicant can reside in an empty house for one night and then go away, I shall rest within you tonight and depart the next morning."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next requested, "O Grandsire, please describe to me the birth of Śukadeva Gosvāmī, the illustrious son of Śrīla Vyāsadeva."

In reply, Bhīṣma narrated the life of Śukadeva as follows: Śrīla Vyāsadeva had once engaged in very severe austerities near the peak of Mount Meru, where Lord Śiva resides along with his wife and associates. Desiring to obtain a son, Śrīla Vyāsadeva worshipped Lord Śiva and remained on the slopes of Mount Meru for 100 years, subsisting upon air alone. Astonishingly enough, in spite of his austerities, Vyāsadeva's bodily strength did not at all diminish, and flames began to blaze forth from his matted hair. Finally, after becoming very pleased with Vyāsadeva, Lord Śiva appeared before him and said, "O son of Parāśara, you can rest assured that you shall soon receive a very powerful and self-realized son, just according to you desire."

One day thereafter, as Vyāsadeva was engaged in rubbing two sticks together in order to ignite a fire, he happened to see the beautiful
Apsarā Ghṛtaci wandering in a nearby forest. The very sight of Ghṛtaci's most beautiful and alluring feminine bodily features caused Vyāsadeva to become over-powered by a strong lust to enjoy her. Ghṛtaci noticed this, and so she immediately transformed herself into a parrot and flew away. Meanwhile, Vyāsadeva tried his best to control his passion which had quickly spread from his heart to all over his body. By summoning his full patience, the rṣi tried to concentrate upon the task of rubbing sticks together in order to produce fire. However, in spite of this attempt, Vyāsadeva's mind could not be diverted from the remembrance of the Apsarā's lovely form. As a result, Vyāsadeva involuntarily discharged his semen, and a son was born at the spot where it landed upon the ground. The glorious son of Vyāsadeva was given the name Śuka, and the Gandharvas and Apsarās arrived there in order to celebrate. Thereafter, Indra appeared there, followed by all of the demigods. As Vāyu showered down flowers upon the son of Vyāsadeva, Lord Śiva next arrived along with Pārvaṭī, and he awarded Śukadeva the sacred thread. Indra then gave the son of Vyāsadeva a celestial water pot and cloth, and the Vedas personified came there in order to dwell within him. In spite of possessing complete knowledge, Śukadeva requested Brhaspati to become his spiritual master, just to observe the universally accepted principle of accepting a guru.

At the conclusion of his birth celebrations, Śukadeva departed in order to take up residence at the āśrama of his preceptor. Thereafter, when he completed his study of the Vedas and had properly rewarded his spiritual master, Śuka returned home and then continued to live with his father while observing a vow of perfect celibacy. Śukadeva was not at all inclined to household life, and so he approached his father in order to receive pure knowledge which leads one directly to liberation. Upon seeing how his son was already perfectly learned in the Vedas, firmly fixed on the path of yoga, and absorbed in self-realization, Vyāsadeva decided to send him to Mahārāja Janaka at Mithilā so that he could receive further instruction. At the time of parting, Vyāsadeva said, "My dear son, this king is fully conversant with all branches of spiritual knowledge, and so you should act very humbly in his presence. Although I had formerly performed many sacrifices for Janaka, I request that you never try to exert your superiority over him. Instead just carry out
Whatever he may order you to do."
Śukadeva then traveled to the kingdom of Mithilā on foot, even though he had the ability to fly through the sky, for that was what his father had instructed him to do. Thus, it was with great endeavor that he had to pass through the regions of Meru, Hari, and Himavat before reaching Bhāratavarṣa. At last, after arriving at the country of the Videhas, Śukadeva entered the city of Mithilā with the permission of the gatekeepers. However, upon his arrival at the king's palace, Śukadeva was barred by the guards and abused with harsh words, for he had tried to enter without permission. Śuka did not become angry, and he waited at the door patiently, for indeed, not even the arduous journey, with its accompanying intense heat and pangs of hunger and thirst, had disturbed him.

One of the guards could appreciate Śukadeva's exalted position, and so he came forward to worship the young āstikī. The guard then took the son of Vyāsadeva into the palace in order to meet the king's minister. After learning that it was the son of Vyāsadeva who had arrived as an unexpected guest, the minister led him into a gorgeously decorated room adjoining a heavenly garden within the palace. Then, at the minister's command, fifty young and very beautiful maidservants seated Śukadeva and began to attend to his needs with the utmost respect. These girls all had exquisitely formed bodily features, and they were dressed in the finest clothes and adorned with golden ornaments. They were all masters of dancing and singing, and they were skilled in the art of pleasing conversation. Thus, they always spoke with very sweet and intoxicating smiles.

First of all, these maidservants gave Śukadeva very nice food and water to wash his feet. Then, they took him on an extensive tour of the palace grounds, with its numerous gardens, while entertaining him by means of their agreeable behavior and service. Because Śukadeva was completely in control of his senses, he was neither pleased nor angered by all this. Then, when evening came, Śukadeva recited his customary prayers and engaged in meditation.
Śukadeva then spent the night in the room, which had been assigned to him, and then next morning, after bathing, he continued his yoga practice in the presence of the maidservants. Mahārāja Janaka then
came there along with his priest in order to receive the son of his revered preceptor. With his own hand, the king placed a very costly seat before Śukadeva and requested him to sit down. Mahārāja Janaka then presented arghya to Śukadeva and many other auspicious articles, and finally some cows in charity. In turn, Śukadeva inquired about the welfare of Mahārāja Janaka, and the king then sat down upon the bare floor, along with his followers. With folded hands, Mahārāja Janaka then very humbly inquired, "My dear Śukadeva, please explain to me the purpose of your visit here so that I can fulfill whatever object it is that you desire."

Śuka replied, "O King, I have been sent here by my father. He desires that you instruct me so that all of my doubts can be dispelled concerning the liberated condition of the soul and the means for its attainment. My dear ruler of Mithilā, if you are agreeable, then I wish to put my inquiries before you. My first question is: If one becomes fully detached while executing the life of brahmacarya as a student, is there any necessity for him to go on to the grhastha āśrama?"

Janaka replied, "My dear Śukadeva, if one becomes self-realized as a brahmaśīri, then there is absolutely no necessity for entering household life. O son of Vyāsa-deva, even though you are acting like a disciple, I can understand that whatever I may speak about transcendental knowledge is already dwelling within your consciousness."

Actually, Śukadeva was a perfectly self-realized soul, but due to his great humility, he doubted his perfection. However, by hearing from King Janaka, all of Śukadeva's doubts became cleared. Finally, after expressing his sincere gratitude, Śukadeva took leave from the king and departed for the Himālayas.

Once upon a time, Skanda defiantly threw his dart into the earth and then declared, "I hereby challenge everyone within the whole creation! Let he who is more powerful than me, or more devoted to the brähmanas and the Vedas, come here and pull this dart out of the earth, or at least try to!"

Upon seeing Skanda's menacing feature, all creatures became exceedingly anxious, thinking, "Alas! Who will be able to come here and take out this dart?"

Being unable to bear Skanda's challenge, and feeling great compassion
for the fearful living entities, Lord Viṣṇu appeared at the spot. Then, while angrily glancing at Skanda, He grabbed hold of the dart with His left hand and began to shake it so that the entire earth trembled. Although Lord Viṣṇu was capable of effortlessly lifting the dart out of the earth, He only shook it, just to keep Skanda's honor intact. The Lord then told Prahlāda, "O king of the Daityas, no one other than Myself is capable of lifting up this dart."

Prahlāda then grabbed onto the dart in order to try and lift it out of the earth. And yet, in spite of straining with all of his strength, Prahlāda could not even budge the dart, and finally, while uttering a loud cry and trembling violently, he fell down from the hilltop in a swoon.

Lord Śiva had previously performed austerities near this place in the Himālayas. In an inaccessible spot, Mahādeva had stood upon one foot for 1,000 years while Agni kept guard, surrounding him on all sides with a ring of fire which was ten yojanas wide. Near to that place, Śrīla Vyāsadeva resided in his āśrama along with his disciples Sumantu, Vaiśampāyana, Jaimini, and Paila. When Śukadeva returned home from the kingdom of the Videhas, he first of all touched the feet of his father and then narrated to him how he had received instructions from King Janaka. Thereafter, Śukadeva continued to reside there with his father. Then, one day, Vyāsadeva's four disciples approached him and requested, "O Preceptor, please be merciful by awarding us a benediction."

Vyāsadeva gave his consent, and so the four disciples requested, "O foremost of learned rṣis, let it be ordained that only ourselves and your son Śukadeva embody the Vedic knowledge and no sixth person."

However, Vyāsadeva replied, "My dear disciples, the Vedas should always be imparted unto those qualified brāhmaṇas who are eager to receive genuine knowledge. Do not be so miserly! Instead of hoping to gain a monopoly of Vedic wisdom, try to expand the knowledge by preaching. Of course, you must never impart the Vedic truths unto those who are not your duly qualified and initiated disciples."

Vyāsadeva's four disciples happily accepted this instruction and then requested, "O Preceptor, let us now take our leave from you so that we can descend upon the earth and subdivide the Vedas for mass distribution."
In response, Vyāsadeva gave his permission, but he also warned, "My dear disciples, Vedic knowledge can very easily be misunderstood if it is not transmitted properly. Therefore, you must carefully examine the qualifications of each and every disciple whom you intend to accept."

After offering obeisances unto their spiritual master and then circumnabulating him, Sumantu, Vaiśampāyana, Paila, and Jaimini departed. Descending from the Himalayas, these disciples of Śrīla Vyāsadeva engaged themselves in officiating at the sacrifices which were performed by saintly kings, and they also taught the Vedas to qualified brāhmaṇas. In this way, the four rṣis soon attained great fame and prosperity, and meanwhile, Vyāsadeva and Śukadeva continued residing together. For some reason, however, Vyāsadeva was troubled at heart, and because of this, Nārada Muni came to his disciple and inquired, "O Dvaipāyana, why is it that the Vedic mantras can no longer be heard resounding in these regions?"

Vyāsadeva replied, "O Nārada, I feel very unhappy now that my disciples have departed. Therefore, kindly instruct me in such a way that I can understand how to dispel my despondency."

Nārada Muni then said, "My dear Vyāsadeva, you should sit down with your son and regularly recite the Vedic hymns. This practice will gradually deliver you from your moroseness."

After the departure of Nārada, Vyāsadeva began to regularly recite the Vedas along with his son. Then, one day, as the two were loudly chanting together, a fierce wind came up and so Vyāsadeva ordered, "My dear Śukadeva, stop reciting for the time being."

Out of curiosity, Śukadeva inquired about the wind, and so Vyāsadeva explained, "My dear son, this specific wind is the breath from the nostrils of Lord Viṣṇu, and it is an omen which indicates that the recitation of the Vedas should be suspended."

Thereafter, when the wind died down, Vyāsadeva instructed Śukadeva to resume his chanting, and after doing so, he went to the banks of the Gaṅgā in order to bathe. While Vyāsadeva was away, Nārada Muni came to Śukadeva, and so the latter worshipped the devaṁśi with great respect. Nārada then inquired, "My dear son of Vyāsadeva, please tell me by what means I can attain the highest good."

Śukadeva replied, "O Nārada, it is you who should instruct me." Nārada
Muni then spoke at great length on the subject of transcendental knowledge, and after hearing from him, Šukadeva became even more determined to gain eternal life without degrading himself by material attachment. Then, with the permission of Nārada, when Vyāsadeva returned home, Šukadeva said, "My dear father, I wish to go away in order to fully devote myself to the practice of yoga, for in this way I shall attain perfection."

Vyāsadeva was highly pleased to hear this, and he replied, "My dear Šukadeva, just remain here for today only, so that I may have the satisfaction of seeing you, my dear son."

Šukadeva was completely indifferent to this request, however, for his heart had become fully set upon liberation from this material world. Thus, without delay, he set out, proceeding toward Mount Kailāsa. After arriving at that great mountain, Šukadeva climbed up to the top and then sat down on a level plateau facing east in order to practice yoga. Šukadeva very quickly became self-realized by dint of his yoga practice, and with spiritual vision he could behold his eternal and unchanging self. Having attained success, Šukadeva then went to Nārada Muni and took his permission for attaining the supreme destination. Nārada gave his consent and thereafter, Šukadeva returned to Mount Kailāsa and began to sit in the trance of mystic yoga. Then, by dint of his yoga-siddhi, Šukadeva soared up into the sky, and after arriving at the Himalaya mountains, he spoke to the entities who were residing there, "O my friends, if my father happens to call out while following me, then I request you to please answer in my place."

The rivers, mountains, forests and directions all gave their assent, and thereafter, Šukadeva continued to concentrate himself in samādhi, thus gradually giving up all kinds of false material identification. At this time, meteors began to fall from the sky, the earth trembled, and all directions seemed to be ablaze. However, as Šukadeva proceeded on toward the north, sweet rains gently showered down upon him while fragrant breezes blew. Then, as he soared through the sky, Šukadeva saw two mountain peaks ahead of him which blocked his path: the golden Mount Meru and the silver Himavat. Without even pausing, however, Šukadeva fearlessly smashed the two peaks, breaking them in half. Upon seeing this, all of the celestial beings were highly astonished, and they
praised Śukadeva as he proceeded on, higher and higher. Meanwhile, due to parental affection, Vyāsadeva had followed his son on the same path. Śukadeva was naked, and when he had passed over the heavenly Mandākinī river, he saw many beautiful Apsarās bathing who were also naked. These girls were not disturbed, however, for they could understand Śukadeva's exalted position, beyond the bodily conception of life. Thereafter, Śukadeva amalgamated the gross elements of his body into the subtle elements, and at last, he went himself to the supreme destination, so that his existence became materially unmanifest. When Vyāsadeva arrived at a spot near to where the Apsarās were bathing, the local ṛṣis related to him the wonderful feats which Śukadeva had performed. Vyāsadeva then began to lament very piteously for the loss of his dear son, and when he called out for him, filling the universe with his cries, all of the moving and nonmoving creatures responded by vibrating the syllable 'bho', as if answering him. Ever since that time, sounds which are uttered in mountain caves, wells, and other such places, produce this same echo. Śukadeva had already attained the supreme liberation, and upon realizing this, Vyāsadeva sat down on the mountainside and began grieving in separation. Due to Vyāsadeva's presence, the Apsarās became very ashamed of their nakedness, and so they quickly covered themselves, although they had not been at all disturbed by the presence of Śukadeva. From this, Vyāsadeva could understand that his son was fully liberated. He felt very happy because of Śukadeva's success, but at the same time felt separation from his son. Lord Śiva then arrived at where Vyāsadeva was lamenting, and he was accompanied by all of the demigods and great ṛṣis. Lord Śiva consoled Vyāsadeva by saying, "O son of Parāśara, please remember how you had solicited me for a self-realized son. You should be highly gratified that Śukadeva has achieved the highest destination in life. Still, just to dispel your grief, I shall now create a shadow Śukadeva who will always remain faithfully by your side and not desert you for a moment." As soon as this was said, Vyāsadeva saw a duplicate Śukadeva seated next to him, and thereafter, he very happily returned to his āśrama along with his son. Next, Bhīṣma related the following history: During a Satya-yuga of the
Svāyambhuva-manvantara, the great sage Dharma had begotten four incarnations of Lord Nārāyaṇa. These were named Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Hari and Kṛṣṇa. Hari and Kṛṣṇa were the first to undergo severe austerities at Badarī and then, later on, Nara and Nārāyaṇa also did so. Nārada Muni once approached Nara and Nārāyaṇa and inquired, "O foremost of ṛṣis, who is it that you are worshipping?" Nārāyaṇa ṛṣi replied, "My dear Nārada, we are meditating upon Lord Viṣṇu, for He is the Supreme Absolute Truth."

After hearing this, Nārada Muni made up his mind to go to Śvetadvīpa in order to see the Supreme Lord directly. After worshipping Nara and Nārāyaṇa ṛṣis and receiving worship from them, Nārada Muni set out, and when he arrived at the peak of Mount Meru, he rested for a little while. From there, Nārada Muni could see Śvetadvīpa within the ocean of milk toward the northwestern direction. In that transcendental abode of the Supreme Lord, all of the residents have four arms and effulgent, white complexions.

At this point, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira interrupted by expressing his great curiosity to hear more about the residents of Śvetadvīpa. Therefore, before continuing his narration concerning Nārada, Bhīṣma related the following story:

There was once an emperor of the earth named Uparicara (Vasu) who was also a great devotee of Lord Nārāyaṇa. Because of Vasu's pure devotion for the Lord and resultant good qualities, Indra befriended him, and indeed, the king of heaven sometimes even used to share his throne and bed with the emperor. During this period, the sapta-ṛṣis: Marīci, Atri, Aṅgirāś, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, and Vasiṣṭha, compiled a treatise on the duties of human beings while residing upon the peak of Mount Meru. Written in collaboration with Svāyambhuva Manu, this treatise expounded the topics of dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa, and thus it set the limits for human behavior.

The sapta-ṛṣis had first of all worshipped Lord Nārāyaṇa for 1,000 celestial years. Upon the completion of their austerities, the Lord had ordered the goddess Sarasvatī to empower the sapta-ṛṣis' speech, and it is because of this that they were able to compile śāstra which was perfectly free from the four defects of conditional life: imperfect senses, the
tendency to commit mistakes, the tendency to become deluded, and the cheating propensity. After finishing their treatise, the sapta-ṛṣis recited it as an offering unto Lord Nārāyaṇa. The Lord then replied to them from an invisible position, "O great sages, this treatise is perfect in all respects, and thus it is as authoritative as the original Vedas. Later on, Bṛhaspati and Uṣanās will compile works which are based upon your treatise, and then, King Uparicara will learn the science from the preceptor of the demigods. However, after the death of this emperor, the treatise which you have now written will become extinct."

Having said this, the Lord remained silent, and after offering their obeisances, the sapta-ṛṣis returned to their duties. Later on, when Bṛhaspati appeared in the line of Aṅgirās, the sapta-ṛṣis taught him their treatise and then ordered him to propagate it. Uparicara became the foremost disciple of Bṛhaspati, and so he carefully studied the treatise which had been compiled by the sapta-ṛṣis. After completing his studies, Uparicara commenced ruling over the earth. Later on, when Vasu performed a horse sacrifice, Bṛhaspati became the chief priest and three sons of Brahmā, named Ekat, Dvita, and Trita, served as referees. Because he was highly compassionate, Uparicara ordered that no animals would be slain during the sacrifice, and this caused the Supieme Lord Hari to become so pleased with the king that He personally appeared at the sacrificial arena. Although all of the demigods had visibly come and taken their seats in order to accept the sacrificial offerings, Lord Nārāyaṇa came invisibly and so He was seen only by the fortunate Uparicara. Bṛhaspati could understand this, and because he took it as a personal offense, he became very angry. With great agitation, Bṛhaspati hurled the sacrificial ladle into the sky. Upon seeing this extraordinary act, King Vasu and the three sons of Brahmā spoke as follows: "O preceptor of the celestials, because this is the Kṛta-yuga, such anger is highly unbefitting. Certainly there is no anger present in Lord Nārāyaṇa, with Whom you are angry."

Ekat, Dvita, and Trita then said, "My dear Bṛhaspati, none of us can see Lord Nārāyaṇa Now please listen as we relate to you what had once happened long ago: After being born from the mind of Lord Brahmā, we had gone to the north in order to gain ascetic merit. There, we performed austerities for thousands of years and at last we began to
stand immovably upon one leg, just like stakes in the ground. While standing on the shore of the milk ocean, north of Mount Meru, we desired to see Lord Nārāyaṇa in His original, transcendental form. At last, when our austerities became mature, we heard a very deep and sweet voice speak to us from the sky, and that transcendental sound filled our hearts with joy. The voice informed us, 'O Rṣis, there is a white island known as Śvetadvīpa near the northern shore of the milk ocean. There, Lord Nārāyaṇa lives along with His pure devotees, who have no other desire or engagement than service to His lotus feet. You should go there and see how the Supreme Absolute Truth is being revealed in His personal, transcendental form.'

"After hearing this, we journeyed to Śvetadvīpa in great eagerness, but after arriving there, we could not see anything on account of the Supreme Lord's blinding effulgence. Thus, we could understand that no one is able to see the personal feature of the Supreme Person unless he is sufficiently qualified. Being undaunted, however, we sat down to worship Lord Viṣṇu and perform austerities in order to purify ourselves. Finally, after 100 celestial years, we began to see wonderfully effulgent personalities of white complexions and possessing all auspicious transcendental bodily features. They kept their hands joined as if they were praying, and we could hear them constantly chanting the holy names of the Lord.

"Next, we saw an intensely concentrated effulgence approaching that place, and all of the residents of Śvetadvīpa began to joyfully run toward it with their hands folded in a reverential attitude. We began to lose consciousness then, due to the great energy which emanated from that concentrated effulgence, and because of this we lost our vision. We could only feel the fragrant breezes and hear the combined sounds of the devotees as they glorified the Lord. Thus, even though the Supreme Lord was present before us, we could not see His personal form because it was covered by His Yogamāyā potency.

"In this way, we had a chance to personally experience what we had already learned from the āśātra: that the Absolute Truth, although non-dual, is realized progressively in three features; as Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān. This can be compared to the progressive stages by which one understands the sun. First of all one can see the glaring sunshine
which is all-pervading. Thereafter, one can understand that this energy is coming from a localized source. In other words, that which had appeared to be formless is realized to be emanating from a specific form. Finally, if one is able to enter into the sun globe and receive the mercy of the presiding deity, Sūrya, then he can understand that in reality everything is emanating from him. Similarly, the brahmajyoti is the all-pervading effulgence of the Supreme Lord's transcendental body. The Paramātmā is the Lord's localized expansion upon whom the yogis meditate within the region of the heart. Bhagavān is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who resides in His own abode and Who expands Himself unlimitedly by means of innumerable personal forms, as well as variegated energetic manifestations.

"Thereafter, when the Lord left that place, the fragrant breezes stopped blowing, and the sounds of glorification ceased. After regaining our senses, we opened our eyes and saw that we were amongst thousands of the Lord's devotees, although none of them paid the slightest attention to us. We were already very weak because of our prolonged austerities, and due to being neglected like this, we became somewhat depressed. Then, from the sky, a voice informed us, 'O Ṛṣis, only those who are qualified by unalloyed devotion are able to see the personal form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Such pure devotion is characterized by one's being devoid of any desire other than to render undeviating service unto the Supreme Lord with one's body, mind, and words. In other words, the pure devotee has no desire to materially benefit himself by engaging in fruitive activities, nor does he wish to become liberated by merging into the Lord's effulgence. After all, even the great demons who are killed by the Lord in His various incarnations achieve that destination. The pure devotees only desire to serve the Supreme Lord, without personal motivation, in any condition of life, whether it be in the material or spiritual world. Due to having developed unalloyed love for the Supreme Lord, the pure devotees have no room in their hearts for any other desire than to simply please Him. This elevated condition of life can only be achieved when one surrenders unto a pure devotee of the Lord and receives his mercy. Only in this way can one hope to one day come face to face with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. My dear sons of Brahmā, I advise you to return home now. Later on, when
the Tretā-yuga sets in, you shall have an opportunity to perform a great task in the service of the demigods that will alleviate the world of a great calamity which will overtake it."

Ekat, Dvita, and Trita then concluded, "My dear Bṛhaspati, after hearing these words, we returned home and began to patiently await that time which had been indicated. O son of Aṅgirā, since we had failed to see Lord Nārāyaṇa, even after performing so many austerities at Śvetadvīpa, how can you expect to do so?"

When the other ṛṣis who were present at Uparicara's sacrificial arena confirmed these statements, Bṛhaspati gave up his anger and then brought the sacrifice to a successful conclusion. Once, thereafter, a discussion took place between the demigods and ṛṣis which revolved around the following question: "What things should be offered in sacrifice?"

The demigods argued, "O Sages, it is clearly mentioned that 'ajās' must be offered as victims, and this word specifically refers to goats."

The ṛṣis replied, "O residents of heaven, seeds are also called 'ajās' and the śrutis recommend that sacrifices be performed with the plants and herbs which sprout from them. This is the Kṛta-yuga, and so the slaughter of animals cannot be a religious practice for those who are actually righteous."

While this argument was going on, Mahārāja Vasu was seen coursing through the sky, riding upon his crystal chariot. The brāhmaṇas suggested that the emperor would be a competent person to give a judgment, and so the demigods and ṛṣis summoned him and then put before him the following question: "Should sacrifices be performed with offerings of animals or plants?"

Before answering, King Vasu first inquired, "O assembled demigods and ṛṣis, which among you have the opinion that sacrifices should be performed with animals, and which of you disagree?"

Thereafter, when he understood who had taken which side, the king said, "O Demigods and Sages, it is my judgment that sacrifices should be performed with offerings of animals."

Actually, Vasu was partial toward the demigods due to his being Indra's friend, and upon hearing his verdict, all of the ṛṣis became highly
enraged. Thus, they cursed him by saying, "O King, since you have taken the side of the demigods due to partiality, you shall immediately fall down from heaven. Indeed, from this very day you will no longer be able to fly in the sky, but instead, you shall sink down deep below the earth's surface."

Immediately after this pronouncement, Uparicara lost his celestial form, and then he fell into a deep hole below the surface of the earth. However, by the mercy of Lord Nārāyaṇa, the king retained his full memory, and since he had been cursed for their sake, the demigods also became very compassionate upon him. Although the demigods were unable to nullify the brāhmaṇas' curse, they went to where King Vasu was staying and supplied him with ghee that they had received as their share of sacrificial offerings. Because of this, King Vasu did not feel any hunger, thirst, weakness or pain while remaining within the hole. The demigods then advised, "My dear Vasu, if you take complete shelter of Lord Nārāyaṇa, then you shall certainly be delivered very quickly from this degraded condition of life."

After the demigods had departed, the king began to wholeheartedly worship Lord Nārāyaṇa with unalloyed devotion. As a result, the Supreme Lord very quickly became pleased with Uparicara Vasu. Considering that the brāhmaṇas' curse had already been honored, Lord Viṣṇu sent Garuḍa to lift the king out of the hole. After entering the deep pit, Garuḍa picked up Uparicara in his beak and then flew high into the sky, where he released him. At once, Mahārāja Vasu regained his celestial form, and ultimately, after relinquishing his material body, he went back home, back to Godhead.

Bhīṣma then continued the narration which had been interrupted by Mahārāja Yudhīśthira's inquiries about Śvetadvīpa. From the peak of Mount Meru, Nārada Muni resumed his journey to Śvetadvīpa. Upon his arrival, the devarṣi met all of the residents of that white island, and after worshipping them, he accepted their worship in return. Then, in the hopes of meeting Lord Nārāyaṇa, Nārada Muni began to perform austerities while keeping his arms upraised, and as he did so, he recited prayers in glorification of the Supreme Lord. Before long, Lord Nārāyaṇa appeared before Nārada Muni in a wonderful form possessing hundreds of heads, arms, and trunks. Nārada Muni bowed down with
great awe and veneration, and then, the Lord spoke to him as follows:
"My dear Nārada, the ānīs, Ekat, Dvita, and Trita had come here in the
hopes that they could see Me. However, they were unable to do so, and
indeed, no one is able to see Me unless his heart is cent percent purified
by dint of having rendered loving devotional service unto Me. My dear
Nārada, I consider you to be the best of My pure devotees. Therefore, I
am ready to fulfill whatever your heart may desire."
Nārada Muni replied, "My dear Lord, just to see You is in itself the
highest benediction, and I consider it to be ample reward for whatever
austerities I may have performed."
Lord Nārāyaṇa then said, "My dear Nārada, I exist along with My
associates in the transcendental position, which is beyond the manifest
and unmanifest conditions of material nature. Therefore, I cannot be
perceived by materially tinged senses. To come to Me in My eternal,
transcendental abode is the complete stage of liberation, whereas the
merging into My glaring effulgence is partial and impersonal. Indeed, it
is a kind of punishment for those spiritualists who, out of envy, do not
surrender unto Me. O Nārada, I have revealed My universal form to you
so that you can graphically experience how the entire universe, and all
of the living entities contained therein, from the tiny ant up to Lord
Brahmā and Lord Śiva, are all My parts and parcels and are resting in
Me."
After describing Himself in this way, Lord Nārāyaṇa suddenly
disappeared from Nārada's vision. Nārada Muni then went to Badarī in
order to see Nara and Nārāyaṇa Rṣis. Thereafter, Nārada Muni recited
the words of Lord Nārāyaṇa to the Siddhas residing in Brahmaloka, and
this treatise became known as the pañcarātra-śāstra.
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O Bhīṣma, please explain how
Lord Nārāyaṇa is superior to Lord Brahmā."
Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, thousands and millions of
Brahmā's lifetimes have passed, and in the beginning of each creation of
the universe, he is enlightened from within by Lord Nārāyaṇa. Thus,
Lord Brahmā knows very well about the superior position of the
Supreme Lord, Viṣṇu. In comparison to Lord Nārāyaṇa's eternal
existence, the lifetime of Brahmā is just like the appearance and
disappearance of a bubble in the ocean. For this reason, the topmost
transcendentalists aim to become one of Lord Nārāyaṇa's eternal associates, for in comparison to this, any other goal, even up to becoming the great Brahmā, is totally insignificant. The glories of Lord Nārāyaṇa are unlimited and full of spiritual bliss. The great devotees never tire of hearing the glories of the Lord and His associates, and indeed, this narration about Lord Nārāyaṇa and the residents of Śvetadvīpa is the essence of all topics which have so far been discussed by me. Everything else consists of preliminary knowledge, whereas unalloyed and spontaneous devotion unto the Lord is life's ultimate goal. It is therefore called the pañcama-puruṣārtha, for it is the fifth dimension of human life, beyond dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa."

After hearing this, the Pāṇḍavas felt highly enlightened about the nature of the Absolute Truth. By giving up all former misconceptions, the Pāṇḍavas became exclusively devoted unto Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is the original Nārāyaṇa, and thus they began to constantly meditate upon His spotless glories.

While relating the conversation between Vaiśampāyana and King Janamejaya, Śūta Gosvāmī urged the sages at Naimiśāraṇya, "My dear rśis, just like the Pāṇḍavas, you should dedicate your lives completely unto the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, without being distracted toward any other goal."

Śaunaka Rṣi inquired, "O Śūta Gosvāmī, since acceptance of the nivṛtti-mārga is the real purpose of Vedic knowledge, why did Lord Nārāyaṇa, who is the ultimate goal of that path, create the pravṛtti-mārga, which consists of various sacrifices unto the demigods that award one with only temporary benefit? In other words, how could Lord Nārāyaṇa, who is the original expounder of the path of detachment, have created the demigods, sacrifices and demigod worshipers, all of which are materially conceived?"

Śūta Gosvāmī replied, "O Śaunaka, King Janamejaya had brought up this same question when he inquired from Vaiśampāyana as follows: 'O Rṣi, how is it that the greatly intelligent and purified demigods turn away from the highest goal of life, liberation, and instead, try to enjoy the temporary and limited fruits of material life?'

"Vaiśampāyana replied, 'My dear king, this same question was asked of
Śrīla Vyāsa-deva by his disciples when they were living atop mount Meru. I shall now repeat to you what the great literary incarnation of Godhead had said."

Śrīla Vyāsa-deva replied, "My dear disciples, once, long ago, when I had visited Śvetadvīpa, Lord Nārāyana personally enlightened me regarding this subject. In the beginning of creation, Lord Brahmā brought the demigods and rṣis into being, and when they approached him in order to learn of their specific duties, the universal grandsire said, 'My dear progeny, I thank you very much for this inquiry. I have also been thinking over this matter very deeply, because only by our proper actions will the universe be maintained in an auspicious manner. I have concluded that the only way in which we shall be able to correctly ascertain the nature of our duties is to approach our supreme master, Lord Viṣṇu, Who is all knowing and infallible. Since the lord is the original cause of the creation, and is very merciful to His obedient servants, I am sure that He will give us direction.'

"Lord Brahmā then took all of the demigods and rṣis to the northern shore of the milk ocean, and there, they began to perform very severe austerities while standing immovably with upraised arms, and eyes turned toward the sky. After the passing of 1,000 celestial years, they suddenly heard the voice of the Supreme Lord. After welcoming the demigods and rṣis, the Lord said, 'O controllers of universal affairs, I know of the reason why you have come here, and so I shall empower you with pravṛtti, the inclination to act in a particular way. As a result, all of you will take up your prescribed duties, and I shall also assign you your jurisdictions. My only request is that you never fail to offer sacrifices wherein the first offerings are for My satisfaction.'

"The demigods and rṣis were highly delighted to hear the speech of Lord Viṣṇu, and they immediately arranged for a great sacrifice to be performed for His satisfaction. Lord Brahmā offered the first portion to Lord Viṣṇu, and then the other demigods and rṣis followed his example. After being worshipped in that sacrifice, Lord Viṣṇu once again spoke while remaining invisible: 'My dear demigods and rṣis, I have accepted your offerings with great pleasure. However, at the same time, I must inform you that the rewards which you will receive from these sacrificial performances shall not be everlasting. Later on, when human beings
perform sacrifices, they will first of all offer oblations unto Me and then unto yourselves. This will strengthen your positions so that you shall be able to continue upholding the universe during your allotted lifetimes. I have created you, the demigods and sapta-ṛṣis, with the propensity for pravṛtti, but others, such as the four Kumāras, have been created with the propensity for nivṛtti.'

"When the Lord finished speaking, the demigods and ṛṣis took their leave in order to assume their various administrative roles in the universal government. Only Lord Brahmā remained at the shore of the milk ocean, hoping to see the Supreme Lord in His personal form. Thereafter, the Supreme Lord appeared to Lord Brahmā in His form of Hayagrīva, having the head of a horse and carrying a staff and a water pot. After being reverentially worshipped, Lord Hayagrīva embraced Brahmā and declared, 'O four-headed progenitor, by placing the burden of ruling over the universe upon your shoulders, I have become freed from all anxiety. Of course, whenever difficulties arise that even you cannot handle, I shall personally incarnate for the welfare of the universe.'

"After saying this, the Lord disappeared, and thereafter, Lord Brahmā returned to his own abode."

Vaiśampāyana then said to King Janamejaya, "My dear king, even though the Supreme Lord is attainable only by renunciation of material desires, and He Himself practices that path when He incarnates into this world, still, for the benefit of the universe, He has also ordained the path of pravṛtti."

After having seen Lord Viṣṇu at Čvetadvēpa, Nārada Muni returned to Gandhamādana, and there he saw that the two ṛṣis, Nara and Nārāyaṇa, were engaged in worshipping themselves. Nārada Muni offered his obeisances, and the ṛṣis offered their respects in return. Actually, Nārada Muni was struck with wonder upon seeing the two ṛṣis, for they appeared to be just like residents of Čvetadvēpa. Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi then inquired, "O Nārada, were you able to behold the Supreme Soul of all souls residing in His eternal, transcendental abode?"

Nārada Muni replied, "Yes, my dear Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, I was very fortunate to be able to see Lord Viṣṇu at Čvetadvēpa, and now I feel as if I am beholding the same person here. O Lord, it is my desire to dwell here at
Badarī and engage in the devotional service of the Supreme Lord in Your association. Please be kind upon me and grant me this request."

Thereafter, Nārada Muni continued to reside at Badarī for 1,000 celestial years, engaging in the unalloyed devotional service of Lord Nārāyaṇa. After this, he took his leave from Nara and Nārāyaṇa Rṣis and then returned to his own āśrama.

In reply, Vaiṣampāyana narrated the following history: In the beginning of creation, Lord Brahmā was born upon a lotus flower which had grown from the navel of Lord Garbhodaśāyī Viṣṇu. At that time, Lord Viṣṇu placed two drops of water upon the lotus flower, and from the drop which looked like honey, the Daitya named Madhu was born, embodying the quality of tāmas. From the other drop of water sprang up Kaiṭabha, who embodied the quality of rajas. After their births, these two powerful demons began to wander over the lotus, armed with their heavy maces. Soon they came upon Lord Brahmā, who was engaged in creating the four Vedas, which were possessed of very beautiful form. Right within the sight of Lord Brahmā, Madhu and Kaiṭabha seized the Vedas and then dove deep into the water of the Garbhodaka ocean. When Lord Brahmā saw how the Vedas had been forcibly stolen, he became exceedingly morose, and in his distress, he prayed to the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu for protection. At the conclusion of his prayers, Lord Brahmā pleaded, "My dear Lord, how shall I be able to perform my duty of creating the universe without the direction of the Vedas?"

Situated below Lord Brahmā on the waves of the Garbhodaka ocean, Lord Viṣṇu opened His eyes as if awakening from a trance of yoga-nidrā. Being determined to recover the Vedas, Lord Viṣṇu then expanded Himself into a separate form which had the head of a horse, and thus bore the name Hayagrīva. This form was an embodiment of the entire universe. The earth became His forehead, the Gaṅgā and Sarasvatī rivers became his two hips, the oceans became His eyebrows, and the sun and the moon became His eyes. Lord Hayagrīva dove deep into the Garbhodaka ocean, and upon reaching the lower regions, He began to loudly chant the Vedic mantras so that the sound reverberated in all directions. When they heard this powerful vibration, the two Daityas, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, put down the Vedas and proceeded toward the
direction from which the sound had come. Having gained this good opportunity, Lord Hayagrīva quickly went and picked up the Vedas and then returned them to Lord Brahmā. Meanwhile, Madhu and Kaitabha could not find out the source of the sounds which they had heard, and so they returned to the place where they had put down the Vedas. When they discovered that the Vedas were missing, the two demons angrily came out from the water, and there, they saw Lord Viṣṇu lying down in yoga-nidrā upon the body of Lord Ananta. At this, the two Daityas began to laugh heartily, considering Lord Viṣṇu to be the one who had taken the Vedas. With gruff and loud voices, they challenged, "Oh, who is it that is lying here, hoping to avoid our wrath?"

Upon hearing the voices of Madhu and Kaitabha, Lord Viṣṇu awoke, understanding that they desired to fight with Him. In the battle that ensued, Lord Viṣṇu killed both of the demons, and thus He enabled Lord Brahmā to recreate the universe as it had been before, without experiencing undue anxiety.

Vaiśampāyana then said, "My dear king, Lord Nārāyaṇa is the Soul of all souls because every living being, including Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva, is His fragmental part and parcel. Lord Viṣṇu is the original seed of all existence, and thus there is nothing outside of Him. Whatever can be seen, whether in this world or any other, is a manifestation of His unlimited energies."

King Janamejaya then commented, "O Rṣi, since the path of bhakti-yoga (devotional service) is the only means for realizing the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa, it is certainly superior to all other spiritual methods. Indeed, when one is fully engaged in unmotivated devotional service, he is immediately elevated to the platform of perfection, without having to take the trouble of advancing through the various lower stages. O great sage, I desire to hear more about the glorious path of bhakti-yoga, and how it had been originally expounded."

Vaiśampāyana replied, "My dear king, the subject matter of bhakti-yoga was originally delineated by the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself. While speaking to Arjuna on the battlefield at Kurukṣetra, Lord Kṛṣṇa once again delivered this supreme science, for indeed, He is
the original spiritual master. This conversation has come to be known as the Bhagavad-gītā, and it deals exclusively with bhakti-yoga by direct explanation and by indirectly distinguishing it from all other processes. This eternal religion of the living being was originally expounded by Lord Nārāyaṇa unto Lord Brahmā at the beginning of creation, and it has descended in paramparā (disciplic succession) through the medium of pure devotees who act as the Lord's representatives. Thus, knowledge and understanding of pure bhakti-yoga can only be obtained by receiving it from the lips of a pure devotee. No one can become a pure devotee unless he undergoes the process of surrendering unto a pure devotee in disciplic succession by accepting him as his spiritual master. Without the direction and mercy of a bona fide guru in disciplic succession, no one can advance to the pure stage of devotional service.

Who is the bona fide guru? Anyone who becomes the perfect disciple of a bona fide guru in disciplic succession himself becomes a spiritual master in the next generation. Otherwise, no one can become a guru simply by his own efforts. One must be authorized by the chain of disciplic succession. Of course, such pure devotees are very rarely seen. But, if the world were full of such godly persons, then Satya-yuga would set in, and everyone would act dutifully, without greed for the fruits of his labor.

King Janamejaya then said, "My dear Vaiśampāyana, previously you had described how Vasiṣṭha had given birth to Śakti, and that his son, Parāśara, was the father of Vyāsadeva. Elsewhere, it is said that Vyāsadeva was a direct incarnation of Lord Nārāyaṇa in the Satyayuga. Can you reconcile this apparent contradiction?"

Vaiśampāyana replied, "My dear king, after completing the Mahābhārata, Śrila Vyāsadeva continued to reside in the Himālayas along with myself, Sumantu, Jaimini, Paila, and his son Śukadeva. Then, one day, we took the opportunity to inquire about our preceptor's birth as the son of Lord Nārāyaṇa, and so he narrated the story as follows:

In the beginning of creation, Lord Viṣṇu ordered Lord Brahmā to bring into being all varieties of living entities. Feeling himself incapable, however, Lord Brahmā replied, "My dear lord, I do not have sufficient knowledge to accomplish this task, and so I beg You to remedy the situation."
After hearing this, Lord Viṣṇu vanished from Lord Brahmā's sight, and thereafter, He began to think over what should be done. At this time, the goddess of intelligence appeared before Lord Viṣṇu, and so He ordered her to enter Lord Brahmā. Lord Viṣṇu then once again appeared before Lord Brahmā, who was now united with intelligence. This time, when Lord Viṣṇu ordered him to create varieties of living beings, Lord Brahmā readily assented. Lord Viṣṇu then departed, but later on, when He saw how the creation had become filled with diverse creatures, including extremely powerful Daityas, Dānavas, and Rākṣasas, He thought to Himself as follows:

"After performing austerities, these unpurified souls will become exceedingly powerful due to the benedictions which they will receive. As a consequence, they will become very proud and begin to oppress others, causing the earth to become aggrieved. Therefore, I had better assume diverse forms of incarnation within the world in order to relieve the earth of this unbearable burden."

After conceiving within His mind the various forms which He would assume, Lord Viṣṇu uttered the syllable "bho," and from that vibration the ṛṣi Apāntaratamā was born. From his liberated position, this son of Lord Nārāyaṇa's speech could see everything past, present, and future. Lord Nārāyaṇa then commanded, "My dear Apāntaratamā, I want you to devote yourself to the distribution of Vedic knowledge, for this alone will provide actual welfare for the conditioned souls who are suffering within material existence."

During the reign of Svāyambhuva Manu, the ṛṣi Apāntaratamā compiled the Vedas and then distributed the knowledge widely. Lord Viṣṇu became very pleased by this obedient execution of His order, and so He appeared before the sage and said, "My dear Apāntaratamā, by My will, you shall become eternal and unconquerable, and in each manvantara you will be the primary propagator of Vedic knowledge. Later on, you will appear in the line of Vasiṣṭha as the son of Parāśara Muni. Then, just before the advent of the Kali-yuga, your sons will beget children who will become the cause of a great fratricidal war. Thereafter, you will distribute the Vedic knowledge very widely in that Kali-yuga, after having witnessed My appearance in My original transcendental form as Lord Kṛṣṇa, the son of Vasudeva. My innumerable incarnations within
the material world, such as matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Nrsimha and Vamana, are all expansions of Lord Visnu, who resides within the ocean of milk. However, this special appearance of Mine is not like that. The form of Lord Krsna is My original form, from which all other Visnu forms have expanded."

Vaisampayana said, "My dear king, you should understand that, although there are different cults: the Sankhya of Kapila, the Yoga of Hiranyagarbha, the Vedas of Apantaratam, the Pasupati of Lord Siva, and the pañcaratra expounded by Lord Narayana Himself; all of them ultimately aim at understanding Lord Narayana alone. Factually, it is Lord Narayana Who is worshipped by the followers of these different paths with the various degrees of understanding which are afforded by their philosophical expositions. In other words, the first-class transcendentalists worship Lord Narayana directly by their engagement in devotional service, whereas others, due to incomplete knowledge, worship Him indirectly by their various procedures."

King Janamejaya then inquired, "O Vaisampayana, in reality, are there many purusas or gods, or is there only one?"

Vaisampayana then explained, "O King, sometimes the followers of Sankhya and Yoga speculate that there are many purusas, but in reality there is only one Supreme Purusa who is the master of all other so-called purusas. In this regard, I have heard from authoritative sources how Lord Brahma used to sometimes go to Mount Vaijanta within the Ocean of Milk. There, on the summit of that effulgent golden mountain, Lord Brahma engaged in deep meditation upon the Supreme Purusa. Once, Lord Siva happened to see his father absorbed in that way. After descending from the sky, Lord Siva worshipped the lotus feet of Lord Brahma and then requested, 'O Lord, kindly disclose to me the reason why you have come to this lonely spot.'

"Lord Brahma replied, 'My dear Rudra, I am engaging in meditation upon the Unlimited One, who is the original Purusa, the cause of all causes, and the master of everyone. It is from Him that our existence has been expanded, and thus He is the Soul of all souls, and it is He whom we must please by our endeavors if we are to come out successful.'

"Lord Siva then asked, 'My dear father, who is this Supreme Purusa that you describe?'"
"Lord Brahmä replied, 'My dear son, I am meditating upon Govinda, the original Personality of Godhead. He is the only master, and all others, including yourself and myself, are His eternal servants. It is Lord Kṛṣṇa Whom, knowingly or unknowingly, all of us are trying to realize by dint of our austerities, meditation, and other spiritual practices. He alone has no need to perform any austerity, for He is the Supreme Enjoyer, the Supreme Proprietor and the Supreme Controller. O Rudra, if it is seen that Lord Kṛṣṇa is engaged in doing some sort of work, then it should be understood to be His transcendental pleasure pastime."

Next, Bhīṣma described the following incident: Once, after worshipping Nārada Muni upon his arrival in heaven, King Indra inquired, "O Devarṣi, during your limitless travels throughout the universe, have you experienced anything very extraordinary which you would like to relate to us?"

In reply, Nārada Muni narrated the following story: There was once a brāhmaṇa descendent of Atri who resided in the town of Mahāpadma, which was situated on the southern banks of the Gaṅgā. This brāhmaṇa had numerous wives, children and other relatives, and because he was very pious, contented, and friendly, he was honored by everyone. And yet, in spite of all this, there was something which troubled him. Again and again, the brāhmaṇa considered within his mind: "There are so many duties which are related to my brahminical order and gṛhastha-āśrama. Besides these, there are many other duties which are mentioned in the dharma-śāstra, as well as traditional duties that sometimes appear to contradict these. Because of this, I cannot confidently ascertain exactly what my duties are, and as a result, I feel exceedingly anxious."

One day, another elevated brāhmaṇa arrived at this householder's dwelling, as if by chance. The householder brāhmaṇa offered his guest all kinds of hospitality, as was his duty. Then, when he saw that the brāhmaṇa was refreshed and seated at his ease, the householder took the opportunity to solicit his advice as follows: "My dear sir, after getting my son married, I wish to execute the supreme duties of a human being. Therefore, since you are a man of vast knowledge, kindly explain to me just what these activities are."

The brāhmaṇa then replied, "My dear sir, I am very sorry to say that I am
also confused in this regard, for it is seen that there are so many paths which one is recommended to follow. Indeed, it appears to me as if heaven has 100 doors at its entrance. If you want to gain more specific knowledge, I suggest that you travel to Naimiśaranya. Nearby, you will find the city of a very pious Nāga king named Padmanābha which is situated on the banks of the river Gomati. This king can surely relieve you of your doubts in this matter."

The householder brāhmaṇa then invited his guest to spend the night and also assured him that he would depart the very next morning in order to meet Padmanābha. Thus it came to be that after the departure of his guest, the householder brāhmaṇa set out for Naimiśaranya. At last, after passing through many kingdoms, the brāhmaṇa took directions from some local ṛṣis and then arrived at the city of the Nāgas. However when the brāhmaṇa came to Padmanābha’s house, he was informed by the Nāga’s wife: "O brāhmaṇa, my husband is away from home this month, for he is engaged in pulling Sūrya’s chariot. He shall return only after fifteen days."

The brāhmaṇa replied, "I shall take up residence on the banks of the river Gomati for this period. Kindly inform me when your good husband returns home."

Thereafter, the brāhmaṇa began to pass his days in the forest on the banks of the river, and because he completely abstained from eating, the residents of the Nāga city became very disturbed in mind. Finally, after six days had passed, some of the Nāgas went to him and implored, "My dear sir, please accept this food from us. If you do not do so then we shall become guilty of not receiving a guest properly."

The brāhmaṇa replied, "My dear friends, do not be aggrieved, for I am fasting out of respect for your king. I assure you that, if after nine more days, Padmanābha does not return, then I shall break my fast."

On the fifteenth day from the brāhmaṇa’s arrival, Padmanābha took his leave from Sūrya and then returned home as promised. After being reverently served by his wife, when Padmanābha was seated at ease, he inquired, "My dear queen, have you been properly attentive to all of your duties in my absence, especially the reception of guests?"

The wife replied, "My dear husband, a brāhmaṇa came here to see you fifteen days ago without disclosing his purpose. He has been living in the
forest by the banks of the Gomati in expectation of your return, and thus I think that you should immediately go and meet him."

The Nagas was offended by this suggestion, however, and with irritation he questioned, "How can a mere human being expect to even meet me, what to speak of my coming to him? Nagas are far superior to humans and are worthy of their worship!"

The wife then said, "My dear king, this brāhmaṇa has come here with an attitude of great respect for you, and he has been fasting all the while. Please give up your pride and anger and thus avoid going to hell by properly honoring your guest."

At this, the Nagas acknowledged that his wife had given him good advice, and so he gave up the wrath and arrogance which are natural for his species. Padmanābha then approached the brāhmaṇa without introducing himself and inquired, "My dear sir, who are you? What is your purpose in coming here to the city of the Nagas?"

The brāhmaṇa replied, "My name is Dharmaranya, and while waiting here in expectation of meeting Padmanābha, the Nagas king, I have been reciting the Vedas for his benefit."

Padmanābha replied, "O brāhmaṇa, it is I whom you wish to meet. Now, please tell me what it is that you want, and rest assured that your purpose shall be fulfilled."

In response, Dharmaranya said, "My dear king, I have come here in the hopes of acquiring some knowledge. First of all, however, I would be very appreciative if you would narrate to me some wonderful thing which you might have seen while taking your scheduled turn, pulling Sūrya's chariot."

Padmanābha replied, "O brāhmaṇa, everything about Sūrya is incredible. By utilizing his powerful rays, he causes clouds to form. Then, after the clouds pour forth rain, he evaporates the water from the land and the seas so that it can once again fall down as rain later on. The Supreme Personality of Godhead personally dwells within Sūrya so as to give him infallible guidance, because it is upon him that all life within the universe depends.

"My dear Dharmaranya, there is one thing, however, which specifically struck me as being very wonderful. One day, as I was engaged in pulling Sūrya's chariot, a blazingly effulgent being approached, who appeared to
be just like a second sun. As that person came closer, Sürya extended his hand in welcome, and so the being put out his right hand in return. That person entered Sürya as if merging into his existence, and thus I could no longer distinguish between the two. Indeed, I almost became overpowered by the fierce energy which was generated by the combined effulgence. I then inquired from Sürya about that person's identity, and the sun-god replied, 'O Nāga, the blazingly effulgent person whom you saw enter into my being was a brāhmaṇa who had once attained success by following the uñca vow. One who follows this vow picks up the grains which are left by the farmers in the fields after the harvest, and then subsists upon that food alone. Sometimes, this brāhmaṇa followed the uñca vow, and at other times he lived only on water and air. As a reward for his austerities, he will now remain as my associate and thus travel around the earth with me.'"

The householder brāhmaṇa then said, "My dear Padmanābha, I feel very grateful to you for your having related this incident, because in this way you have pointed out to me the path which I should follow. I shall now take your leave, for I feel that my visit here has turned out successful." In reply, the Nāga reminded his guest, "My dear brāhmaṇa, you have not yet disclosed the purpose of your coming here. Besides, we are now bound by a tie of friendship, and thus you should not depart so hastily." The brāhmaṇa said, "My dear king, throughout my entire life I have always been in doubt as to what is the best means for attaining the Supreme. Your words have cleared this doubt, however, and so I shall now earnestly apply myself to following the uñca vow. Since my object in coming here has been fulfilled, I beg you to give me permission to depart."

From Naimiśāraṇya, the brāhmaṇa went to the āśrama of Cyavana, a ṛṣi in the line of Bhṛgu, and he took formal initiation from him. Thereafter, he proceeded to another forest in order to execute his vows of austerity. Bhiṣma then concluded, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, this narration was originally spoken by Cyavana to King Janaka. Mahārāja Janaka later narrated it to Nārada Muni, and he related it to Indra as aforementioned. Indra then narrated the story to an assembly of demigods and brāhmaṇas, and the Vasus later on related it to me at the time when I had fought with Paraśurāma."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "O Grand sire, in spite of hearing your wonderful narrations, I have not been able to give up my grief and obtain peace of mind. How can mere theoretical instructions on the subject of spiritual elevation help me when I have already brought condemnation down upon myself by becoming the cause of a great massacre? Alas, what could be more distressing than to see my own grandfather lying down upon a bed of arrows as a consequence of my own greed? How shall I ever be able to become freed from the results of my grievous sins?"

In reply, Bhīṣma narrated the following story: There was once an old lady named Gautamī who was noted for her great patience and mental satisfaction. One day, Gautamī's son died after being bitten by a serpent, and so, in order to please the ascetic lady, a bird-hunter named Arjunāka captured that snake. After binding it up, the hunter brought it to Gautamī and inquired, "O pious lady, how should I kill this culprit?"

Gautamī replied, "O ignorant hunter, release the serpent! My son will not be brought back to life by killing this snake. Therefore, why should you unnecessarily perform such a sinful act?"

At this, the hunter argued, "O Gautamī, although persons like yourself value peace of mind and equanimity very highly and thus claim that everything is caused by Time or Destiny, practical persons like myself take revenge against wrongdoers and thus mitigate our grief. For this reason, I shall kill the snake."

Gautamī countered, "O Hunter, the death of my son, like everyone else's end, was predestined as a result of his own previous actions. Therefore, I cannot sanction the killing of this serpent. Furthermore, elevated persons never allow themselves to become disturbed by calamities. They forgive wrongdoers, knowing that resentment only brings on more suffering."

The hunter said, "My dear lady, a person gains great merit by killing an enemy or an envious and abominable creature."

Gautamī replied, "O Hunter, this may be true, but greater merit is gained by releasing an enemy who has been captured."

The hunter argued, "If this envious serpent is released, then other people shall surely be put into danger."
Gautamī remained adamant, however, and so the hunter next said, "Indra had earned great merit by killing Vṛtrāsura, and so you should allow me to destroy this serpent without misgivings."

And yet, in spite of the hunter's numerous arguments, Gautamī did not waver in her views. The bound-up serpent then suddenly said in a human voice, "O Hunter, I should not be blamed for killing this woman's child, for I had bitten him under the direction of Mṛtyu. If anyone is at fault, then it is Death personified, because I was only the instrument of the action."

At this, the hunter said, "O Serpent, even as an instrument of action, you are to be held responsible, just as in the manufacture of a clay pot, the potter's tool and wheel are also considered to be the causes."

The snake replied, "O Hunter, the potter's wheel and tools are not independent causes, and neither was I. Therefore, I cannot be held responsible for the boy's death."

As the argument continued, Mṛtyu personally came there and said, "O Serpent, you are falsely blaming me for the child's death. I had not independently ordered you to bite him, but I had done so at the command of Kala (Time). Therefore, neither you nor I are the actual cause of his death. Whatever action, or abstention from action, which a creature performs is done under the influence of Kala. Indeed, everything is created and destroyed by Kala, and thus your accusation is most unjust! If I am to be blamed, then you will also be implicated."

The snake replied, "O Mṛtyu, I do not blame you, nor excuse you. I had simply stated that whatever I had done was under your direction. As far as blaming Kala is concerned, it is beyond my knowledge to judge whether this is proper or not."

The snake then turned to the hunter and said, "My dear sir, after hearing the words of Mṛtyu, you should not continue to keep me bound up any longer."

However, the hunter replied, "O Serpent, quite to the contrary! I now consider both you and Mṛtyu to be guilty as conspirators. Instead of letting you go, I intend to kill the two of you."

At this, Mṛtyu objected by saying, "O Hunter, this is not right. Both of us have acted under the direction of Kala."

Just then, Kala arrived upon the scene and declared, "Neither I nor
Mṛtyu nor the snake should be considered responsible for the death of any creature. The real cause of this child's death is the *karma* (actions) which he performed in the past. Just as a man can take a lump of clay and shape it in any way which he likes, we can mold our destiny by our actions."

Upon hearing this, Gautamī said, "Yes! This is the actual fact! My child has died as the result of his own past sins. Similarly, it is due to my past actions that I am now experiencing the death of my dear son. Therefore, let the snake be released at once!"

At this, the hunter finally became convinced, and so he gave up his anger toward the snake. The old lady also felt highly pleased in mind after hearing this enlightening debate. Thereafter, Kala, Mṛtyu, and the serpent were all given leave so that they could go to their respective destinations.

Bhiṣma then urged, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should also give up your grief, for it is caused by falsely considering yourself to be the cause of the battle which had taken place at Kurukṣetra."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira actually became somewhat consoled after hearing this story, and he next inquired, "O Grandsire, is there any example in the history of the world where a householder conquered over death?"

Bhiṣma responded by narrating the following story: The tenth of Ikṣvāku's 100 sons was named Daśasva, and he became the king at Māhiṣmatī. His pious son was named Madirāsva, and his son was Dyutimān. Dyutimān's son was Suvīra, and he begot a son named Surdurjaya who later on received a son named Duryodhana. Due to Duryodhana's piety, the kingdom of Māhiṣmatī became decorated with all kinds of auspicious symptoms. The celestial river Narmadā once approached the king in her personal form, desiring to have sexual union with him. As a result, a beautiful daughter named Sudarśanā was born. Indeed, she came to be so exquisitely lovely that Agni took the form of a *brāhmaṇa* and approached Duryodhana in order to ask for her hand in marriage. Duryodhana was not willing to give his daughter to a *brāhmaṇa*, however, and so in retaliation, Agni disappeared from the great sacrifice which the king was in the process of performing. At this, Duryodhana became highly aggrieved, and he consulted with his priests.
in order to ascertain what sin he had performed in order to receive such punishment. Then, in order to benefit the king, the brāhmaṇas began to deeply meditate upon Agni. Soon thereafter, the god of fire appeared before the sacrificial priests and explained, "O brāhmaṇas, I desire to marry Duryodhana's daughter. It is because I have been disappointed in this matter that I have withdrawn myself from this sacrifice."
The next morning, the brāhmaṇas informed Duryodhana of the situation, and when he learned that it was Agni who had desired to become his son-in-law, the king gladly gave his consent. Then, when Agni appeared in order to accept the hand of Sudarśanā, Duryodhana said, "My dear lord, as a dowry for my highly qualified daughter, I request you to always remain within my kingdom."
Bhiṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, Agni agreed, and thus even to this day the firegod can be seen in the city of Māhiṣmatī. When you had sent out Sahadeva to conquer over the kingdoms in the southern direction, he had personally met Agni there."
After the marriage of Agni and Sudarśanā, a son was born, and he also received the name Sudarśana. This wonderful boy became fully self-realized in his childhood, and when he grew up, he married Oghavatī, the daughter of King Oghavat. After their marriage, the couple took up residence at Kurukṣetra, and soon thereafter, Sudarśana vowed, "Even while remaining in household life, I shall conquer over death!"
For this purpose he instructed, "My dear wife, you must never act against the wishes of whoever may become our guest. Whether I am present or not, you must offer whatever a guest requests, even if it is your very self."
Oghavatī obediently agreed to her husband's command, and from that time onward, Mṛtyu began to carefully watch Sudarśana, hoping to find out some fault which would allow him to defeat his vow. Then, one day, while the son of Agni was away in the forest collecting firewood, a brāhmaṇa came to his house and requested Oghavatī to accept him as a guest. Sudarśana's wife received the brāhmaṇa perfectly according to the etiquette for honoring a guest. Then, she inquired, "My dear sir, for what purpose have you come here, and how can I be of service?"
The brāhmaṇa frankly replied, "O beautiful lady, my only business in coming here is to enjoy you to my full satisfaction. Thus, I request you to gratify my ardent desire without hesitation."
Oghavatî tried to offer him innumerable other services and gifts, but the brāhmaṇa remained adamant. Thus, while remembering the command of her husband, Oghavatî finally agreed to gratify the brāhmaṇa, and as a result, she felt great shame. The brāhmaṇa then immediately took Oghavatî into the cottage and began to enjoy her company just according to his desire. Soon thereafter, Sudarśana returned home, with Mṛtyu, as always, staying invisible by his side. Sudarśana was surprised that his wife did not come out to greet him, and thus he called out loudly for her. Still, he received no answer because Oghavatî had remained silent, in spite of hearing her husband's voice. Since she was being held tightly in the fond embrace of the brāhmaṇa, Oghavatî felt too ashamed to answer. Finally, as Sudarśana repeatedly called out for his wife, the brāhmaṇa replied, "My dear sir, I have come here as a guest, and, at my request, your wife is now engaged in gratifying me with her body. Considering the circumstances, it is up to you to do as you see fit."

With club in hand, Mṛtyu was right beside Sudarśana, ready to instantly kill him upon the violation of his promise. Indeed, Sudarśana could see how Death was standing beside him. Thus, even though he certainly became perplexed and momentarily aggrieved upon hearing the brāhmaṇa's words, he quickly cast off all jealousy and anger which might be displayed by his glance, thought, word, or deed. Sudarśana then replied, "O brāhmaṇa, you may enjoy yourself as you like and rest assured that it is a great pleasure for me to entertain you as my guest. All of my possessions are at your disposal, for by this act I am confident of attaining the highest merit. In case you may doubt the sincerity of my words, I hereby call upon the elements, time, space, and all other universal witnesses to certify the truth of my statement."

As soon as this was said, voices were heard coming from all directions, and they declared, "This statement of Sudarśana's is indeed true and not at all false!"

At this, the brāhmaṇa immediately came out of the cottage, revealing his true identity as Dharma. The god of righteousness then congratulated Sudarśana by saying, "O son of Agni, you have conquered over death! Rest assured that due to her chastity and your own piety, your wife had not been in the least defiled by my contact. As a benediction, I hereby grant that half of your wife will follow you to your exalted destination,
and the other half will become the celebrated Oghavatī River.

Indra then appeared overhead, riding upon his celestial chariot, and thus it came to be that the son of Agni was able to conquer over death by ascending to heaven without even giving up his present body. Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, for a householder, there is no more worshipful person than his guest. The heartfelt blessings which are given by an honored guest give the householder more merit than the performance of 100 sacrifices."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next desired to hear about the meritoriousness of compassion, and so Bhīṣma narrated the following story:

There was once a hunter who lived within the kingdom of Kāśi. One day, after leaving his village and entering the forest, this hunter discharged a poisoned arrow which hit a tree instead of the deer at which it was aimed. Because of the poison, that tree shed all of its leaves and fruits and began to gradually wither away. A parrot lived within the hollow of that tree's trunk, and due to great attachment, he refused to leave his home. Indeed, the parrot simply remained motionless and silent due to being overwhelmed by grief on account of the tree's death. When Indra saw how the bird had given up eating, and was thus withering away along with the tree, he became highly amazed to see that a lower animal could have such human-like feelings. After descending upon the earth, the king of heaven took the form of a brāhmaṇa and approached the parrot. Indra then inquired, "My dear Śūka, why don't you leave this dead tree, for there are so many other green ones here for you to reside in?"

The parrot replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, by dint of my ascetic merit, I can recognize that you are Indra in disguise. Why have you come here like this?"

Indra was amazed to hear this, and then he once again asked, "O Parrot, why do you remain within this tree which is no longer fit for habitation? Select another tree, for so many nice green ones abound in this forest."

The parrot then explained, "My dear king, I was born and raised in this tree. It was here also that I purified myself by performing austerities and thus acquired all good qualities. Therefore, it is not proper for you to advise me to change my residence like a fickle person. This tree has
supported me throughout my entire life. How can I desert it now?"
Indra was very pleased to hear the parrot's noble words and so he requested him to accept a benediction. The parrot then asked Indra to rejuvenate the tree, and so the king of heaven sprinkled some nectar over it, causing it to quickly blossom forth with new life.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "O Bhīṣma, who is most worthy of worship?"
Bhīṣma replied, "My dear king, the brāhmaṇas are always worthy of the highest regard. If a 100-year-old kṣatriya meets a 10-year-old brāhmaṇa, the latter should be treated like a father by the former, for brāhmaṇas are always to be considered superior. Just as her husband is the worshipful deity for a wife, the brāhmaṇa is the object of utmost regard for a kṣatriya."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then asked, "My dear grandsire, what result awaits a person who promises something to a brāhmaṇa and then fails to give it?"
In order to reply, Bhīṣma related the following incident: There were once two intimate friends who, after death, were forced to accept the bodies of an ape and a jackal. One day, the ape came across the jackal as he was engaged in eating animal carcasses in a crematorium. Remembering their former friendship in the human form of life, the ape inquired, "My dear jackal, what terrible sin did you commit in order to receive this abominable body?"
The jackal replied, "My dear ape, once, I promised something to a brāhmaṇa and then failed to give it. Now, please tell me, what horrible sin did you commit in order to get this degraded form?"
The ape replied, "My dear jackal, in my last life, I used to steal fruits which belonged to the brāhmaṇas."
Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, after promising something to a brāhmaṇa, if one does not give it, then all of the pious acts, sacrifices, and giving in charity which he had performed are rendered fruitless."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O Grandsire, what is the result of giving instruction to persons who are unworthy of receiving them?"
In reply, Bhīṣma narrated this story: Once upon a time, there was a śūdra who possessed very elevated compassion toward all creatures. This śūdra
journeyed to an āśrama of rṣis in the Himālayas, and he was welcomed by the sages there. When the śūdra saw the wonderful qualities possessed by these brāhmaṇas, he also became inclined toward the performance of austerities and so he approached the Kulapati (a leader of rṣis who has at least 10,000 disciples). After touching the rṣi's feet, the śūdra implored, "My dear sir, even though my birth is fourth-class, I beg you to initiate me into a life of renunciation. O Kulapati, please accept me as your surrendered disciple and servant." The Kulapati replied, "It is not possible for a śūdra to be formally initiated. Still you can remain here and engage in the service of the rṣis. In this way, I am sure that you shall earn great merit."

The śūdra was not happy with this proposal, however, because his mind had already become enthralled by the thought of living a life of renunciation. Without having obtained formal initiation or accepting the symbols of sannyāsa, the śūdra went far away to a secluded place in the forest. There, he constructed a cottage, and in front of it he made a sacrificial platform along with sitting arrangements for the demigods. Thereafter, the śūdra began to engage in the performance of sacrifices, worship of the demigods, and severe austerities. In this way, a long period of time passed. Then, one day, a rṣi came to the śūdra's abode. The śūdra received his guest with proper hospitality and then the two passed some time in pleasant conversation. In this way, a warm friendship developed and from that time on, the brāhmaṇa used to return again and again to visit the śūdra. On one such occasion, the śūdra requested, "My dear brāhmaṇa, please teach me how to properly worship the pītrs."

The brāhmaṇa consented, and thereafter, he very carefully instructed the śūdra and then directed his performance of the śraddhā ceremony. Finally, after a long life of executing austerities, the śūdra gave up his body while residing in the forest, and due to the great merit which he had earned, he took his next birth as the son of a king. When the brāhmaṇa who had instructed the śūdra passed away, he took his next birth as the son of a family priest, and while growing up, he became very learned in many branches of Vedic knowledge. After the death of his father, the śūdra-reborn-prince ascended the royal throne, and soon thereafter, he installed the reborn rṣi as his family priest. However,
every day, when the priest came to utter benedictions or assist him in his religious duties, the king would smile and sometimes even laugh out loud in his presence. After repeatedly seeing how the king would laugh or smile just by seeing him, the priest met with him in private. The brāhmaṇa first of all pleased the king greatly by his learned discourses, and then he took the opportunity to ask for a favor. The king replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, out of affection for you I am prepared to offer 100 benedictions and not just one."

The priest responded, "My dear king, the only thing I wish to request is that you tell the truth in reply to my question."

The king agreed, and so the brāhmaṇa inquired, "Why is it that you frequently laugh at me? O King, speak the truth, for my curiosity has been greatly aroused."

The king then confided, "My dear brāhmaṇa, I am able to remember our previous births. In my last life, I was a śūdra who engaged in performing austerities. You were a rṣi who, out of friendship, had instructed me in the performance of the śraddhā ceremony. Due to this fault of yours, you have now become my family priest, and it is because of this ironic turn of events staged by irresistible time that I smile whenever I see you. My dear brāhmaṇa, do not think that I laugh at you out of disregard. I actually feel very sorry that your great ascetic merit was destroyed because you had imparted instructions to a śūdra. Indeed, my advice is that you quit this post as sacrificial priest and once again engage in the performance of austerities so that your next birth will be more auspicious."

The brāhmaṇa took the king's words very seriously, and after giving away all of his possessions in charity, he went on a tour of holy places. Then, at last, he returned to the āśrama where he had resided in his previous life, and there, he continued his execution of austerities. As a result, the brāhmaṇa quickly made great spiritual advancement so that he became an object of veneration for all the rṣis who dwelt in the vicinity.

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear king, brāhmaṇas should never give instructions on the ritualistic portions of the Vedas to śūdrās. Indeed, as a general rule, brāhmaṇas should remain silent, for there is always a risk of speaking incorrectly or offensively. One should not be very eager to
impart instructions to others. Of course, if one is requested to speak, then he should do so, but only after careful consideration, and never in exchange for money, for such an act greatly pollutes the instructor." Mahārāja Yudhishṭhira next inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, how can one receive the grace of the goddess of fortune, Lakṣmī, and thus become very prosperous in all regards?"

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhishṭhira, once, when Rukmiṇī had the opportunity of meeting Lakṣmīdevī, she requested, 'O goddess of fortune, kindly describe to me those persons in whom you dwell and those whom you avoid.'

"Thus being questioned, Lakṣmīdevī replied as follows in the presence of Lord Krṣṇa: 'My dear Rukmiṇī, I always reside with those persons who are eloquent, active, attentive to their duties, freed from anger, grateful, of controlled passions, who are worshipers of the Supreme Lord and the demigods, and who are high-minded. I never reside with those persons who are atheists, inattentive to their duties, who beget unwanted children due to uncontrolled lust, who are ungrateful, of impure habits, who are thieves, malicious toward their superiors, who use harsh and cruel words, and who become distressed over trifles and thus are always irritated and angry. I reside with those wives who are very devoted to their husbands and also in certain objects such as lotus-flowers, virgin girls, ornaments, and the stars in the sky. Of course, I only personally reside with Lord Nārāyaṇa, who is the original reservoir of all good qualities. By expanding my potencies, I enrich those persons with whom the Lord is pleased, and it is in this sense that I reside with them."

Mahārāja Yudhishṭhira next inquired, "My dear grandsire, who derives more pleasure from the act of sexual intercourse, the man or the woman?"

In reply, Bhīṣma narrated the following story: Once, long ago, there lived a king named Bhaṅgasvāna who was very learned and pious, and was known as a rājarśi. Because he did not have any children, this king decided to perform a sacrifice for that purpose called the Agniśtuta. In this particular sacrifice, only Agni is worshipped, and when Indra came to understand that Bhaṅgasvāna was planning to perform it, he became highly offended. The king of heaven then began to carefully look for
fault which might give him the opportunity to punish the king for disregarding him. And yet, in spite of careful scrutiny, Indra could not find any fault, and so the sacrifice was successfully performed, and in due course of time, the king received 100 sons. Then, one day, sometime later on, Bhaṅgasvana went alone into the forest to hunt. Indra considered this to be a good opportunity for gaining revenge, and by utilizing his mystic power, he created delusion within the mind of the king. As a result, the bewildered Bhaṅgasvana became lost in the forest, and at last, while riding here and there, hunger, thirst, and fatigue overwhelmed him. Being unable to ascertain the proper direction, Bhaṅgasvana came to a lake, and after dismounting, he dove into the crystal-clear water in order to refresh himself. Much to the king's amazement, as soon as he contacted the water, his body transformed into that of a woman, and as a result, he became exceedingly ashamed. With great agitation, the king thought, "Alas! How shall I ever be able to return to my capital city and face the citizens? What will I say to my 100 sons? How shall I explain this to my wives, 630 friends and relatives?"

While indulging in such thoughts, Bhaṅgasvana mounted upon his (her) horse and began to slowly return home. As expected, upon her arrival, when the citizens saw how their ruler had been transformed into a woman, they became highly amazed. Bhaṅgasvana then called together all of his relatives and subjects, and after explaining what had happened, she announced, "I shall now retire to the forest, and so I beg all of my ministers to cooperate in order to rule over the kingdom righteously."

Bhaṅgasvana then departed, and after entering the forest, she came to the āśrama of a ṛṣi and began residing there. In due course of time, this ṛṣi begot 100 sons within the womb of Bhaṅgasvana. Then, taking these children with her, Bhaṅgasvana returned to her kingdom and commanded her former sons to accept them as brothers. Thus, it came to be that the 200 sons of Bhaṅgasvana lived together peacefully while cooperatively ruling the kingdom in a very righteous manner. Upon seeing this, Indra angrily thought to himself, "Instead of harming Bhaṅgasvana by transforming him into a woman, it appears that I have unwittingly benefited him."

Indra then assumed the form of a brāhmaṇa and went to Bhaṅgasvana's capital city. By explaining to the first group of sons that their parental
kingdom was being unnecessarily shared with those who were undeserving, Indra was able to create disunity among the two groups of princes. Thus, a strong enmity soon arose between them, and thereafter, when they fought for possession of the kingdom, all 200 princes were slain in the battle. At this time, Bhaṅgasvana was living in the forest as an ascetic woman, and when she heard about the extermination of her sons, she began to lament very bitterly. Indra then approached her in the form of a brāhmaṇa and inquired, "My dear woman, for what reason are you so aggrieved?"

Bhaṅgasvana piteously replied, "O brāhmaṇa, previously, as a king, I begot 100 sons. Then, after my sex had miraculously changed, I gave birth to 100 more. Now, all of my 200 sons have been slain."

The brāhmaṇa then harshly declared, "Formerly you had dared to perform a sacrifice which was displeasing to Indra. Indeed, it is I whom you foolishly created hostilities with, for I am the king of heaven disguised as a brāhmaṇa!"

While saying this, Indra revealed his true form, and so Bhaṅgasvana very repentantly fell down at his feet. While begging forgiveness, the former king then implored, "O Indra, please believe me. I had performed the Agniśțuta sacrifice simply for the purpose of begetting children and not for provoking hostility with you."

Because of the former king's very submissive attitude, Indra immediately became pacified, and he even offered Bhaṅgasvana the benediction that one of his batches of 100 sons could be brought back to life. Having received this choice, the ascetic lady requested, "My dear king of heaven, let the 100 sons which I gave birth to while in this form of a woman be restored to life."

Indra was a little surprised to hear this, and so he requested, "O Bhaṅgasvana, please explain to me why you have more affection for the children which were born to you as a woman than those which you had received as a man."

Bhaṅgasvana replied, "O king of heaven, the affection which a woman feels for her children is far greater than that which is felt by a man."

Indra was very pleased to gain this insight into human nature. He then proclaimed, "My dear Bhaṅgasvana, I shall restore all of your 200 children to life, and if you like, you can regain your masculinity as well."
However, Bhaṅgasvana replied, "O Indra, I prefer to remain as a woman and so I shall just accept the benediction which will enable all of my children to be brought back to life."

Indra was once again very surprised to hear Bhaṅgasvana's decision, and in reply to his inquiry, she explained, "My dear king of heaven, during sexual intercourse, the pleasure which is experienced by the woman is normally much greater than that which is felt by the man. It is for this reason that I wish to remain a woman and thus derive more sensual happiness."

After hearing this, Indra took his leave from Bhaṅgasvana and then returned to his heavenly abode.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, how should one act so that he can very easily pass his journey through life?"

In reply, Bhīṣma advised, "My dear king, a person who wants to avoid putting himself into great difficulty should carefully avoid performing three acts with his body: the killing of other living entities, stealing, and the enjoyment of others' wives. In addition, one should meticulously avoid four acts of speech: conversation about sinful activities, the utterance of harsh and offensive words, the advertising of others' faults, and lies. And, three acts of the mind should be rigorously avoided as well: coveting the possessions of others, disbelief in the Vedas, and thoughts of injuring others. If a person acts in this way, then he will traverse the path of life as easily as possible."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "My dear grandsire, please describe to me the position of Lord Śiva."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I shall request Lord Kṛṣṇa to speak now, for He is the only one competent to understand the real truth regarding Lord Śiva. Mahādeva is not one of the separated parts and parcels of the Supreme Personality of Godhead (vibhinnāṁśa) like the other demigods, headed by Lord Brahmā and Indra. Nor is Lord Śiva considered to be a personal expansion of Lord Viṣṇu (svāṁśa). However, he is almost on the level of viṣṇu-tattva, and thus he is considered to be the topmost Vaiṣṇava. For this reason, I think it only befitting if Lord Kṛṣṇa describes the glories of His foremost worshiper."

Playing the role of a human being, Lord Kṛṣṇa responded by saying, "My
dear Bhīṣma, I also cannot properly delineate the glories of Lord Śiva. However, because I have been requested to do so, I must at least make the attempt. Once, Jāmbavatī became unhappy to see how Rukmīṇī had given birth to such nice children, and so she begged Me to give her a son equal to Pradyumna. After agreeing to fulfill Jāmbavatī’s wish, I took permission from Vasudeva, Devakī, and Balarāma, and then set out for the Himālayas, riding upon the back of Garuḍa. Upon My arrival, I dismissed Garuḍa and then entered the āśrama of Upamanyu, the brother of Dhaumya. After describing to him the purpose of My visit, I took initiation from Upamanyu so that I could properly commence a life of austerities.

"Upamanyu was an unalloyed devotee of Lord Śiva, and after receiving from him the mantras for worshipping that chief of demigods, as well as a sacred staff, I shaved My head, rubbed ghee all over My body, and put on a dress of rags. Then, taking up kuśa-grass in My hand, I went to a secluded spot in order to initiate My austerities. Thereafter, during the first month of My ascetic life, I ate only fruits. Then, during the second month, I subsisted upon water alone. Thereafter, for the next three months, I maintained My life simply by breathing, and all the while, I stood upon one foot with arms upraised, and I did not sleep for a moment.

"At the end of the fifth month, I saw a splendid effulgence appear overhead in the sky, and in the midst of that glare was something which appeared to be like a mass of dark blue clouds. Soon, I could perceive that this was Lord Śiva and Umā, who were surrounded by their ghostly companions as well as all of the demigods and great sages. Lord Śiva then spoke to Me, declaring that there was no one else more dear to him. In return, I glorified Śiva at great length, and thereafter, both he and his wife awarded Me many benedictions. Lord Śiva assured Me that I would possess all opulence in full, and that I would beget numerous children. Pārvatī then informed Me that through Jāmbavatī, I would beget Sāmba, and she also gave Me the boons that My transcendental beauty would never deteriorate, and that I would receive 16,000 wives. Thereafter, Lord Śiva and Umā disappeared from view, and so I called for Garuḍa and then returned to Dvārakā."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, since women are considered to be the complete embodiment of māyā, their association is greatly condemned in the śāstra. Why then is a householder supposed to perform his religious duties in the company of his wife?"

Bhīṣma then narrated the following story in reply: Once upon a time, Aṣṭāvakra desired to marry Suprabhā, the incomparably beautiful and highly qualified daughter of Vadānya Rṣi. After being solicited for this purpose, Vadānya said, "My dear Aṣṭāvakra, I shall give you my consent, but only on one condition. I want you to first of all journey to the north, beyond the abodes of Kuvera and Lord Śiva. There, within a wonderful forest, you will meet a female ṛṣi who is as beautiful as Lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune. After worshipping this ascetic lady, you may come back here and accept my daughter's hand in marriage."

Aṣṭāvakra then took his leave from Vadānya and set out for the north. After arriving at the Himālayas, he bathed in the River Vahuda, and then he spent the night there. The next morning, Aṣṭāvakra journeyed to Mount Kailāsa, and when he came to the abode of Kuvera, the Yakṣas, headed by Maṇibhadra, came to welcome him. Then, when Aṣṭāvakra Rṣi requested the Yakṣas to inform Kuvera of his arrival, Maṇibhadra replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, the lord of wealth already knows of your presence here, and he will personally come to meet you very shortly."

Thereafter, when King Vaiśrāvana (Kuvera) arrived, he inquired about Aṣṭāvakra's welfare and then led him into his palace. After offering the ṛṣi his own seat, Kuvera worshipped his guest with great reverence. Then, with Aṣṭāvakra's permission, the lord of wealth called for the foremost of the Apsarās, and as they proceeded to dance to the accompaniment of the Gandharvas, the ṛṣi became thoroughly enthralled. Indeed, Aṣṭāvakra became so enchanted that he passed one full year in Kuvera's palace without even realizing how the time had passed. The lord of wealth then said, "My dear ṛṣi, you have been here for more than one year. It is the special quality of the Gandharva's music that it completely steals one's heart away. Of course, if you so desire, you can remain here longer, for my very life and possessions are meant for the pleasure of the brāhmaṇas."

When Aṣṭāvakra realized how the time had passed, he took his leave and proceeded further toward the north until he arrived at Lord Śiva's
abode. After circumambulating that holy place three times, Aṣṭāvakra continued until he entered an astonishingly beautiful forest within which he found a similarly charming āṣrama. In that forest, Aṣṭāvakra saw how jewels were strewn here and there, all over the ground. Within the āṣrama, he saw a brilliant golden mansion which was surrounded by hills of gems, and thus the opulence of that place surpassed even the palace of Kuvera. When Aṣṭāvakra entered that āṣrama, he saw that numerous rṣis were residing there, and upon entering that golden palace, he announced his presence as a guest. At once, seven young girls, who possessed astonishingly unique beauty, came to greet him, and as Aṣṭāvakra gazed upon them, each one began to steal away his heart. Although he tried to control his mind, Aṣṭāvakra lost his normal tranquillity and became highly excited with strong desires for sense enjoyment. Upon seeing himself thus becoming totally bewildered, the rṣi made a supreme effort and at last, with great difficulty, he regained some composure. The girls then invited Aṣṭāvakra to come into the interior of the palace, and there, he beheld an old lady, dressed in white cloth and adorned with costly ornaments. After exchanging greetings with her guest, the lady offered Aṣṭāvakra a seat, and after being seated, the rṣi requested that the girls be dismissed. Thereafter, Aṣṭāvakra and the old lady passed the entire day in pleasant conversation. Finally, when night fell, the rṣi suggested that they both retire. Aṣṭāvakra then laid down on the bed which was provided for him, and the old lady retired to a separate room. Before long, however, the old lady got up, and while pretending to tremble because of the cold, she approached Aṣṭāvakra's bed. The rṣi welcomed her, but then, to his great surprise, the elderly lady reached out and began to embrace him very tenderly. Aṣṭāvakra remained as indifferent as a piece of wood, however, and so the old lady became very aggrieved and said, "My dear brāhmaṇa, for a woman, to have sexual intercourse with a man who excites her lusty desires is the highest pleasure. Indeed, the only real enjoyment a woman finds in the association of men is their sexual advances. O ṛṣi, I am fully under the influence of lust and so you should reciprocate with me. Become my lord and master and in return, I promise to always obey you implicitly. All the objects of human enjoyment are available here, and my vast wealth will be at your disposal. Please do not disappoint me."
Aṣṭāvakra replied, "My dear woman, I am a stranger to all types of sensual pleasure, and furthermore, I would never consider enjoying the wife of another. I desire to marry, but only for the purpose of begetting children and thus earning the merit which is gained by doing so. Therefore, please desist from this most unbefitting attempt to enjoy with me."

The elderly lady then said, "My dear sir, women in general are exceedingly fond of sexual intercourse. Thus, among thousands of women, hardly one can be found who is genuinely devoted to her husband. When a woman becomes inflamed with passionate desire, she does not care for family ties. Indeed, in their pursuit for happiness, women often become the destroyers of their own families."

Aṣṭāvakra then inquired, "Is there nothing else which I could do to gratify you?"

At this, the lady said, "All right. Just reside here for some time, and I shall be satisfied with that."

Aṣṭāvakra gave his consent, and surprisingly enough, as he continued to stay there, even though the woman was incredibly old and decrepit, he never felt the least bit of repulsion while looking at her. Indeed, with great curiosity, the rṣi began to wonder, "Since this woman is the master of such a heavenly place, why is it that she was cursed to suffer such decrepitude?"

Aṣṭāvakra passed the next day absorbed in such thoughts, and then, as the sun was setting, the old lady came to him and inquired, "My dear brāhmaṇa, what can I do to serve you?" In reply, Aṣṭāvakra requested the old lady to bring him some water for his bath, and when she did so, she also brought a gumcha and some oil. Then, with the rṣi's permission, she began to rub the oil all over his body and afterwards, she bathed him with her own hands. Due to the pleasure which he felt because of the warm water and the very agreeable quality of the old lady's touch, Aṣṭāvakra lost all sense of time and thus he could not understand that the entire night had passed away. Because of this, when he got up from the bath and saw that the sun had already risen, Aṣṭāvakra became very highly astonished and thought, "Is it really the next day, or is this some kind of illusion?"

The old lady then prepared some food for Aṣṭāvakra, and when he ate it,
he found the taste to be so rich and nectareous that he could only take a very little. And yet, amazingly enough, while eating that little bit of food, the whole day passed and evening arrived. The old lady then requested the āśī to take rest, and this time, she provided him with a more excellent bed. When Āśāvakra laid down, the old lady entered her own room but then, at midnight, she quietly came and stood before him. Upon being aroused from his slumber and seeing the old lady before him, Āśāvakra pleaded, "My dear woman, please understand that my mind turns away from the very thought of having sexual intercourse with the wife of another. Now, please desist and go back to your own bed."
The old lady replied, "My dear brāhmaṇa, I am my own mistress. I am not the wife of anyone. Therefore, it would not be sinful for you to enjoy me."
Āśāvakra then argued, "A woman can never be independent, whether in her childhood, her youth, or her old age."
Still, the old lady countered, "O Rṣi, because of my ardent desire for sexual union, and the painstaking devotion which I have shown for you, it would be sinful for you not to respond in a loving manner."
Āśāvakra then said, "When one is unable to control his senses, he becomes a victim of so many unfortunate circumstances. Therefore, since I am able to restrain myself, you should return to your bed and leave me alone."
In spite of this, however, the lady continued to beg the āśī, and at last, she said, "O brāhmaṇa, if you think that it is sinful to have sexual relations with a woman who is not your wife, then I shall marry you."
At this, Āśāvakra inquired, "How is it that you consider yourself to be your own mistress so that you can give yourself away in marriage?"
The old lady replied, "O Rṣi, from my very childhood, I adopted the vow of brahmacarya. I have renounced my family and have remained a virgin throughout my entire lifetime. Therefore, you can feel free to accept me."
Finally, Āśāvakra admitted, "My dear lady, I must confess that I full attracted to you. Still, wouldn't I be going against the wishes of the āśī Vādānya by accepting you? I shall never give up the control of my passions just to act according to inclination. I desire to act only in that
way which is meritorious, and not simply out of lust.

Just then, the old lady transformed herself into an exquisitely beautiful, young girl. Still, Aṣṭāvakra awaited her reply, and so she said, "My dear brāhmaṇa, I am the Northern Direction personified and I have tested you. I know the purpose for which you have come here. You see, I had once become very pleased with the rṣi Vadānya. Now, at his request, I have given you some practical instruction about the fickleness of feminine nature, showing how even old women are sometimes tortured by the desire for sexual intercourse. You may now take your leave and return home so that you can marry the girl whom you have already chosen within your heart."

Thereafter, Aṣṭāvakra returned to his āśrama, and after resting, he went to the home of Vadānya. Then, after hearing from Aṣṭāvakra all that had transpired, Vadānya very happily gave away his daughter in marriage, saying, "My dear son, from what you have told me, I can understand that there cannot be anyone more fit than yourself for becoming the husband of my beloved daughter."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, which mountains, rivers, āśramas and holy places are considered to be the most sacred?"

Bhīṣma replied, "O King, wherever the Gaṅgā flows becomes the most sacred of all holy places. Anyone who resides on the banks of the Gaṅgā attains a very exalted destination after death. Even those persons whose bones are thrown into the Gaṅgā, or who had received Gaṅgā water sprinkled upon their bodies at the time of death, go to dwell in heaven."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "My dear grandsire, I would like to hear more about the nature of women. It is well-known that women are very fickle, and sometimes they are even described as the root of all evil."

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, once upon a time, Nārada Muni happened to meet the faultlessly beautiful Apsarā, Pañcacaḍā, and so he requested her to speak on this very subject. At first, however, the Apsarā replied, 'My dear great sage, you already know very well about the disposition of women! Why then are you asking me to talk on this subject? Since I myself am a woman, you cannot expect me to speak ill of
my kind. Therefore, it is not proper for you to request such a thing of
me.'
"Finally, however, at Närada's repeated urging, Pañcacūḍa spoke as
follows: 'O Devarṣi, no matter how well-born she may be, and no matter
how good a husband she may have, a woman will always be ready to
disregard him and transgress the restraints which are placed upon her.
Actually, women hate to be controlled. On the other hand, they very
much appreciate any man who approaches them in order to render very
respectful service. Be he handsome or ugly, as long as he is a man, a
woman is ready to enjoy his company. It is only lack of opportunity, fear
of relatives, and inborn shyness that cause a woman to faithfully remain
by the side of her husband. Women are by nature extremely restless, and
because of this, they always hanker after newer and newer male
companions. As a result, they will even show affection toward a man
who is lame, blind, very ugly, or an idiot. O Nārada, factually speaking,
the nature of women is inscrutable. Women are incapable of being
controlled simply by affectionate treatment because they are never
satisfied with men, just as fire never becomes satisfied by any amount of
fuel. As soon as a woman sees a very charming and handsome man, she
becomes very lusty, and thus she will show more regard to him than her
own husband.'
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then remarked, "O Bhīṣma, in spite of the fact
that women have so many faults, men are invariably seen to become
exceedingly attached to them. Thus, it appears as if women have some
kind of special mystic power. The intelligence of women is so subtle and
cunning, it seems to me that Bṛhaspati must have evolved the science of
diplomacy only after having carefully observed their nature. Women are
so clever and devious that they can make truth appear to be a lie and a
lie appear to be truth. Just like cows who forever seek newer and newer
pastures, women forever seek new friendships with men. Considering all
this, how can a woman be controlled? It doesn't matter whether a man
treats her respectfully or with disdain; she will turn her attention toward
him just for the purpose of agitating his heart. Has there ever been an
instance where a man has actually succeeded in restraining a woman's
body, mind, and words?"
Bhīṣma replied, "O King all that you have said is perfectly true, for there
is no more sinful creature than a woman. A woman is illusion, a razor's sharp edge, a snake, and poison all rolled into one. Long, long ago, in the beginning of creation, all human beings were righteous, and by purifying their existence, they attained the planets of the demigods without fail. This alanned the residents of heaven, however, and so they went to Lord Brahmā in order of inform him of the situation. After hearing from the demigods, Lord Brahmā created women within human society. In the previous creation, women had been virtuous. This time, however, with the help of illusion, Lord Brahmā created sinful women who were endowed with all kinds of desires for sensual pleasure. Lord Brahmā also created Lust and Anger, and thereafter, when men were pursued by these sensuous women, those who became overwhelmed by these two lower qualities took to their companionship. In this way, the number of human beings who ascended to heaven drastically decreased. O King, it is for this reason that the śāstra warns us that women are living lies whose only enjoyment is the sexual companionship of men and the uttering of disagreeable words. Now, in order to specifically answer your question, I shall relate to you a story."

There was once a great ṛṣi named Devaśarmā whose wife, Ruci, was the most beautiful woman on earth. Indeed, whoever happened to see Ruci would immediately become intoxicated by her unparalleled feminine attractions. Indra became especially enamored by Ruci, and so he began to devise plans for obtaining her favor. Devaśarmā knew very well the nature of women, and so he tried his best to save his wife from becoming degraded. The ṛṣi also knew that the king of heaven did not hesitate when it came to enjoying others' wives, and thus he was especially on guard against him. Once, however, Devaśarmā was required to go away from home in order to perform a sacrifice. Thus, he anxiously began thinking about what could be done to protect his wife in his absence. Finally, after making up his mind, Devaśarmā called for his favorite disciple, Vipula, and commanded, "My dear boy, you must guard my wife in my absence. Especially beware of Indra, because he is infamous for assuming various disguises in order to enjoy others' wives." The austere and truthful Vipula replied, "My dear preceptor, I shall carry out your order. Now, please describe to me the various forms which
Indra assumes."
In response, Devaśarmā related how the king of heaven appears in innumerable disguises, such as a caṇḍāla, a ṛṣi, a crow, a parrot, or even a common fly. The ṛṣi then departed, and so Vipula began to very carefully think over the best means for protecting his preceptor's wife. Finally, taking into consideration Indra's great prowess, Vipula concluded that it would not be possible to protect Ruci by ordinary means. Thus, he decided to enter her body by utilizing his mystic power, and thus protect her from within. Vipula thought to himself as follows: "If I enter the body of my guru's wife with my mind completely devoid of passion, then there will be no fault on my part. After all, I shall not be physically touching her."
Having made up his mind in this way, Vipula entered Devaśarmā's cottage. Then, after sitting down by Ruci's side, he began to discourse on the subject of righteousness. While staring into her eyes, Vipula united the rays of his vision with hers, and by this means, he entered her body in his subtle form. In order to crudely conceive of how this is possible, one can think of this act as being something like the entering of the wind into our body. Ruci had no idea that Vipula had done this, however, because the external body of her husband's disciple continued to sit by her side. Meanwhile, thinking that his golden opportunity had arrived, Indra came to Devaśarmā's āśrama after assuming a male form of incomparable celestial beauty which was exceedingly tempting for women. When the king of heaven entered Devaśarmā's cottage, he saw Vipula sitting erect and motionless, just as if he were a picture painted upon canvas, and beside him was the astonishingly beautiful Ruci. Upon seeing Indra-in-disguise before her, Ruci wanted to get up and welcome him, for she was immediately attracted by his exceedingly handsome appearance. However, since Vipula restrained her limbs by dint of his mystic power, Ruci was unable to move. Then, without wasting time, Indra introduced himself to Ruci and expressed his ardent desire to enjoy her association. From within Ruci's body, Vipula could hear Indra's words and he could also understand that she was highly inclined to act agreeably toward him. Ruci also heard Indra's innuendoes, but because she was being controlled by Vipula, she could not respond. As a result, when Indra found himself to be neglected like this, he became a
little unnerved. Still, the king of heaven addressed Ruci once more,
hoping that she would respond to his advances. Actually, Ruci wanted to
respond very warmly, but because Vipula tightened his control over her,
she was forced to inquire in a very indifferent and formal tone of voice,
"My dear sir, for what purpose have you come here?"
Thus, Indra became very discouraged, feeling sure that his hopes were
frustrated. Then, when, by dint of his celestial vision, he could see
Vipula staying within Ruci's body, appearing something like a reflection
on the surface of a mirror, the king of heaven began to tremble with fear
of the ṛṣi's curse. Understanding the situation, Vipula quickly left Ruci's
body and after re-entering his own, he chastised Indra with harsh words
as follows: "You fool who cannot control your senses! Do you not
remember how your body had formerly become covered with 1,000
vaginas on account of Gautama's curse? You had better be careful not to
offend a brāhmaṇa again, lest you be burnt to ashes the next time.
Indeed, it is only out of compassion for such a pitiful person as yourself
that I do not consume you with my wrath this very instant!"
Upon hearing these words, Indra became overwhelmed by shame, and,
without replying, he immediately made himself invisible. Just then,
Devaśarmā returned home, and after presenting Ruci to the ṛṣi, Vipula
assured him that he had protected her as instructed. Devaśarmā then
took a little rest, and thereafter, when he was seated along with his wife,
Vipula narrated the story of how Indra had hoped to enjoy Ruci but had
been driven away by him. Devaśarmā was very pleased with his faithful
disciple, and so he gave the benediction to Vipula that he would never
fall away from righteousness.
Soon thereafter, Vipula departed with the permission of his guru in
order to engage himself in the execution of severe austerities in a
solitary place. Thereafter, as Devaśarmā continued to reside at his
āśrama, along with his wife, free from any fear of Indra, Vipula
completed what he considered to be a sufficient amount of austerities.
He then began to wander over the earth, very proud of his acquired
ascetic merit, and the way in which he had protected his preceptor's
wife.
One day, Ruci happened to find some flowers which had fallen upon the
ground from the hair of a celestial damsel as she flew overhead. Soon
thereafter, Devasarmā received an invitation to attend a religious
ceremony which was being performed by Ruci's sister, Prabhavati, who
was the wife of Citraratha, the king of the Angas. Ruci had decorated
her hair with the celestial flowers for this occasion, and when
Prabhavati saw them, she begged her sister to get some for her as well.
Ruci then informed her husband of Prabhavati's desire, and so
Devasarmā summoned Vipula, who also happened to be there for the
occasion, and ordered him to procure the flowers. Humbly taking his
guru's order upon his head, Vipula went to the spot where Ruci had
found the celestial flowers, and he found that there were more of them
scattered upon the ground. Having been dropped there from heaven,
these flowers were still fresh, and so Vipula picked them up and then
hurried back to Campā, the capital city of the Angas. While going along
the road, Vipula happened to come upon a couple who were engaged in
twirling each other around in a circle by holding onto each other's
hands. Suddenly, one of them stepped too quickly, and because of this,
their circular movement was interrupted. An argument then ensued as
each claimed that the other was at fault. At last, while fervently denying
the other's accusations, both persons cursed one another by saying, "If
you are lying, then in your next life you will have to meet with the same
destiny as the rṣi, Vipula!"
Upon hearing this, Vipula's face became pale due to fear and shame.
With great anxiety, he began to dredge his memory in order to recall
what sin he might have committed which would cause him to deserve an
unpalatable destination after death. While absorbed in such thoughts,
Vipula proceeded on slowly, and soon thereafter, he met six men who
were gambling with dice which were made of gold and silver. Indeed,
these men had become so excited as a result of gambling that their hair
stood up on end and their eyes practically bulged out from their sockets.
When a quarrel then suddenly broke out, in great anger all six uttered
this curse: "If you are lying, then in your next life, may you meet with
the same fate as the rṣi, Vipula!"
Vipula feverishly tried to remember any fault which he had committed,
right from his childhood, and yet, he could not recollect any such sinful
act. Still, just by hearing these ominous words, his mind became clouded
with depression, and his heart burned with grief. Finally, it dawned upon
Vipula that after protecting his preceptor's wife, he had concealed from Devaśarmā the fact that he had entered her body, face to face and limb to limb. While considering that this must have been a great fault on his part, Vipula came to the city of Campā. As he handed over the celestial flowers to Devaśarmā, Vipula worshipped him with great respect. The preceptor then inquired, "My dear disciple, did you see anything interesting on your journey?"

In reply, Vipula described the dancing couple and the six gambling men. Then, in answer to his inquiries, Devaśarmā explained the situation as follows: "My dear Vipula, the couple whom you saw were Day and Night, ceaselessly moving as if in a circle. The six men were the six seasons, and all of these persons were witnesses of your transgression. My dear disciple, when a person secretly performs a sinful act, he should not think that there are no witnesses. Out of fear that you may have acted wrongly, you had concealed from me your act of subtly entering into my wife's body. Then, you became proud, thinking that no one knew of your transgression. For this reason, you shall have to go to those regions which are reserved for the sinful."

Vipula certainly became highly mortified upon hearing these unpalatable words. Then, after a lengthy pause, Devaśarmā said, "My dear disciple, I know that your act was not actually sinful because your only motive was to protect my wife as I had ordered. Therefore, you can now give up all anxiety and rest assured that, by my mercy, you shall proceed on to heaven without impediment."

Indeed, as soon as this was said, a celestial chariot appeared overhead in the sky. Then, all together, Devaśarmā, Ruci, and Vipula ascended to heaven, where they continued to reside in great happiness.

Bhīṣma next spoke about different types of marriage, the procedure for giving a dowry, inheritance, and the subject of mixed castes. In the course of his instructions Bhīṣma said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, a brāhmaṇa is allowed to have up to three wives. Some people say that, along with the wives he marries for acquiring virtue, a brāhmaṇa can accept a śūdra girl for the purpose of sensual enjoyment. However, this is a degraded practice which is never to be accepted by a brāhmaṇa who is interested in elevating himself by purification. If, after attaining puberty, a girl has not received a husband from her father, she should wait for three years.
After that, if her father has still neglected to marry her, a girl should find a husband on her own."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired about the nature of the compassion which people feel for each other, and so Bhīṣma narrated the following story:

Once, Cyavana Muni made a vow to live for 12 years according to the Udavasa method. For this purpose, he entered the water at the confluence of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā and remained standing there like a wooden post. When the ṛṣi put his head down in order to bear the force of the onrushing combined currents, the two rivers began to flow gently at that place out of respect for him. Sometimes, Cyavana would sleep by floating on top of the water, and because he practiced perfect nonviolence, the fish had implicit faith in him. One day, some fishermen came to that place and closed off a portion of the river with their nets. Then, after entering the water and dragging their nets onto the shore, these fishermen found that they had not only snared innumerable fish and other aquatics, but the ṛṣi, Cyavana, as well.

Cyavana's body was covered all over with moss and barnacles, and his hair and beard had become green. Being struck with wonder, all of the fishermen bowed down in order to offer their obeisances unto the ṛṣi, and then they stood before him with folded hands. When he saw how many fish had been killed, Cyavana began to sigh heavily on account of grief, for he felt great compassion for the poor creatures. The fishermen then said, "O great sage, we have certainly committed a great sin by unknowingly dragging you out of the river. We beg that you kindly forgive us. Please order us so that we may act for your satisfaction."

Cyavana replied, "O Fishermen, I had lived in the water along with these fish for such a long time. Now, I am unwilling to abandon them. Therefore, I also intend to die along with the fish you have caught. And, when you sell them, then I should be sold along with them."

Upon hearing these words, the fishermen became highly mortified, and as a result, their faces became exceedingly pale. Being bewildered about what to do, they ran to King Nāhuṣa and informed him about all that had happened. The king then quickly proceeded toward the confluence of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā, taking with him his priests and ministers.
Upon his arrival, King Nāhuṣa introduced himself to Cyavana and then, while standing before him with folded hands, he said, "My dear rṣi, I am ready to execute your command, no matter how difficult it may be." Cyavana Muni replied, "O King, since these fishermen have labored very hard, they should be paid the fair price for not only the fish which they have caught, but myself as well."

Without hesitation, Nāhuṣa ordered his chief minister to pay the fishermen 1,000 gold coins in exchange for the rṣi. Cyavana Muni objected, however, by saying, "O King, I do not consider this to be a fair price."

Nāhuṣa next suggested that 100,000 gold coins could be paid, but still, Cyavana Muni insisted, "O King, this is not a just price. Therefore, you had better consult with your ministers and then ascertain a proper value."

Nāhuṣa replied, "O illustrious rṣi, I am willing to pay 10 million gold coins, or even more if necessary."

Still, Cyavana objected, and then once again advised the king to consult with his brāhmaṇas. Having become exceedingly agitated, the king next declared that he was prepared to give half, or even all of his kingdom, and yet, Cyavana Muni replied by informing him that this was still not sufficient. When he heard this, Nāhuṣa became very depressed, and at last, he began to discuss the matter with his ministers and priests. As this discussion was going on, a rṣi who had been born from a cow suddenly arrived upon the scene, having come from the forest. Addressing Nāhuṣa, this rṣi urged, "My dear king, if you are willing to do my bidding, then I can assure you that both I and the sage Cyavana, will become pleased."

In response, Nāhuṣa implored, "O Rṣi, just name the price that is to be paid for Cyavana Muni and thus save my dynasty from destruction on account of his wrath."

The rṣi born from a cow then explained, "My dear king, since brāhmaṇas are the foremost of persons, they can never be equated with any amount of material assets. However, since the value of a cow is also beyond estimation, I suggest that one cow be fixed as the price for Cyavana Muni."

Taking this advice, Nāhuṣa approached Cyavana and said, "My dear
brāhmaṇa, I would like to purchase you in exchange for one cow."
Cyavana replied, "My dear king, I have been properly purchased by you. Cows are so valuable that any place where they are allowed to live fearlessly becomes purified of all sins."
The fishermen then came before Cyavana and pleaded, "My dear great sage, kindly accept this cow which we have received in exchange for our labor."
Cyavana Muni accepted the cow and then said, "O Fishermen, by my mercy, you and all of the fish which you have caught shall now proceed to heaven without delay."
Indeed, as soon as these words were spoken, all of the fishermen and the fish were taken away upon celestial chariots, and when he saw this, King Nāhuṣa became struck with wonder. The two rṣis then gave Nāhuṣa many benedictions, including the assurance that he would always remain steady in his practice of virtue. Because his twelve-year vow of living within the water had just reached completion, Cyavana Muni departed for his āśrama, while the cow-born rṣi entered the forest and King Nāhuṣa returned to his palace.
Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, a person's compassion becomes especially aroused upon seeing the distressed condition of others, by living with others in close association, and by seeing those who are by nature helpless or dependent, such as women, children, cows, the aged, and brāhmaṇas."

Next, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira desired to hear more about the mysterious births of Paraśurāma and Viśvāmitra, and so Bhīṣma narrated the following history: By dint of spiritual vision, Cyavana Muni, who had appeared in the line of Bhṛgu, could foresee that at some future date his dynasty would become contaminated due to one of its members adopting kṣatriya behavior. After carefully analyzing the situation, Cyavana decided to destroy the Kuśika family, since one of its members would become the cause for this pollution of his own dynasty. With this intention, Cyavana Muni approached King Kuśika and expressed his desire to remain with him as a guest for some time. The king happily gave his consent, and then he very respectfully worshipped the rṣi along with his wife. At last, Mahārāja Kuśika stood before Cyavana with
folded hands and submitted, "My dear great sage, I await your command. Indeed, I am prepared to offer you my entire wealth and kingdom if requested."
Cyavana then replied, "My dear king, I have not come here to receive any wealth or a kingdom. I wish to perform a certain vow while staying here, and so I request you and your wife to wait upon me during the required period."
The royal couple readily agreed to satisfy Cyavana Muni in all regards. Thereafter, Mahārāja Kuśika showed Cyavana to the room within the palace that would serve as his residence. It was noon, and so Cyavana requested that his midday meal be brought to him. The king instantly responded, and in a very short while, a sumptuous feast was put before the ṛṣi. When he had finished eating, Cyavana Muni informed Kuśika that he desired to take some rest, and after laying down upon his bed, the ṛṣi commanded, "My dear king and queen, as long as I sleep, you must remain awake and massage my feet all the while. Make sure that you do not awaken me, but let me sleep for as long as I desire."
Thereafter, Cyavana Muni proceeded to sleep continuously for twenty-one days without even once changing his position in bed. Mahārāja Kuśika and his queen stayed awake the whole time and they tended to the ṛṣi's comfort while personally forgoing all food. Finally, at the end of the twenty-first day, Cyavana Muni suddenly awoke of his own accord. However, without saying a word or even glancing at the royal couple, he simply walked out of the room. Kuśika hurriedly followed Cyavana, but the ṛṣi then suddenly disappeared by utilizing his mystic power. At this, the exhausted king became so aggrieved that he fell down to the floor unconscious. After some time, while being cared for by his wife, Mahārāja Kuśika came to his senses, and after getting up, he began to search for Cyavana everywhere. At last, when the king failed to find the ṛṣi, even after searching for a long time, he became filled with despair and shame. Returning to his palace, Mahārāja Kuśika dejectedly sat down and remained silent. A little while later, however, when the king entered his own bedroom, he was very surprised to see Cyavana Muni stretched out upon his bed. Being struck with wonder, the king and queen took their seats next to Cyavana and remarkably, just by seeing the ṛṣi, all of their grief and fatigue became dispelled. Thereafter, as the
royal couple massaged his feet, Cyavana Muni continued sleeping as before, except this time he lay on his other side. Finally, after twenty-one days had passed, the ṛṣi suddenly awoke and said, "O King, kindly rub oil all over my body, for I wish to take a bath."

Although they were famished and exceedingly tired, Kuśika and his wife cheerfully brought very costly oil and began to massage the ṛṣi’s body. Cyavana Muni sat motionlessly, and even after many hours had passed, he did not inform the king and queen that they should stop. When Cyavana Muni saw that the royal couple remained undisturbed, in spite of this, he suddenly got up from his seat and entered the bathroom. Although his bath was ready with all sorts of paraphernalia placed there for his use, Cyavana Muni immediately disappeared as before, without even uttering a word. This time, Mahārāja Kuśika was not disturbed, but simply sat down in order to await Cyavāna’s return. Sure enough, the ṛṣi was once again seen. This time, he was seated upon the royal throne as if freshly bathed and dressed. Without delay, the king and queen cheerfully offered Cyavana Muni a royal feast consisting of innumerable varieties of food and drink. However, when Mahārāja Kuśika next brought a nice seat and comfortable bed for the ṛṣi, Cyavāna responded by burning up all of the food and furniture to ashes with his glance. In spite of this, Mahārāja Kuśika and his queen did not display the slightest bit of irritation for they were very afraid of the ṛṣi’s curse.

In this way, day after day, the king and queen provided for Cyavana’s comfort. In spite of the ṛṣi’s numerous attempts to agitate them, the ṛṣi could not discern even the slightest flaw in their behavior. Then, one day, Cyavana Muni requested, "My dear king, please yoke yourself and your wife onto a chariot and then take me wherever I may want you to go."

Mahārāja Kuśika readily agreed to this proposal and then inquired, "O ṛṣi, which chariot should be brought, the one which is used for battle, or the one meant for pleasure?"

Cyavana ṛṣi requested the battle chariot, and soon thereafter, it arrived, fully equipped with all kinds of weapons. After yoking his wife onto the left side, Mahārāja Kuśika yoked himself to the right and then provided the ṛṣi with a goad with a point as hard as a thunderbolt and as sharp as a needle. The king then inquired, "My dear Muni, where would you like
Cyavana then instructed, "My dear king, let all of the citizens be summoned so that they can see you pull my chariot. In addition, I wish that anyone who approached you for charity should be given whatever he desires. Now, proceed very slowly, step by step, so that I may not feel any discomfort."

Kuśīka then ordered his servant to bring vast amounts of wealth and instructed them that they should give away whatever the ṛṣi requested. After these arrangements had been made, Cyavana Muni set out. The ṛṣi was pulled by the king and queen, and behind his chariot there were huge carts containing all kinds of valuable objects. When the citizens saw this extraordinary sight, they became plunged into an ocean of grief. While going along, Cyavana struck his human carriers upon their backs and cheeks with his terrible goad. And yet, the royal couple did not show any sign of agitation. Being exceedingly weak because of fasting for the last fifty days, the royal couple trembled violently from head to foot, and since they were being cut by the sharp goad, their bodies became covered with blood. Still, in spite of all this, they somehow or other managed to pull Cyavana's chariot. The citizens were extremely mortified while witnessing such ghastly torture, but they remained silent out of fear of the ṛṣi.

When Cyavana Muni saw that Mahārāja Kuśīka and his queen remained undisturbed, he began to give away fabulous amounts of charity from the royal treasury, as if he were a second Kuvera. Still, no trace of dissatisfaction could be discerned in the face of the king. Thus, Cyavana Muni finally became very pleased with the exalted royal couple. Getting down from the chariot, he unyoked the king and queen, and with a gentle voice he said, "My dear Kuśīka, I am ready to offer you and your wife very excellent benedictions."

While saying this, Cyavana Muni touched the afflicted couple with his hands, and immediately, all of their bodily pains went away. At this, King Kuśīka exclaimed, "O ṛṣi, I feel that I have not re-gained my health and energy, but that by your mercy our bodies appear to be even more youthful and beautiful than before!"

Cyavana ṛṣi then advised, "My dear king, I shall remain here on the banks of the Gaṅgā while you and your wife return to your palace. Then,
after becoming fully refreshed, you can return here tomorrow so that I may properly reward you both.”

The king and queen then returned to their capital, and upon seeing them, the citizens became highly delighted. After eating, the royal couple passed the night very happily together, for each observed how the other had acquired a wonderfully youthful and celestial beauty.

Meanwhile, by utilizing his mystic power, Cyavana Muni converted the delightful forest on the banks of the Gaṅgā into a hermitage which was filled with so much opulence that it surpassed even the abode of Lord Indra. The next morning, when King Kuśika came there along with his wife, he was astonished to see how, where formerly there had only been trees, there now stood a spacious palace with 1,000 pillars, made entirely of gold. Surrounding the palace were hills, valleys, lakes, and meadows which possessed heavenly beauty and were adorned with exotic birds and flowers. Many other palaces were also seen here and there, and within them, the Gandharvas and Apsarās enjoyed themselves in great happiness. The transcendental sound of preceptors instructing their disciples in Vedic knowledge could also be heard, and upon experiencing all of this, the king wondered, “Am I dreaming or have I gone mad? Or, have I somehow been able to go to heaven in my very same body?”

Kuśika then saw Cyavana Muni within the palace of gold, and he was lying down upon a costly bed. As soon as the king and queen began to approach him, however, the rṣi miraculously disappeared. Then, at the next moment, Cyavana Muni was seen within the forest, seated upon a mat of kuṣa-grass, reciting Vedic mantras. Then, at the next instant, the palace, the rṣi, the Gandharvas and Apsarās, and the entire delightful surrounding area vanished so that the banks of the Gaṅgā appeared to be just like before. The king and queen became practically stunned with amazement upon seeing this transformation, and with an excited voice, Mahārāja Kuśika began to glorify Cyavana Muni’s greatness. Indeed, the king joyfully exclaimed, “My dear queen, to become the emperor of the world is not such a great thing. However, to attain the position of a genuine brāhmaṇa is certainly something extraordinary!”

Cyavana Muni then once again appeared, and when he called for them, the royal couple rushed to where he was standing. With heads bent low in a very reverential attitude, Mahārāja Kuśika and his queen
worshipped the ṛṣi with gladdened hearts. Then, putting aside all
deception, Cyavana Muni requested the king to take his seat and then
said, "My dear Kuśika, the control over the mind and senses which you
and your wife have exhibited is practically unparalleled in the history of
the world. I am extremely surprised and pleased to see how you not only
survived the ordeal which I put you through, but that you did so without
committing even the slightest transgression. Now, before taking my
leave, I want to reward you with whatever benediction you may desire."
Kuśika replied, "My dear ṛṣi, that I have succeeded in gratifying you is in
itself the highest benediction which I could ever hope to receive.
Therefore, my only request is that you please dispel one doubt that I
have. For what reason did you come to me and subject me to this severe
trial?"
Cyavana Muni then explained, "My dear king, I cannot refuse to
enlighten you in this matter, now that you have requested me to do so.
Once upon a time, in the assembly of demigods, I heard Lord Brahmā
predict that in the future, there would be an intermixing of the Bhṛgu
and Kuśika dynasties. In order to avoid this contamination of my family
line, I came here in the hopes of exterminating your dynasty by making
you angry or finding some other excuse to exhibit my wrath. For this
purpose, I devised so many contrivances, but I could never induce you to
fall prey to even the slightest fault in behavior. Indeed, your impeccable
character softened my heart, and it is for this reason alone that I have
desisted. When I saw how greatly you admire brahminical prowess, I gave
you a glimpse of heaven just to show you the result which is obtained by
the execution of austerities and the practice of righteousness. As you
observed the delightful objects which I had created by my mystic power,
I could understand that you had lost all desire for sovereignty over the
earth, due to appreciating the status of a brāhmaṇa. Now, as a reward for
this, I hereby grant that your grandson shall become a brāhmaṇa after
winning the favor of Lord Brahmā by his remarkable penances."
Upon hearing all this, Mahārāja Kuśika became very curious to hear
more about what would happen regarding his grandson. Then, in answer
to his inquiries, Cyavana Muni spoke as follows: "My dear king, even
though, traditionally, the kṣatriyās always take help from the Bhārgavas
for performing sacrifices, by the will of Destiny, the two clans will have a
falling out. At that time, the enraged kṣatriya will kill almost all of the descendants of Bhrigu. Then, a great rṣi named Arurva will appear in the Bhrigu dynasty. When he learns of the destruction of his forefathers, his anger will become so greatly aroused that the entire three worlds will appear to be threatened with destruction. For some time, Arurva will suppress this terrible wrath by casting it into the mouth of the mare who wanders throughout the ocean."

"Arurva's son will be Ricika, and by the grace of God, the entire science of weapons will automatically appear within his understanding for the extermination of the kṣatriya race. He will communicate this military science unto his son, Jamadagni, who will marry the daughter of your son, Gādhi. Jamadagni's son will be endowed with a kṣatriya spirit, whereas your grandson will possess the gentle nature of a brāhmaṇa. This son of Gādhi will be known as Viśvāmitra, and even though born of a kṣatriya, he will become recognized as an exalted brāhmaṇa."

Mahārāja Kuśika became extremely pleased by hearing Cyavana Muni's speech. Then, when the rṣi once again begged him to accept a benediction, the king replied, "My dear great sage, please grant that my heart may never swerve from the path of virtue, and let my dynasty become invested with brahminical status as you have indicated. Beyond this, there is nothing more which I desire to ask for."

Cyavana Muni granted this boon and then took his leave from the king in order to set out on a tour of holy places.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's grief still had not subsided, in spite of having received so many relevant instructions. The king therefore said, "My dear grandfather, I have been the cause of destruction for practically all of the kṣatriyas on earth. This, in turn, has plunged almost all the women of the world into an ocean of distress. As a result, I am convinced that an exceedingly hellish destination awaits me. I feel that only by the performance of very severe austerities shall I be able to atone even slightly for all of my sinful acts. Therefore, my dear Bhīṣma, I beg you to instruct me toward that end."

In reply, however, Bhīṣma continued to extol the virtues of household life by describing the great merit which can be achieved in that āśrama, especially by serving the brāhmaṇas. Thus, at last, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira
gave up all disgust which he had held for the grhastha mode of life. Indeed, the king's interest in the grhastha-āśrama became aroused, and so he next requested Bhīṣma to discourse on the various types of charity and recipients of charity.

In reply, Bhīṣma spoke on the subject of charity and then concluded, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, charity is especially meant to be given to brāhmaṇas. By giving the brāhmaṇas all kinds of comforts in this life, a person gains enjoyment in heaven in his next life. Other kinds of charitable works, such as the digging of wells, the supplying of water to travelers, and the planting of shade-giving trees alongside highways, awards one with merit in proportion to the number of persons who avail themselves to such facilities."

One who hears these instructions of Bhīṣma will certainly become inspired to treat brāhmaṇas with great respect. Indeed, when a person comes to understand that the pure brāhmaṇas are very sacred and deserving of all facilities, he becomes very eager to gain the opportunity of serving them. Bhīṣma also described the merit of giving away cows in charity, and in conclusion he said, "My dear king, a person who sells a cow for slaughter, who kills a cow, or who eats her flesh, has to rot in hell for as many years as there are hairs on the slain animal's body."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "O Bhīṣma, I have heard it said that cow's dung is one of the residences of Śrī, the goddess of fortune. If this is so, will you kindly explain how Lakṣmī came to reside there?"

In response, Bhīṣma narrated this story as follows: Once, after having assumed a very beautiful form, Lakṣmī entered a herd of cows. When they saw her exquisite loveliness, the cows became struck with wonder and inquired about her identity. Lakṣmī then introduced herself and said, "My dear cows, I have come here desiring to take up my residence with you, just as I always dwell with the demigods."

However, the cows replied, "O goddess of fortune, we do not wish to accept you, for you are well known to be very restless, fickle, and enjoyed by many. Besides, we already have very beautiful forms, and so we have no need for you anyway. Therefore, please give us your leave and depart."

At this, Lakṣmī replied, "Alas! It appears that the popular proverb, 'One who comes to another of his own accord is certainly going to be
neglected' is quite true. O Cows, if you reject me like this, then my good reputation will be spoiled. For this reason, I beg of you to allow me to reside somewhere within your body. I am even willing to reside in your rectum, because, since you are sacred animals, no part of your body is actually repulsive."

The cows were compassionate by nature and so, after consulting among themselves, they announced, "My dear Lakṣmī, we hereby give you permission to live within our stool and urine."

Lakṣmī happily consented to this proposal, considering it to be a great honor. Next, at Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's request, Bhīṣma ascribed the superiority of the all-white Kapila cow. In the beginning of creation, Lord Brahmā ordered Dakṣa to generate progeny. Although Dakṣa first of all created many varieties of food before begetting numerous species of living things, still, after their birth, these creatures came crying to him for their subsistence. In response, the Prajāpati drank some nectar, and then, when he burped, the cow Surabhi was born along with the pleasant smell which emanated from his mouth. Later on, Surabhi gave birth to a number of spotlessly white daughters called Kapilas. These cows poured forth milk in great abundance, and when their calves sucked their udders, some of the froth fell upon the head of Lord Śiva, who at that time was residing on the earth. At this, Lord Śiva angrily glared at the Kapila cows with his third eye, and as a consequence, their complexions became colored, just as the setting of the sun tinges masses of clouds with various hues. Some of cows escaped Lord Śiva's glance, however, by entering the abode of Soma, and so they retained their pure white complexion. Dakṣa then went to Lord Śiva and pacified him by saying, "My dear Rudra, everything about the cow is auspicious. Therefore, the froth of the milk which had touched you cannot be considered impure like the remnants of other's meals. Since milk has been born from nectar, it can never be considered contaminated."

After saying this, Dakṣa presented Lord Śiva with a wonderful bull who later on became Śiva's carrier and the symbol upon his flag. In addition, from that day on, Lord Śiva has been recognized as the master of all cows.

Next, Bhīṣma related the following incident: Once upon a time, when all of the demigods and great ṛṣis had assembled together for the purpose of
worshipping Lord Brahmā, Indra inquired, "O Grand sire, why is it that
the planet of the cows is situated much higher than any of our
residences within this material world?"
Lord Brahmā replied, "My dear king of heaven, long ago, when Aditi was
engaged in performing austerities for the purpose of receiving Lord
Viṣṇu as her son, Surabhi, the daughter of Dakṣa, also performed severe
austerities at Mount Kailāsa by standing upon only one leg for 11,000
years. Indeed, because of Surabhi's austerities, even the demigods and
ṛṣis became scorched by the heat which was generated, and so I took all
of the celestials to her in order to award her a benediction. Thereafter,
when I offered Surabhi a boon of her choice, she replied, 'O Grand sire, I
do not require any other benediction since you have now become
satisfied with me.'
"In spite of this, I insisted by saying, 'My dear Surabhi, I shall grant you
immortality as well as an abode in Goloka, which is beyond the
coverings of this material universe. Although you will go to reside in
that transcendental abode, your descendants shall have to reside upon
earth for the benefit of humankind."
Next, Bhīṣma related this story: Once upon a time, while undergoing a
certain vow, the ṛṣi Uddalaki ordered his son Nāciketā to carefully
attend to his needs. Thereafter, when the vow was completed, Uddalaki
said, "My dear son, because I was absorbed in meditation, I forgot to
bring the firewood, kuśa-grass, flowers, herbs, and water jug which I had
collected and then left lying upon the riverbank. Please go quickly now
and fetch these things for me."
However, when Nāciketā went to the riverside, he could not find
anything because all of the articles which his father had collected had
been washed away. Thus, upon returning home, Nāciketā announced,
"O Father, I could not find any of the things which you described to me."
Uddalaki had become very hungry, thirsty, and fatigued as a result of his
austerities. Thus, upon hearing of his son's failure, the ṛṣi's anger flared
up, and he cursed Nāciketā by saying, "May you meet with Yamarāja this
very day!"
The frightened boy tried to appease his father with folded hands, but
before he could hardly utter a word, he fell down dead devoid of life.
When he realized what he had done, Uddalaki became overwhelmed
with grief, and while bending over his dead son, he began to pour upon him his tears of lamentation. Then, miraculously Näciketā began to gradually show signs of revival. Indeed, his recovery appeared to be caused by his fathers tears just in the way that a seed sprouts forth after receiving the monsoon rains. When he regained consciousness, Näciketā looked as if he had awakened from a sound sleep, and in answer to Uddalaki's inquiries, he explained, "My dear father, in accordance with your curse, I had proceeded to the abode of Yamarāja. Then, upon my arrival there, I was very respectfully received and worshipped by the lord of death. I then said, 'O Yamarāja, you should now judge my good and bad acts and award me my deserved destination.'

"Yamarāja said, 'My dear Näciketā, you are not actually dead. Your father had declared, "Let you meet with Yamarāja this very day!" and so I could not falsify the words of such a great rṣi. Now that you have seen me, please accept a benediction and then quickly return to where your father is lamenting.'

"In response, I had requested, 'O Yamarāja, if you wish to fulfill my desire, then allow me to view those celestial regions which are attained by persons who perform pious activities.'

"At this, Yamarāja immediately called for a celestial chariot and thereafter, he proceeded to take me on a guided tour of all the heavenly regions within the universe. After beholding many wonderful sights, I spotted a place where there were rivers of milk and hills of pure ghee. Being very curious and delighted, I inquired, 'O Yamarāja, who is allowed to enjoy these heavenly regions?'

"Yamarāja replied, 'My dear Näciketā, those persons who, in the human form of life, give away milk and ghee in charity to the brāhmaṇas, come here to enjoy heavenly bliss after death. Higher than these regions, however, are the planets which are reserved for those persons who give away cows in charity to the brāhmaṇas.'

"Thereafter, I listened as Yamarāja described to me the glories of cows and the merit which is achieved by giving them away in charity. At last, I took my leave from the lord of death and then returned here to your āśrama."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear grandsire, according to
the śāstra, a gift of gold is superior even to that of land or cows. Can you explain to me why this is so?"

In reply, Bhīṣma narrated the following incident from his own life:
"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, after the death of my father, Mahārāja Śantanu, I went to Gaṅgādvāra in order to perform the śraddhā ceremony. At that time, my mother Gaṅgādevī personally came there in order to assist me. I invited many rṣis to attend the śraddhā ceremony, and then, when I was just about to place the sacrificial food upon the ground, a handsome arm, decorated with ornaments, pierced through the blades of kuśa-grass which I had placed there. Being struck with wonder, I thought, 'My father has personally come in order to accept my offerings!' However, after carefully thinking over the śāstric injunctions, I concluded that such offerings are never given to a physical presence, but are to be put onto blades of kuśa-grass which are spread over the ground. Thus, I disregarded the outstretched hand and put the offerings on to the kuśa-grass, and as soon as this was done, the arm instantly vanished from sight. That night, as I slept, the pitṛs appeared in my dreams and said, 'O Bhīṣma, we are very pleased that you had strictly adhered to the śāstric injunctions while performing the śraddhā ceremony. Now, in addition to the cows and land which you have given in charity, we request you to give away gold as well, for this will be very purifying for both yourself and us, your ancestors.' The next morning, I awoke filled with wonder on account of this dream, and I made up my mind to immediately give away gold in charity to the brāhmaṇas."

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira. if a brāhmaṇa accepts a gift from a sinful man, he runs the risk of sinking down into hell because of sharing that person's karma. In this regard, please listen attentively as I narrate to you the following story."

The sapta-ṛṣis: Kaśyapa, Atri, Vasiṣṭha, Bhāradvāja, Gautama, Viśvamitra, and Jamadagni, all had a common maidservant named Ganda, who was married to a śūdra named Pasuśakhā. Once, while the sapta-ṛṣis were wandering over the earth performing austerities, along with these two servants and Vasiṣṭha's wife, Arundhatī, a very severe drought set in. Previously, the son of King Śibi had given his son to the sapta-ṛṣis as dākṣīṇa after they had performed a sacrifice on his behalf. During this drought, the prince died of starvation, and so the sapta-ṛṣis,
who were also on the verge of starvation, took his dead body and began to cook it. At this time, King Śaivya, the son of Vṛṣādarbha, arrived at that place. Upon seeing what was going on, King Śaivya pleaded, "O Rṣis, I will give you cows, grains, and whatever else you may desire, if only you desist from this most unbefitting act."

However, the Rṣis replied, "My dear king, the gifts which a brāhmaṇa accepts from a kṣatriya may be like nectar in the beginning, but they turn out to be poison in the end. Considering this, why are you tempting us with such offerings? When a brāhmaṇa accepts a gift, he loses all of the ascetic merit which he had earned that day."

After saying this, the Rṣis departed, leaving the flesh which they had intended to eat uncooked. Thereafter, as the sapta-Rṣis continued to search for food in the forest, King Śaivya had his ministers fill some figs with gold. Then, under the king's order, the ministers came before the Rṣis and presented these figs as a gift. However, when Atri picked up some of the figs and felt how heavy they were, he declared, "We are not willing to take these, for by accepting gold, we shall have to reap bitter consequences later on. The nature of greed is such that even if a man were to acquire all of the food, gold, women, and land of this world, he would still be unsatisfied. As soon as one desire is fulfilled, another hankering immediately springs up, demanding gratification. Thus, it is better to give up greed altogether by adopting a life of satisfaction and tranquillity."

After speaking in this manner, the Rṣis wished the king's ministers well and then departed. Thereafter, when these ministers informed Śaivya of how the Rṣis had refused his gift, the king became exceedingly angry. Desiring to gain revenge, the king executed austerities and then ignited a sacrificial fire. When the libations of ghee were then poured into the flames along with the chanting of certain mantras, a fierce female demon emerged from the sacrificial altar. Named Yātudhānī, she came and stood before King Śaivya with folded hands, awaiting his order. The king then commanded, "O rākṣasi, go to the sapta-Rṣis, their two servants and wife, and after ascertaining the meanings of their names, kill them!" Yātudhānī consented and then proceeded to where the sapta-Rṣis were searching for food within the forest. Meanwhile, the sapta-Rṣis had been
wandering about, subsisting upon fruits and roots, and while doing so, they came upon a very broad-shouldered mendicant with plump limbs and well-nourished face and belly. This sage had a dog with him, and upon seeing his healthy physique, Arundhatī exclaimed, "Alas! None of you seven rṣis will ever be able to have such nice healthy bodies!"

In reply, each of the seven rṣis gave various reasons why their energy had dwindled. In this way, one of the rṣis cited how he had formerly cursed his wife, and others explained how they had given up the study of the Vedas and performance of sacrifice in order to search for food. The well-nourished mendicant then conversed with the sapta-rṣis for some time about the difficulties involved in procuring food in the forest, and thereafter, he remained in their association. Some days later, the party happened to come upon a very beautiful lake which was overgrown with lotus flowers, surrounded by nice trees, and inhabited by varieties of exotic birds. There was one path which led down to the crystal clear water of this lake, and under King Śaivya's order, the rākṣasi Yātudhānī guarded it. Thus, when the sapta-rṣis came there, hoping to gather some of the lotus stalks, they beheld the frightful demoness standing there. Then, in response to the sapta-rṣis' inquiries, Yātudhānī said, "O brāhmaṇas, there is no need for you to ask who I am, and as far as what I am doing here, I am guarding this lake."

The rṣis then explained, "O rākṣasi, we are exceedingly hungry, and so we request you to kindly give us permission to gather some of these lotus stalks."

Yātudhānī replied, "O Rṣis, I shall give you my consent, provided that you first of all tell me your names and explain their meanings."

The rṣis could understand that the rākṣasi intended to kill them after receiving this information. Thus, one by one, they introduced themselves in such an inscrutable way that Yātudhānī had to reply, "O Rṣis, you can feel free to plunge into the lake, for I must admit that your names are incomprehensible to me."

The plump rṣi with the dog then said, "O rākṣasi, my name is Śunāhsakhā, and unfortunately, I am unable to give you any etymological meaning for it."

Yātudhānī replied, "O Rṣi, I could not catch your name. Therefore, would you please repeat it?" At this, Śunāhsakhā angrily declared, "O
räkṣasi, since you could not understand my name I shall reduce you to ashes by striking you with my tridaṇḍa!"

Indeed, when Yātudhānī was hit with the plump ṛṣi's tridaṇḍa, she was immediately consumed by a blazing fire. After killing Yātudhānī, Śūnaḥsakhā struck his tridaṇḍa into the ground and then sat down on the grass. The sapta-ṛṣis had entered the lake, and after picking as many lotus stalks as they liked, they came out of the water. Then, after putting all of the stalks into a big pile, they once again entered the lake in order to make offerings of water to the pīṭṛs. However, when the ṛṣis finished their religious duties and emerged from the lake, they found that their stalks were gone. At this, all of the ṛṣis became very angry and started to accuse one another of the theft. It was finally agreed upon that each of the ṛṣis would have to profess his innocence by uttering a curse upon the guilty person. Thus, one of the ṛṣis declared, "May whoever has stolen the lotus stalks give up the study of the Vedas!"

Another ṛṣi said, "May the person who has stolen the lotus stalks incur the reaction for having killed a brāhmaṇa!"

The others declared, one after another, "May the thief become a surrendered servant of lust, anger, and greed!" "May whoever has stolen the stalks marry after taking sannyāsa!" "May the culprit engage in sexual intercourse with a śūdra woman or during the daylight hours!"
"May whoever has committed this theft become cruel in behavior, disrespectful toward the Vedas, and may he pass urine while facing the sun!"

After the sapta-ṛṣis had pronounced curses in this way, thus agreeing to accept grave consequences if guilty, Śūnaḥsakhā stepped forward and declared, "May the person who has stolen the lotus stalks acquire the merit of giving away a daughter in marriage to a brāhmaṇa, as well as the merit gained by undergoing the vow of brahma-carya and studying all of the Vedas!"

When the sapta-ṛṣis heard this benediction-curse, they came to the obvious conclusion and angrily accused Śūnaḥsakhā of being the thief. Confronted in this way, the plump ṛṣi finally admitted, "My dear great sages, it was indeed I who made the lotus stalks disappear. I did not take your stalks out of greed. In reality, I just wanted to hear all of you discourse on the distinction between righteousness and sinful behavior.
Now that I have succeeded in my purpose, I shall return your lotus stalks to you and beg that you kindly forgive me for my small transgression. O Ṛṣīs, I had entered your company in order to protect you from the rākṣasi who had been sent to kill you. Now, as a reward for your austerities, I invite all of you to immediately ascend to heaven with me." In this way, the sapta-ṛṣis, Arundhatī and the two servants all proceeded on to heaven, where they continued to live together in great happiness. Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, if a brāhmaṇa gives up greed by refusing all gifts like the sapta-ṛṣis did, then he earns the right to enjoy happiness like the demigods."

Next, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired, "My dear Bhīṣma, how is it that the custom of giving away umbrellas and shoes to the brāhmaṇas originated?" Bhīṣma replied by narrating the following story:

When Jamadagni used to practice with his bow, Reṇukā would go out and gather up the arrows and then return them to her husband. One day, at noon in the summer season, after having released all of his arrows, Jamadagni requested his wife to go and fetch them as usual, so that he could continue his practice. Thus, Reṇukā hurried out into the field in order to execute her husband's order. After a short while, however, her head and feet became so scorched by the sun's intense rays, that she had to take shelter in the shade of a big tree. Still, due to fear of her husband's curse, Reṇukā dared to stay there for only a moment, and then she once again resumed her work. Finally, after collecting all of the arrows, Reṇukā fearfully returned home, and upon seeing her, Jamadagni angrily questioned, "O Woman, why have you delayed so long in returning with my arrows?"

Reṇukā replied, "O Lord, my head and feet became scorched by the sun, and thus I was forced to briefly rest beneath a tree." When he heard this, Jamadagni angrily vowed, "I shall destroy the sun this very day for his having afflicted my wife in this way!"

After saying this, the ṛṣi picked up his bow and then aimed a powerful arrow at the sun. When Sūrya saw that Jamadagni was prepared to fight with him, he quickly disguised himself as a brāhmaṇa. Then, after coming before the ṛṣi, Sūrya inquired, "My dear sir, what is it that Sūrya
has done in order to displease you so greatly? Don't you know that the sun benefits all living creatures by evaporating water from the earth and then pouring it down once again as rain? O magnanimous brāhmaṇa, since everyone's life depends upon the sun, you should give up your anger and desist from your attempt to slay Sūrya."

And yet, in spite of this plea, Jamadagni's rage did not subside, and so Sūrya in the form of a brāhmaṇa bowed down before him and questioned, "O Rṣi, how do you expect to pierce the sun since it is always moving?"

Jamadagni replied, "O brāhmaṇa, I know that you are Sūrya in disguise. Rest assured that I shall be able to pierce you at midday, when you momentarily remain stationary."

Sūrya then pleaded, "O Rṣi, in consideration that I have now surrendered unto you and am seeking your protection, you should withdraw your anger and excuse me."

At this, Jamadagni smilingly replied, "O Sūrya, since you have sought my protection, you need no longer fear. However, I request you to devise some means whereby people can gain relief from the intensity of your midday rays."

In response, Sūrya handed over to Jamadagni an umbrella and a pair of sandals while saying, "O great sage, from this day on, the gift of these two articles shall become a standard practice at religious functions."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "My dear grandsire, how can a person's duration of life be increased or decreased?"

Bhiṣma replied, "O King, it is by dint of good conduct that one acquires longevity, and similarly, by performing sinful acts, a person reduces his duration of life. If one wants to live a long life, then he should never gaze at the rising or setting sun, nor should he look at the sun during an eclipse. There is nothing which shortens a man's duration of life as effectively as having sexual intercourse with the wives of others. Indeed, one has to suffer in hell for as many thousands of years as there are pores on the body of the woman with whom he has sexually indulged. One should not sit with his legs crossed; eat meat which has not first of all been offered in sacrifice; or taunt those who are crippled, ignorant, ugly, weak, poor, or suffering. One should not point his finger at the stars in the sky nor say which day of the lunation it is upon being asked. One
should not see his image reflected in an unpolished or dirty mirror, and one should not sleep with his head facing the north or west. One should never argue with an atheist. One should never bathe or sleep while naked, and one should not even talk with a woman during her menstrual period. One should always eat in a seated position and never while walking. One should not pass urine while standing. One should eat in the morning and evening, but not in between. One should never indulge in sexual intercourse during the daytime, or when his wife is having her menstrual period. One should not cultivate intimacy with physicians, children, old persons, or one's servants. During the evening twilight time, one should not sleep, study, or eat. Instead, during this time one should suspend his work and engage himself in prayer and meditation. At night, one should not eat very much, nor should one try to force a guest to do so by means of excessive hospitality. One should never think of doing harm to a woman. If, during the daytime, one sleeps or indulges in malicious practices, then his duration of life is reduced. One should not go to a sacrifice uninvited, because if he does so and then is not properly respected by the performer, his life becomes shortened.

"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, good conduct is superior to all branches of theoretical knowledge. Therefore, the father who practically trains a child in good behavior, is due ten times more respect than a teacher of the Vedas. The mother deserves ten times more respect than even the father, for it is she who really bears the brunt of raising children. Thus, from the material point of view, the mother is considered to be the most respectable person in human society."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next requested, "My dear Bhiṣma, please describe to me what happens to the soul after quitting the material body at the time of death."

Bhiṣma then pointed out."O King, just see how Bṛhaspati is approaching us! There is no one who can explain this mystery better than he, and so I request you to put your questions before him."

Bṛhaspati then descended from the sky to where Bhiṣma was laying upon his bed of arrows, and so everyone stood up in order to respectfully receive him. Finally, after Bṛhaspati had been properly worshipped and comfortably seated, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired, "O preceptor of the
demigods, who is the real friend of the living entity? When one leaves this material body, which is actually just like a piece of wood, cloth, or earth, who is it that goes along with him?"

Bṛhaspati replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, a person is born alone, he has to face the difficulties which are encountered during life's course alone, and then finally, he has to die alone. Therefore, a living being has no true companion at any stage of life. At the time of death, a person's father, mother, wife, children, as well as all other relatives and friends, cast aside his body as if it were no more important than a stone. After lamenting for a few moments, they turn away from the dead body and resume going about their own business. It is only one's righteous and unrighteous acts which follow him after death, and thus virtue alone is a person's real friend. For this reason, an intelligent person will consider the performance of virtuous acts to be his only goal of life. If, by accident, or due to bad association, a person performs an unrighteous act and then repentantly declares his fault in the presence of pure brāhmaṇas, he very quickly become purified of all resultant sinful reactions."

After instructing Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira in this way, Bṛhaspati took his leave and then departed through the sky. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next inquired, "O Grand sire, what is the supreme religious principle?"

Bhīṣma replied, "My dear king, just as the hoof print of an elephant encompasses the hoof prints of all other animals, the principle of nonviolence encompasses all other religious principles. The complete abstention from meat-eating is one of the pillars of nonviolence. Therefore, I shall now describe to you the greatly sinful nature of eating animal flesh. My dear king, even when a person eats the meat from an animal which has been offered in sacrifice, he must accept some sinful reactions.

Considering this, it is not astonishing that one who eats unsanctified meat has to suffer in hell. On the other hand, when a former meat-eater gives up the abominable practice, then he acquires very great merit. And, if such a person preaches to others that they should also give up meat-eating, then even if he is sinful in other areas, he will be saved from having to enter the hellish planets after death. It must be admitted that grossly conditioned souls will find meat to be the tastiest food. And,
for one who is lean and weak, for one who is addicted to continual sex-
indulgence, and for one who is fatigued from excessively hard work or
travel, there is no other food which will revive his strength so quickly.
Still, one who desires to increase the volume of his own flesh by eating
the flesh of others must be considered the most cruel of all persons.
Indeed, one who eats meat that has not first of all been sanctified by
offering in sacrifice, must be considered on par with a Rākṣasa. Kṣatriyas
are exceptions, however, because they do not incur any sinful reactions
when they eat meat. Since kṣatriyas must be supremely powerful in order
to give protection to the entire society, meat eating is allowed for them.
In other words, in order for all of society to be properly protected, the
lives of a few animals may be sacrificed. Therefore, kṣatriyas can hunt
deer and other animals in the forest, although cow killing is never
allowed under any circumstance.
"My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, in spite of this concession for kṣatriyas, and other
such concessions for lower-grade persons, it should be well understood
that the complete abstention from meat-eating is a higher principle of
religion. When a person abstains from harming other living beings,
especially by giving up meat-eating, then in turn, he is never put into
fear or danger by other creatures, even though he may be in the densest
jungle. The word for meat is 'mansa'. 'Mam' means 'me' and 'sa' means
'he'. Therefore, 'mansa' means, 'me, he will eat'. In other words, those
who eat the flesh of animals will themselves be eaten by those same
animals later on. Abstention from intentionally injuring all living beings
is the highest religion, the highest practice of self-control, and the most
valuable gift to others. Indeed, the glory and merit of living a life of
nonviolence could not be fully expounded, even if a person were to go
on speaking on the subject for 100 years.

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then commented, "My dear Bhīṣma, it is certainly
a fact that no one likes to give up his life, whether it be in prosperity or
in the greatest adversity."
In order to illustrate this point, Bhīṣma next narrated the following
story:
Once, while wandering over the earth, Śrīla Vyāsadeva saw a worm
hurriedly crossing a highway upon which many chariots and other large
vehicles traveled. Being omniscient, and also knowing the language of all creatures, Vyāsadeva inquired, "My dear worm, it appears that you are quite alarmed about something. Where are you going in such great haste?"

The worm replied, "O Rṣi, I can hear the rattling of a rapidly approaching cart, and it is for this reason that I have become very afraid. Indeed, I can even hear the hard breathing of the bulls which are pulling the cart, and so, due to fear of death, I am trying to cross this road as quickly as possible."

Vyāsadeva then inquired, "O Worm, may it not be that death is preferable to your present miserable condition of life?"

The worm replied, "O brāhmaṇa, a creature becomes very attached to whatever condition of life he is put into, for according to the body which is acquired, there is always a particular kind of sense gratification. In my last life I was a very cruel and sinful śūdra who had no respect for the brāhmaṇas. And yet, even though I was by nature exceedingly greedy and envious, I still served my mother very devoutly, and upon one occasion, I also worshipped a brāhmaṇa. Because of this, I have retained my memory of the past and, as a result, I feel great repentance on account of my former sinful life. My dear rṣi, please instruct me now. What can I do under these circumstances for achieving my best welfare?"

Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear worm, because I am acting on behalf of my spiritual master and thus representing the Supreme Personality of Godhead, you have attained great fortune simply by seeing me. Besides this, since you have sincerely inquired from me about the path of elevation, I shall arrange to instruct you in spiritual knowledge when, in a future life, you take birth as the son of a brāhmaṇa. In this way, you will ultimately achieve the supreme destination."

The worm had implicit faith in the words of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, and after quickly considering the situation, he decided to remain stationary in the middle of the road. Thus, when a large bullock cart passed by, it tore the body of the worm to pieces. Thereafter, the living soul who had been in that worm's body proceeded to accept various higher forms of life, one after another. Finally, after becoming a lizard, a bird, a boar, a bear, etc, the former worm took birth in human society as a caṇḍāla. Thereafter, this living entity took births as a śūdra and vaiśya before at last being
born in the kṣatriya order. Because this fortunate living being retained his memory of previous lives, he went to where Śrīla Vyāsadeva was residing. Falling down upon the ground, the prince humbly touched his head to the āśī'śi's lotus feet. Then, while standing before Vyāsadeva with folded hands, the former worm described his subsequent lives and expressed his immense gratitude for having attained a royal birth with all of its accompanying opulence and enjoyment. Śrīla Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear prince, if you give up your present body in battle while giving protection to the brāhmaṇas and cows, then you will next take birth in a family of righteous brāhmaṇas. At that time, I will come to you and instruct you how to attain the highest destination."

After this meeting with Vyāsadeva, the prince retired to the forest in order to execute austerities, hoping to accelerate his advancement in spiritual life. Because of this, Vyāsadeva came to him and explained, "My dear prince, the proper penance for a kṣatriya is to give protection to the citizens within his realm. If you just go on performing your royal duties properly, and at the same time act righteously in your personal life, then you will next take birth in a family of brāhmaṇas."

After receiving these instructions, the prince gave up his forest life of renunciation and returned to his capital city. He resumed ruling over his kingdom righteously as Vyāsadeva had advised, and at last, after giving up his body, the former worm took birth in a good brāhmaṇa family. Vyāsadeva then once again came to him as promised, and after instructing him thoroughly, he concluded by saying, "My dear prince, an elevated person should know for certain that the only cause for fear is unrighteousness. No material condition, not even death, can impede one's spiritual progress. Only sinful life has the power to degrade one, and this important truth was realized by you in your former life as a worm."

After receiving instructions from Śrīla Vyāsadeva, the former worm became firmly fixed in virtue, and after quitting his material body, he ascended to Brahmaloka.

Bhīṣma then urged, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should not lament for the warriors who gave up their lives in the battle here at Kurukṣetra. By executing their religious duty, they have all achieved similarly elevated destinations."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired, "My dear grandsire, which is more effective in winning friends: the giving of gifts, or the practice of conciliation, which consists mostly of flattery?"

Bhīṣma then replied, "My dear king, it depends upon the particular person. Some people are won over by gifts, whereas others are won over by lavish praises."

Thus, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira heard from Bhīṣma, the son of Mahārāja Śantanu, as he very extensively spoke about the duties of the four social orders as well as practically every conceivable kind of religious principle. Quite befittingly, the king finally requested, "My dear grandfather, I wish that you now tell me about the one from whom all of these religious principles and duties have emanated. Because that Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa, is personally present here, it is only proper that you glorify His Supreme position and transcendental qualities at the culmination of your monumental series of discourses."

Bhīṣma felt exceedingly delighted upon hearing the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and indeed, various ecstatic symptoms became manifest in his body. As a result of transcendental love, Bhīṣma began to shed tears, and his hair stood up on end. With a faltering voice, the grandsire then replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I am so happy that you have come to the ultimate purpose of all types of inquiries. I shall now narrate to you one of Lord Kṛṣṇa's confidential pastimes, and so kindly continue to hear me with rapt attention."

Once upon a time, as Lord Kṛṣṇa was engaged in performing austerities for twelve years in the Himālayas, many great ṛṣis, headed by Nārada Muni and Śrīla Vyāsadeva, came there to see Him, and they were accompanied by innumerable disciples. Lord Kṛṣṇa very respectfully welcomed all of the sages, and after they were seated, these devotees naturally began to discuss among themselves about the glories of the Supreme Lord. Then, all of a sudden, the ṛṣis were astonished to observe how the energy generated from Lord Kṛṣṇa's austerities suddenly came out from His mouth in the form of a blazing fire. Within moments, that fire spread in all directions so that the entire region surrounding the mountain peak upon which Lord Kṛṣṇa was seated became consumed. As a result, all of the trees, animals, and birds perished, so that the whole
area took on a horribly gloomy and devastated aspect, as if bereft of all life. Having burned everything to ashes, that fire returned to Lord Kṛṣṇa and touched His feet just like an obedient disciple. Lord Kṛṣṇa then cast His merciful glance over the devastated mountainous region so that instantly, everything regained its original condition. When the ṛṣis saw how the entire area once again abounded with trees, birds, and animals, they became struck with wonder, and upon seeing their amazement, Lord Kṛṣṇa humorously asked, "O great sages, why are you so surprised? You are supposed to be fully learned in all branches of Vedic knowledge and completely detached from the dualities of this material world. Therefore, why should this tiny display of mystic power astonish You?"

The ṛṣis replied, "My dear Lord, since You are the supreme controller, the cause of all causes, the master of everyone and everything, what You have done is certainly not very astonishing. Still, because we are Your very tiny parts and parcels, even Your smallest activities appear to be inconceivable. Now, kindly explain to us about the fire which had issued forth from Your mouth. What purpose had it served?"

Lord Kṛṣṇa explained, "My dear ṛṣis, the fire which you saw was a manifestation of My energy (viṣṇu-māyā), and it had come out of My mouth as a result of My severe penances. As such, this fire is identical with Myself, and thus you should not consider it to be a cause of fear. My ascetic merit had gone to see Lord Brahmā, and it was informed by him that I would soon receive a very glorious son, almost equal to Myself in prowess. Now, My dear great sages, I request you to speak about something wonderful which you might have experienced while in heaven or on the earth. Please satisfy Me in this regard, for I desire to hear the nectarean rivers of speech which emanate from your moonlike faces."

After hearing these very pleasing words, all of the ṛṣis worshipped Lord Kṛṣṇa with hearts which were saturated with love. Then, Nārada Muni was selected to speak, since he is considered to be the foremost devotee among all of the great sages. Being thus called upon, Nārada Muni narrated an incident which many of the ṛṣis had witnessed long ago: Once upon a time, Lord Śiva had engaged in performing austerities upon a mountain peak in the Himālayas, surrounded by hundreds of ghostly beings, some of whom were beautiful and others quite ghastly. Present
there were also numerous Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Gandharvas and Apsarās who resided at that heavenly place, and the sounds of musical instruments and singing continually filled the air. Because all of the great ṛṣis also remained there for as long as Lord Śiva sat in meditation, clad in tiger skin and wearing a snake as his sacred thread, the mountains also resounded with the vibration of the Vedic mantras. One day, when the ṛṣis came to offer obeisances unto Lord Śiva, Pārvatī was accompanied by the wives of her husband's ghostly companions, as well as the presiding deities of the sacred rivers.

With a playful smile upon her lips, Pārvatī jokingly crept up behind Lord Śiva and put her hands over his eyes. However, as soon as Lord Śiva's eyes were covered, the entire universe went black. Then, as all living creatures became afraid of losing their very lives, a third eye appeared on Lord Śiva's forehead. A blazing fire emanated from that wonderful eye, dispelling the universal darkness, just as if it were a second sun. Being struck with fear and amazement, Pārvatī offered obeisances unto her lord, and at that time, the fire which had emanated from Śiva's third eye appeared as if it would consume the entire three worlds. When Lord Śiva saw how his wife was fearfully standing before him with folded hands, however, his compassion became aroused, and thus he wound up that fierce energy so that once again the universal atmosphere became peaceful. The astonished Umā then very respectfully inquired, "My dear lord, for what reason has this third eye appeared upon your forehead?"

Lord Śiva replied, "My dear Devī, when you playfully covered my eyes, the whole universe became devoid of light. Thus, for the protection of all living entities, I manifested the third eye."

Thereafter, Śiva dismissed most of the ṛṣis who had come to see him. A select few ṛṣis thus remained. Being great devotees of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the sages then requested, "My dear Lord Śiva, since you are the foremost of all Vaiṣṇavas (worshipers of Viṣṇu), kindly enlighten us about the glories of Lord Vasudeva, the worshipable lord of all lords."

In reply, Lord Śiva very enthusiastically spoke at great length about the supreme and absolute position of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. A summary of this speech is as follows:

"My dear ṛṣis, since Lord Kṛṣṇa is the cause of all causes, there is nothing
in existence but Him. And yet, simultaneously, He is distinct from everything as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, for He is the source of all emanations, spiritual and material. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the original cause of everyone and everything, including myself and yourselves, and thus we are all His parts and parcels. He expands Himself into innumerable personal forms (viṣṇu-tattva) who are all equally and supremely powerful, as well as separated forms who are the innumerable living entities. These infinitesimal separated parts and parcels are referred to as the marginal potency of the Lord. This dull, inert, material world is composed of inferior potency. The living entities, although essentially superior energy, are further distinguished as marginal, because, on account of their minuteness, they have the propensity to sometimes fall down into the inferior material nature and thus incur suffering. The constitutional position of all living beings, however, is to serve the Supreme Lord within the superior manifestation (the spiritual world), and thus the suffering condition of material existence has been brought about by a misuse of their minute independence. This misfortune can be rectified only when the fallen living entities sincerely surrender themselves unto the Supreme Lord and thus become transferred back home, back to Godhead.

"My dear great sages, since everyone and everything rests within the universal body of the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa, when one understands Him, he automatically understands everything else, including Lord Brahmā and myself. One who satisfies Lord Kṛṣṇa automatically satisfies all of the demigods, and by seeing Him, one automatically sees everything. Therefore, you should all worship Lord Kṛṣṇa with great reverence and devotion, and by performing austerities, you will attain the purification which is necessary for appreciating His greatness."

After hearing the words of Nārada Muni, all of the ṛṣis worshipped Lord Kṛṣṇa with great satisfaction, and thereafter, they took their leave. When Lord Kṛṣṇa completed His twelve year vow of austerity, He returned to Dvārakā, and in due course of time, Queen Rukmīṇī gave birth to Pradyumna. Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you should now cast aside all grief which you feel due to thinking yourself to be the cause of the destruction of your friends and relatives. The truth is that everyone is slain by the eternal Time, which represents the will of
Lord Kṛṣṇa, the original Personality of Godhead, and the supreme one above all others. My dear king, you have acted instrumentally in the hands of the Supreme Lord, and for this reason, you should feel the greatest satisfaction. Indeed, if anyone wants to serve his ultimate self-interest and award himself the highest benediction, then he should become an unalloyed devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa."

After hearing this, all of the persons who had assembled to hear Bhīṣma speak turned toward Kṛṣṇa, and with folded hands, they mentally worshipped Him with awe and reverence. Bhīṣma fell silent and so everyone else refrained from speaking. After a long pause Śrila Vyāsadeva suggested, "My dear son of Śantanu, now that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira has been restored to his normal mentality by having received your instructions, he should be dismissed so that he can return to Hastināpura."

Bhīṣma then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you have my permission to depart. My only request is that you cast off your feverish mentality once and for all. In addition, please do not fail to return here when the time comes for me to at last give up this material body."

Placing Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhāri in front, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira prepared to set out for Hastināpura, accompanied by his brothers and Lord Kṛṣṇa. At this time, the king gave away abundant wealth to all of the women whose husbands had died during the great war at Kurukṣetra. Then, after spending fifty nights in the Kuru capital, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could understand that the time had arrived for the sun to cross over into the northern hemisphere. Thus, he set out from Hastināpura, taking with him all of the necessary paraphernalia for performing Bhīṣma's funeral ceremony. Accompanied by Lord Kṛṣṇa, Kuntīdevī, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and many others, the Pāṇḍavas soon arrived at the place where Bhīṣma was lying upon his bed of arrows. After getting down from their chariots, the Pāṇḍavas first of all offered their obeisances to Bhīṣma and then to the assembled ṛṣis. Then, while standing before Bhīṣma with folded hands, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira said, "My dear grandfather, if you are still able to hear me, please give me your order."

At this, Bhīṣma opened his eyes and said with a deep and resounding sound..."
voice, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I am happy to see you. Now, after having lain here for fifty-eight nights, the auspicious time for my departure has finally arrived."

Then, turning to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma said, "O King, rest assured that Yudhiṣṭhira will always remain obedient to you. Do not grieve for all that has transpired, especially considering how wicked and envious your sons had been."

Thereafter, Bhīṣma turned his full attention to Lord Kṛṣṇa, and while offering prayers, he requested the Lord to grant him permission to leave this mortal world. Lord Kṛṣṇa then smiled magnanimously and assured Bhīṣma that after relinquishing his mortal body, he would become reinstated in his original position as one of the Vasus. Then upon seeing that his final moment was about to arrive, Bhīṣma embraced all of those who were present before him and begged them to always remain fixed in righteousness.

Bhīṣma then fell silent, and as he fixed his mind and gaze upon Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who was mercifully standing before him, he withdrew his senses from all external engagement. While withdrawing his mental activities from all material subject matters, Bhīṣma proceeded to raise his life air upwards. Miraculously, from whatever part of Bhīṣma's body the life air was raised, all wounds became instantly healed.

Next, when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira requested Bhīṣma to speak about the merit which is acquired by worshipping the brāhmaṇas, the grandsire replied, "My dear king, both my physical and mental strength are rapidly weakening, and thus I can understand that the time for quitting my body is rapidly approaching. I therefore request you to hear from Lord Kṛṣṇa whatever else remains to be understood."

Upon hearing this, Lord Kṛṣṇa smiled slightly and then narrated an incident from his personal experience: "Once, Durvāsā Muni came to Dvārakā, and upon his arrival, as was his custom, he made the following public announcement: 'Who is brave enough to take me into his house as a guest? I must warn you, however, that once someone has accepted the responsibility of offering me hospitality, I shall become enraged over even the slightest transgression of etiquette.'

"Durvāsā Muni was the tallest man on earth, but at the same time he was very emaciated on account of his severe austerities. Dressed in rags and

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having a very long beard, the rṣi presented an exceedingly ominous appearance and thus no one dared to take him in as a guest. For that reason, I Myself stepped forward and invited Durvāsā Muni to My palace. Thereafter, while residing with Me, Durvāsā Muni ate enough food for thousands of people on some days, and on other days, he would hardly eat anything. One day, after returning home, Durvāsā Muni entered his guest-room and burnt to ashes all of the furniture, maidservants, and other paraphernalia. After doing so, the rṣi quickly departed, but then, upon meeting Me, he demanded, 'I want to eat sumptuously without delay.'

"Fortunately, I had predicted his mind, and thus I had ordered a huge feast to be made ready. Then, after he sat down to eat, Durvāsā Muni requested Me to take some of the food and smear it all over My body. I did this without hesitation, and then, when he saw Rukmīṇī standing nearby, the rṣi laughingly smeared food over her body as well. Then, after finishing his meal, Durvāsā Muni ordered Me to yoke Rukmīṇī onto a chariot, for he desired to enjoy riding through the streets of Dvārakā. Being determined to please the rṣi at all costs, I smilingly complied, and soon thereafter, he mounted upon My chariot and set out from the palace. Although Durvāsā Muni beat my wife with his goad just as if she were an animal, I did not feel the slightest bit of grief or hatred toward him. Thereafter, as Rukmīṇī proceeded to pull Durvāsā Muni's chariot along the highway, she repeatedly tottered and fell down to the ground, and upon seeing this, the mortified citizens became filled with indignation. Each time that this happened, Durvāsā Muni became very angry and struck Rukmīṇī violently with his whip, and at last he became so disgusted that he jumped down from the chariot and began to swiftly run away on foot. I chased after the rṣi, imploring him not to become displeased with us. Finally, Durvāsā Muni turned around and announced, 'O Kṛṣṇa, I hereby certify that I could not even find the slightest fault in You. O descendent of Yadu, You have completely conquered over anger, and thus Your life has become glorious. Being very pleased, I hereby award You the benediction that from now on, people in general will become as fond of You as they are of food, or even life itself. All of the things which I had burnt to ashes shall be restored to their original condition, and You will become immune to death.
through all the parts of Your body over which You had smeared my food. My dear Kṛṣṇa, for some reason You had neglected to smear my remnants over the soles of Your feet, and so You shall remain vulnerable on that account. I shall also bless Rukmīṇī so that she will become the foremost person of her sex, and will never have to suffer from old age or diminution of bodily beauty.'

"After saying this, Durvāsā Muni suddenly disappeared, and when I returned home along with My wife, we saw that whatever had been burnt or broken by the ṛṣi was indeed restored to its original condition." Then, all of a sudden, Bhīṣma’s life-air penetrated through the top of his skull, and all who were present there could see how it proceeded upward through the sky toward heaven like a blazing meteor. Flowers then rained down from above, and the sound of celestial drums mixed with the joyful shouts which were uttered by the Siddhas and great ṛṣīs.

At last, the soul of Bhīṣma rose out of sight, and so Vidura began to construct a funeral pyre with large quantities of wood. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira wrapped Bhīṣma’s body with cloth and then decorated it with flower-garlands. Thereafter, as the body was placed upon the funeral pyre, Yuyutsu held an umbrella overhead, Bhīma and Arjuna took up cāmaras, and, while standing at Bhīṣma's feet, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and Dhṛtarāṣṭra waved fans. Finally, as the brāhmaṇas loudly chanted the hymns of the Sāma Veda, the fire was ignited. Then, after the cremation, a procession was led to the Gaṅgā, where everyone offered water for the departed soul of Bhīṣma. At this time, Gaṅgādevī personally rose up out of the water, and while piteously crying, she lamented, "Alas! My heart must be made of stone, for it did not break upon witnessing my powerful son slain by Śiṅkaṇḍī!"

Lord Kṛṣṇa then consoled Gaṅgādevī, and while assuring her of her son's exalted destination, He explained that Bhīṣma had actually been killed by Arjuna and not Śiṅkaṇḍī. By hearing Lord Kṛṣṇa's words, Gaṅgādevī was able to give up her grief, and after worshipping the celestial goddess, the Lord and all others present there took permission from her and departed.

As he left the banks of the Gaṅgā, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became overwhelmed by an unbearable grief, and indeed, while walking along
the road, he suddenly fell down to the ground, unconscious. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Bhīma rushed forward to pick up Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and when all of the others came and saw the king's pitiable condition, they sat down around him. At last, when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira came to his senses, Dhrtrārṣṭra said, "My dear nephew, please get up. Return to Hastināpura and rule over the kingdom with a cheerful heart. It is I and Gāndhāri who should lament, and not you. Vidura had repeatedly warned me about the imminent destruction of the Kuru dynasty. Because I failed to heed his advice, the responsibility for this wholesale annihilation of kṣatriyas rests squarely upon my shoulders."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became a little pacified by hearing his uncle's words. Lord Kṛṣṇa then said, "My dear cousin, when a person becomes too aggrieved on account of his forefathers, then they have to share his suffering. Perform the aṣvamedha-yajña, give in charity to the brāhmaṇas, and then cheerfully accept the burden of ruling over the earth."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, now that I have witnessed the death of my grandfather, I cannot find any peace of mind. My dear lord, I know that You are very mercifully inclined toward Your devotees. Therefore, please grant my wish. Allow me to retire to the forest in order to live an ascetic life. This is my heartfelt desire and so I beg You to fulfill it."

Upon hearing this, Śrīla Vyāsa-deva mildly chastised Yudhiṣṭhira by saying, "O my grandson, it is simply childish for you to sentimentally retain your grief after receiving so many good instructions which were meant to dispel it. O King, even if you insist that you have become sinfully contaminated by the war, you can atone by performing the aṣvamedha-yajña, just as Lord Rāmacandra had previously done millions of years ago."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Grandfather, I know that great merit can be attained by performing the horse-sacrifice. However, since I have practically destroyed the entire earth, nothing remains to be distributed to the brāhmaṇas. I could not dare to extract taxes from others now, because everyone has become financially ruined on account of this terrible war. O Vyāsa-deva, considering all of this, what do you advise me to do?"
Śrīla Vyāsadeva considered the situation very carefully and then replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, Duryodhana's exhausted treasury can be refilled by the gold which the brāhmaṇas had left in the Himālayas after performing the great sacrifice of King Marutta."

Then, at Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's urging, Śrīla Vyāsadeva narrated the history of King Marutta as follows:
Bṛhaspati and Samvarta were the sons of Aṅgirāś, and there was always a stiff rivalry between them. Finally, after being exceedingly harassed by his elder brother, Samvarta renounced all of his possessions and went to the forest in order to live as a naked ascetic. Soon thereafter, the demigods were defeated by the demons in battle, and then Indra appointed Bṛhaspati as his sacrificial priest. Formerly, Aṅgirāś Ṛṣi had been the priest of King Karandhama, who had ruled over the entire earth. After his passing away, the king was succeeded by his son, Avikṣit, and then later on, Avikṣit's son, Marutta, came to rule the world. Marutta had a continual rivalry with Indra, and due to the king's spotless piety, the king of heaven could do nothing to prevail over him. Then, at the time of appointing Bṛhaspati as his priest, Indra had insisted, "O son of Aṅgirāś, after accepting my patronage, you must never perform a sacrifice on behalf of King Marutta. In other words, before assuming this post, you must clearly decide whether you want to pledge your allegiance unto me, or unto a mere mortal."
Soon thereafter, when Marutta heard how Bṛhaspati had become Indra's preceptor, he made up his mind to perform a great sacrifice. For this purpose, the king went to Bṛhaspati and said, "O brāhmaṇa, you may remember how you had once suggested that I should perform a great sacrifice. Now, I have made up my mind to do so, and I have come here to request you to act as my priest."
Bṛhaspati replied, "O King, I cannot perform your sacrifice because I have already accepted the post as Indra's priest."
At this, Marutta argued, "My dear son of Aṅgirāś, you are the hereditary priest of our family, and thus it is not befitting for you to refuse my request."
Still, Bṛhaspati insisted, "O king, since I have now been elevated to the position of priest for the demigods, I am no longer willing to perform any
sacrifices for mere mortals. Therefore, you had better appoint someone else."

Upon hearing this insulting remark, King Marutta felt exceedingly ashamed and hurt. Then, as he was returning home in this mood, the king happened to meet the great sage Nárada. After being very respectfully welcomed by the king, Nárada Muni remarked, "My dear Marutta, all does not appear to be well with you. Please inform me as to what is the matter."

In reply, King Marutta explained how he had been rejected by Bṛhaspati, and he concluded by saying, "O Nárada, after this humiliating experience, I do not even feel like continuing my wretched life any longer!"

Nárada Muni then suggested, "My dear king, why don't you approach Bṛhaspati's brother, Samvarta, who is now wandering aimlessly over the earth? If you can please him, he will surely agree to perform your sacrifice."

Marutta replied, "O Nárada, I feel so indebted to you, for your suggestion has given me a new lease on life! Now, kindly inform me where I can find Samvarta, and how I should approach him so as to not be rejected."

Nárada Muni then explained, "My dear king, in the hopes of meeting Lord Śiva, Samvarta is wandering about like a madman through the streets of Benaras. Go now to the city gates and place a corpse there. The first person who turns away from that dead body will be Samvarta, and so you should follow him. Upon reaching a secluded place, surrender unto him with folded hands and explain to him your difficulty. If Samvarta wants to know who had informed you of his whereabouts, then you can mention my name. And, if he inquires about my whereabouts, you can tell him that I have entered the fire."

After receiving these instructions, Marutta took leave from Nárada Muni and hurried to Benaras. After arriving at the city gate, the king placed a corpse there, as instructed, and then he waited to see who would come along. After a brief moment, a brāhmaṇa arrived there in order to enter the city, but upon seeing the dead body, he turned back. Marutta followed Samvarta with folded hands, but then, when they reached a secluded place the brāhmaṇa began to spit on him and throw mud and ashes as well. Marutta tolerated all this, and as he followed
Samvarta, the king tried his best to pacify him. Finally, after walking a great distance, Samvarta sat down in the shade of a banyan tree in order to rest. The brāhmaṇa then inquired, "O King, tell me who has informed you where I could be found, and be careful not to lie, for if you do so I shall tear you into 100 pieces."

Marutta named Nārada Muni, and next, Samvarta inquired, "O King, where is the Devarṣi now?" Marutta replied, "O brāhmaṇa, after informing me of your whereabouts, Nārada Muni has entered into fire. My dear son of Aṅgirāś, I desire to perform a great sacrifice, and for that purpose I have come to you."

In response, Samvarta began to rave like a lunatic. Then, after some time, he inquired, "O King, why do you want to engage as your priest someone who has a mental disorder? You had better approach my brother, Brhaspati, for, in any case, I would never dare to perform a sacrifice without his permission."

Marutta then explained, "My dear brāhmaṇa, I have already requested Brhaspati to perform my sacrifice, and he refused on the grounds that Indra has forbidden him to do so. How can I then approach him again?"

Upon hearing this, Samvarta agreed to perform Marutta's sacrifice, but at the same time he warned, "O King, because you are hoping to utilize all of your wealth for the purpose of outdoing Indra in terms of sacrificial merit, the king of heaven and his priest will certainly try to take revenge. For this reason, I insist that you implicitly follow my directions. If some difficulty arises and you disobey my order, then my anger will surely burn your whole family to ashes."

In reply, Marutta vowed, "My dear brāhmaṇa, rest assured that I will never do anything which is disagreeable to you."

Samvarta then confided, "My dear Marutta, I have no desire to obtain wealth. I have agreed to perform your sacrifice simply for the purpose of competing with my elder brother. I promise that if you follow my directions, I shall enable you to become the equal to the king of heaven in all respects. O King, Lord Śiva resides on a mountain peak named Muñjāban in the Himālayas, and he is accompanied by his consort, Umā, as well as his ghostly associates, Yakṣas, Gandharvas, and Apsarās. On all sides of this mountain peak, which cannot be perceived by the fleshy eye, there are gold mines being protected by Kuvera's guards. I advise
you to go and satisfy Lord Śiva in order to receive this gold from him." Marutta did as he was instructed, and after receiving a vast quantity of gold, he made fantastic arrangements for his sacrifice by manufacturing all of the paraphernalia out of the precious metal. However, when Bṛhaspati learned of how Marutta's opulence had surpassed even that of the demigods, he became afraid that his brother's fame might eclipse his own. Thus, Bṛhaspati became sick at heart, and his very complexion became pale. When he learned of this, Indra took all of the demigods with him and went to inquire of his preceptor's welfare. In reply, Bṛhaspati explained, "O king of heaven, Marutta is preparing to perform a great sacrifice, and he intends to install my brother Samvarta as his priest. This sacrifice will award Marutta unprecedented fame, and because Samvarta has been my lifelong rival, I wish to impede him, lest my own reputation become impaired."

Indra replied, "My dear Bṛhaspati, now that you have become the priest of the demigods, there is nothing for you to worry about. You can rest assured that you brother cannot do anything to harm you."

Bṛhaspati argued, "O Indra, you know very well that the prosperity of one's enemy is always painful. Indeed, it is seen that when the demons become too powerful, you invariably try to subdue them. For this reason, I request that you put a stop to Marutta's sacrifice and thus mitigate my distress."

Indra then instructed Agni, "O god of fire, go to Marutta and request him to appoint Bṛhaspati as his sacrificial priest. Assure the king that if he does so, then, even if he is a mere human being, he shall attain heavenly immortality like the demigods."

Thereafter, when Agni went to Marutta, the king received him with great respect. Then, after hearing of Agni's proposal, Marutta replied, "O Lord, I have already arranged that my sacrifice will be performed by Samvarta. You can tell Bṛhaspati that since he has now become the priest of the demigods, it would not look well for him to perform a sacrifice for a mere mortal."

Agni then argued, "My dear king, if you simply act according to the wishes of Indra, then certainly you shall receive the highest blessings."

Upon hearing this, Samvarta interrupted by warning, "O Agni, you had better desist now. Indeed, never come here on behalf of Bṛhaspati, for if
you do so, then I shall burn you to ashes with my wrath!"
Agni fearfully returned to Indra and described to him all that had
happened. The fire-god grasped Bṛhaspati's hands and implored him to
forget his determination to perform Marutta's sacrifice, since Samvarta
had already been appointed. Then, once again, turning to Indra, Agni
said, "O King, when I had assured Marutta that he would gain a life of
immortality by following your advice, he showed complete indifference.
Indeed, the king said, 'O god of fire, if I had even the slightest interest in
going to heaven, then I would have immediately appointed Bṛhaspati as
my priest.'"
When he heard this, the king of heaven became inflamed with rage. He
then commanded, "O Agni, go back at once and threaten Marutta by
saying that if he does not accept my proposal then I shall retaliate by
hurling my thunderbolt at him!"
Agni replied, "O King, Samvarta had threatened to burn me to ashes if I
ever again come on your behalf. Therefore, please send the Gandharva
king as a messenger instead of me."
Indra then said, "My dear Agni, since you are the one who burns all
things to ashes, you should not have to fear the ṛṣī's threat!"
Agni replied, "O Indra even though you had been appointed as the king
of the three worlds, Vṛtra was still able to take away your sovereignty!"
Indra then declared, "My dear Agni, Vṛtra only appeared to triumph for
a short while because I hesitated to use my thunderbolt against a weak
enemy."
Agni argued, "O Indra, have you already forgotten how Cyavana Muni
had paralyzed your arm while enabling the Aśvinī-kumāras to drink the
soma-rasa? Since no one is superior in prowess to the brāhmaṇas, I have
no intention of incurring Samvarta's wrath."
Indra then said, "O Agni, I admit that what you say is true. Still, I shall
never agree to tolerate Marutta's pride. If he refuses to agree to my
proposal, then I shall vanquish him with my thunderbolt!"
Finally, Indra sent Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the Gandharva king, to the court of
King Marutta. Still, even after receiving Indra's threatening message,
Marutta refused to allow Bṛhaspati to perform his sacrifice. Dhṛtarāṣṭra
then warned, "My dear king, you had better reconsider your decision
before it is too late. Indeed, if you listen carefully, you can hear Indra's
war cry reverberating through the sky."
When he listened, Marutta could bear Indra's loud roars, and so he quickly went to Samvarta and begged him to remove his fears. Samvarta then said, "My dear king, I shall soon dispel your anxiety by utilizing my mystic power. Rest assured that even if Indra sends forth torrents of rain, I will force Agni to neutralize the deluge."
King Marutta could then bear the roaring of a powerful wind and the crashing sound of thunder. Thus, he once again anxiously expressed his fears to Samvarta. The brāhmaṇa said, "O King, I shall order Vāyu to dispel this storm, and I will give you any other benediction which will set your mind at ease."
At this Marutta requested, "O brāhmaṇa, quickly begin the sacrifice and utilize your ascetic prowess to force Indra and all of the demigods to come and personally accept our offerings."
Thereafter, Samvarta commenced Marutta's sacrifice, and by employing his mystic power, he was able to forcibly attract Indra. While pointing to the sky, Samvarta announced, "O Marutta, just see how the king of heaven has appeared overhead along with all of the demigods!"
Marutta and Samvarta stood up in order to welcome Indra, and thereafter, when all of the demigods had finished drinking the soma offerings, the son of Aviksit bowed down before the king of heaven. Indra became pacified by the king's submission, and at last he said, "My dear king Marutta, you can rest assured that I have now given up all resentment toward you. Indeed, I am very pleased to have come here at your invitation."
Samvarta then requested, "My dear king of heaven, if you are genuinely satisfied with us, then personally distribute the sacrificial offerings to the demigods and give us further directions so that we can bring this yajña to a successful completion."
In response, Indra commanded the demigods to erect a magnificent assembly hall consisting of 1,000 gorgeously furnished rooms. Then, after all the arrangements had been made, Indra and the demigods surrounded Samvarta, who blazed forth with great splendor as he sat upon the sacrificial altar. At last, after accepting their shares of the offerings, all of the demigods took leave of King Marutta and returned to their
heavenly abodes. The king then distributed heaps of gold to all of the brāhmaṇas who were present there, and finally, with Samvarta's permission, he returned to his capital city.

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, most of the gold which King Marutta had distributed is still lying at that place in the Himalayas, for the brāhmaṇas had carried away whatever they wanted and just left the rest there."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then announced, "My dear great sage, my grief-stricken mind has at last become somewhat relieved, and thus I am ready to make preparations for the aśvamedha-yajña. Now, with your permission, I shall depart for the Himalayas."

After giving his consent, Śrīla Vyāsadeva instantly disappeared from the king's vision. King Yudhiṣṭhira then finished the remaining funeral rites for Bhīṣma. Thereafter, he returned to Hastināpura along with his brothers and Lord Kṛṣṇa. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were very pleased to have come out victorious in the great battle of Kurukṣetra. Upon their return to Hastināpura, the two friends began to pass their time together in great happiness by enjoying themselves in the surrounding forests. Sometimes, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna would sit in the great assembly hall at Indraprastha. At such times, they would pass many an hour recounting the wonderful events which had taken place during the Kurukṣetra war, as well as during the Pāṇḍavas' period of exile. Then, one day, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "My dear Arjuna, due to My love for you and your brothers, I have spent a long time here without even realizing it. However, I can understand now just how long it has been since I have seen my father Vasudeva, my brother Balarāma, and My numerous other friends and relatives who reside at Dvārakā. Therefore, please go to your elder brother and inform him that I desire to return home. After all, there is no reason for Me to remain here now that your enemies have been slain and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira has regained the royal throne."

Arjuna very sorrowfully gave his consent, and then confided, "My dear lord, even though You had instructed me fully on all aspects of transcendental knowledge before the battle of Kurukṣetra, and although You had graphically exhibited these truths by revealing Your universal form, still, due to the fickleness of my mind, I have practically forgotten
everything. Now, since You are about to depart for Dvārakā, please impart this knowledge unto me once more for my benefit."

In response, Lord Kṛṣṇa embraced Arjuna, but then mildly chastised him as follows, "My dear son of Kuntī, I am greatly displeased that you have so foolishly forgotten My instructions. Now, I shall not be able to remember all that I had said before. Therefore, I will narrate a story which will impart unto you the same knowledge. Once, a brāhmaṇa came to Brahmaloka in order to see Me. After receiving him with proper respect, I began to question him on the subject of liberation. The brāhmaṇa praised My questions and then related to Me the following incident:

"My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, once upon a time, Kaśyapa approached a certain brāhmaṇa who was known to be well-conversant regarding all of the mysteries of religion. Indeed, this brāhmaṇa was fully liberated, and he possessed all mystic powers. Therefore, after coming before this great soul, Kaśyapa fell down at his lotus feet in order to offer him his humble obeisances. Being very pleased with Kaśyapa's submission and surrender, the brāhmaṇa discoursed at great length about the journey of the soul through material existence and his ultimate liberation from material bondage. At the end of his talks the brāhmaṇa disclosed, "O Kaśyapa, the attainment of heaven is not eternal, although it is sometimes referred to as such on account of the vast duration of life which is enjoyed by the residents there. Ultimately, one has to fall down from heaven if he is not able to liberate himself entirely from the conditioned state of material existence. Formerly, being misled by lust and greed, I had taken one body after another, and thus I had sucked upon all varieties of mothers' breasts. At last, after repeatedly traveling from heaven to hell and then back again, I became disgusted with the cycle of repeated births and deaths. It was at this time that I seriously took to the path of liberation. Still, however, it required many lifetimes of austerity before I could finally realize that full surrender unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the means of ultimate liberation and thus life's ultimate goal. My dear Kaśyapa, very soon I am going to quit my body in order to go back to the spiritual
world, the eternal kingdom of God. Therefore, you should take advantage of this opportunity by asking me whatever question you may have.”

"My dear Arjuna, the brāhmaṇa who had come to visit Me at Dvārakā was actually this self-realized soul, and after describing his discussion with Kaśyapa, he suddenly disappeared from My vision, then and there. O son of Kuntī, whatever I have now spoken is the same knowledge which I had imparted while seated upon your chariot before the commencement of the Kurukṣetra war. I hope that you have heard Me this time with rapt attention. Very few persons can understand this philosophy of pure unalloyed devotional service to Me, and indeed, even the demigods are averse to it due to possessing a strong desire for enjoying the fruits of their labor.”

Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke at great length, covering the entire spectrum of spiritual understanding, and in conclusion He said, "My dear Arjuna, it is out of love for you that I have spoken so much about the mysteries of self-realization. In return, if you have any love for Me, you will act strictly according to the instructions which I have imparted. I shall now take your leave for I am very anxious to return to Dvārakā in order to see My father after such a long period of separation.”

Arjuna then suggested, "My dear lord, let us got to Hastināpura together and meet with Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, for without his permission, You have never been willing to do anything.”

Lord Kṛṣṇa then ordered Dāruka to make ready His chariot, and thus He and Arjuna left the royal assembly-hall at Indraprastha and set out for Hastināpura. While going along the highway, the two friends engaged in pleasant conversation, and upon their arrival at the Kuru capital, they immediately entered the palace of Dhātarāṣṭra. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna first of all approached the old blind king, and after announcing their names, they reverently touched his feet. Then, after touching the feet of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Gāndhārī, and Kuntī, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna fondly embraced Vidura. Evening had already arrived, and so Dhātarāṣṭra dismissed everyone. Lord Kṛṣṇa then accompanied Arjuna to his palace, and after spending the night happily together, the two friends performed their morning religious duties. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then went to meet Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, who was seated in the royal
court, surrounded by all of his ministers. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra could understand that Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna had come to tell him something, and so, without wasting time, he requested them to speak. In reply, Arjuna described Lord Kṛṣṇa’s desire to return to Dwārakā and then requested his elder brother to grant the necessary permission. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then urged Lord Kṛṣṇa to depart that very day if He so desired, but at the same time he requested the Lord to return for the performance of the aśvamedha-yajña.

Thereafter, Lord Kṛṣṇa went to see His aunt, Kuntīdevī, and thus He received her permission as well as Vidura's to depart. Finally, after placing Subhadrā and Sātyaki upon His chariot, Lord Kṛṣṇa set out from Hastināpura while the Pāṇḍavas followed. At last, after going some distance, Lord Kṛṣṇa urged the five brothers to turn back, and then he ordered Dāruka to proceed more quickly. For as long as Lord Kṛṣṇa’s form was visible, Arjuna's gaze remained fixed upon Him, and at this time, Indra gently showered rain mixed with flowers, while Vāyu caused very pleasant gentle breezes to blow. Finally, when Lord Kṛṣṇa’s chariot disappeared from view, the Pāṇḍavas reluctantly returned to Hastināpura.

When He reached the desert country, Lord Kṛṣṇa happened to meet the rṣi Utaṅka, and so He worshipped the brāhmaṇa and received his worship in return. Being apparently unaware of what had transpired at Kurukṣetra, Utaṅka inquired, "O Kṛṣṇa, were you able to bring about peace between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas? I hope that the cousin-brothers are now enjoying life in harmony together. My dear Lord, I have great faith in You, and so I am certain that You must have succeeded in establishing friendly relations between the sons of Pāṇḍu and those of Dhṛtarāṣṭra."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Utaṅka, I certainly tried my best to bring about peace. However, when all of our efforts failed, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra were slain in a great war."

When he heard this, Utaṅka became highly enraged, and with red-hot eyes he declared, "O Kṛṣṇa, I will curse you for failing to save the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra! As the Supreme Controller, You could have forcibly brought about peace! Therefore, since You chose not to do so, it
obviously indicates that You were partial toward the Pāṇḍavas and indifferent toward the Kauravas!"
At this, Lord Kṛṣṇa interrupted and said, "My dear Utaṇka, please listen to Me first and then decide what you wish to do. However, you should keep in mind that since I am the Supreme Personality of Godhead, I cannot be harmed by a mere ṛṣi's curse. Why then should you ruin all of your carefully acquired ascetic merit by performing such a fruitless act?"
Utaṇka replied, "O Kṛṣṇa, I want You to speak about transcendental knowledge. Then, after hearing from You, I shall decide whether to curse You or not."
Being so invited, Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke on the science of the self and explained how He was the cause of all causes, the Supreme Absolute Truth. The Lord then concluded, "My dear ṛṣi, I honestly tried My best to establish peace between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. However, since Duryodhana and his friends were under the sway of Destiny, they were unwilling to accept My words. I even went so far as to frighten them with a partial display of My universal form. Only thereafter, when they still refused to relent, were the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra slain in a righteous battle, and as a result, they have undoubtedly gone to reside in heaven."
Utaṇka then said, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, I know that You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead and that whatever spiritual advancement I have made is due to You alone. Now that I have heard Your divine instructions, my anger has subsided, and so I am no longer inclined to curse You. O my lord, if You are pleased to fulfill my request, then kindly show me the universal form which You had previously exhibited in the royal court of the Kurus."
Being pleased with the ṛṣi, Lord Kṛṣṇa complied, and upon seeing this wondrous form Utaṇka became awe-struck. Just like Arjuna previously, the ṛṣi offered very reverent and descriptive prayers in glorification of that cosmic form. Utaṇka then requested Lord Kṛṣṇa to withdraw His awesome feature and resume His human-like appearance. Finally, after winding up His universal form, Lord Kṛṣṇa asked Utaṇka to accept a benediction, but the ṛṣi responded, "O my lord, just to see You is in itself a supreme reward!"
Still, Lord Kṛṣṇa insisted, by saying, "My dear Utaṇka, your meeting
with Me should not prove fruitless, and so I beg you to ask for something."

At last, Utaṅka requested, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, since I am residing in this desert region I wish that I may have water when I am in want of it."

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "O Ṛṣi, whenever you desire water, then just think of Me," and after saying this, He departed for Dvārakā. One day, thereafter, when Utaṅka became exceedingly thirsty as he wandered in the desert, he began to think of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Just then, the ṛṣi saw a naked hunter approaching. This hunter had a very dirty and fierce appearance. He carried a bow and a sword, and he was surrounded by a pack of dogs. As a stream of water continually poured out of his genital, the hunter came close to Utaṅka and announced, "O Ṛṣi, I have come here out of compassion for you. Now, you may drink this water and thus quench your thirst."

Instead of being inclined to drink the water which the caṇḍāla had offered him, Utanaka became exceedingly angry, thinking that Lord Kṛṣṇa was cruelly joking with him. Again and again the hunter urged Utanaka to drink the water, but the ṛṣi only became more and more enraged, and he censored Lord Kṛṣṇa all the while. Finally, upon seeing that the ṛṣi would not accept his offer, the caṇḍāla disappeared, then and there, along with his pack of dogs. When Utanaka saw this miracle, he became ashamed, thinking that Lord Kṛṣṇa had purposely arranged this occurrence in order to enjoy making him the butt of a crude joke. Just then, Lord Kṛṣṇa arrived there, and upon seeing Him, Utanaka criticized Him by saying, "Alas! How could you be so arrogant as to offer a brāhmaṇa water in the form of a caṇḍāla's urine?"

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "O Ṛṣi, all that had happened was quite proper, but you cannot understand it. After awarding your desired benediction, I had summoned Indra and requested him to give you nectar in the form of water. The king of heaven objected, however, saying that it was not proper for a human being to be made immortal. And yet, even though Indra repeatedly begged Me for permission to give some other benediction, I remained adamant. Thus, he finally agreed to give you nectar, but only on the condition that he could appear in the form of a hunter and then go away if his offer was refused. Thus, My dear ṛṣi, it was Indra who had appeared before you, and since you disregarded him,
he left without delivering the nectar to you. You have therefore made a
great blunder. Still, My dear Utaṅka, I feel obliged to fulfill My former
promise to you. Therefore, whenever you feel thirsty, I shall arrange for
clouds to suddenly appear overhead and shower down rain in
abundance."

Thereafter, while approaching Dvārakā, Lord Kṛṣṇa saw that a great
festival was being held at the nearby Raivataka Hill. Thus, the entire
area was adorned with countless flags, lamps, and other decorations, and
the air was filled with the sounds of men and women singing to the
accompaniment of musical instruments. At last, when He entered
Dvārakā, Lord Kṛṣṇa was worshipped by all of the members of the Yadu
dynasty, and the lord highly honored them all in return. After getting
down from His chariot, Lord Kṛṣṇa first of all approached his father and
mother, Vasudeva and Devakī, and after offering His obeisances, the
lord was fondly embraced by them.

At last, after exchanging greetings with all of His innumerable friends
and relatives in a way that was befitting each particular relationship,
Lord Kṛṣṇa sat down with them, and began to recount all of the events
which had taken place during the great war at Kurukṣetra. Lord Kṛṣṇa
refrained from speaking about Abhimanyu's death, for He considered
that this would be too painful to hear. Subbadra noticed this oversight,
however, and so she requested her brother to describe how her son had
been slain. And yet, before Subhadra had even finished speaking, she
fainted onto the floor, and upon seeing his daughter's pitiful condition,
Vasudeva also lost consciousness. Finally, upon regaining his senses,
Vasudeva requested Lord Kṛṣṇa to narrate the story of Abhimanyu's
death, and then he indulged in all sorts of lamentations while
remembering his dear grandson's childhood activities. In order to pacify
His bereaved father and sister, Lord Kṛṣṇa glorified Abhimanyu greatly
as He proceeded to describe his heroic fighting. At last, Lord Kṛṣṇa
pacified all of his aggrieved relatives by assuring them that Abhimanyu
was now enjoying life as one of the demigods in heaven.

Thereafter, Vasudeva, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Lord Balarāma, and Sātyaki
performed the funeral rites for Abhimanyu, and then they gave away a
vast quantity of wealth unto the brāhmaṇas. Still, the members of the
Yadu dynasty were not very much comforted, because, just like the
Pāṇḍavas, without Abhimanyu, they could no longer feel any happiness or peace.

Meanwhile, back at Hastināpura, Uttarā had forgone all eating after the death of her husband, and because of this, her relatives became very fearful that the embryo within her womb would be harmed. Knowing this by dint of his spiritual vision, Śrīla Vyāsadeva came to Uttarā in order to dissuade her from further fasting. While comforting his great-grand-daughter, Śrīla Vyāsadeva explained, "My dear Uttarā, your son will become a very great hero, equal in all respects to the Pāṇḍavas, and he will rule over the entire earth after the retirement of his grandfathers. You should not grieve so much for your slain husband, for he is now residing in the company of the demigods in heaven."

After hearing this, Uttarā and the Pāṇḍavas cast aside their grief, and Śrīla Vyāsadeva next advised Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, you should immediately begin to prepare for the performance of the horse-sacrifice, as was already decided upon."

After saying this, Śrīla Vyāsadeva disappeared from everyone's vision, and thereafter, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to consult his brothers, and he specifically inquired from Bhīma about how King Marutta's gold could be retrieved. In reply, Bhīma suggested that they should worship Lord Śiva so that if he became pleased, then the Yakṣas who guarded the gold would certainly allow them to take it. All of the Pāṇḍavas agreed that this was the best course of action, and so, after arraying their army, they devoutly worshipped Lord Śiva. Then, after taking permission from Dhrtaraṣṭra and Gāndhārī, the Pāṇḍavas set out at an auspicious moment. As the Pāṇḍavas paraded throughout the streets of Hastināpura, all of the citizens came out of their houses and crowded around in order to see them and express their well-wishes.

Finally, after traversing many forests and crossing over numerous rivers, the Pāṇḍavas arrived at the Himālayas. When they reached the vicinity of where King Marutta's treasure had been buried, the Pāṇḍavas set up camp. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then called for the brāhmaṇas who had accompanied him, and requested them to select an auspicious time for performing the necessary preliminary rituals. In reply, the brāhmaṇas explained how the next day was very auspicious, and they instructed the
Pāṇḍavas to begin fasting. After passing the night, the brāhmaṇas first of all had Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira make offerings unto Lord Śiva before endeavoring to acquire the gold. For this purpose, Dhaumya performed a sacrifice, and offerings were made to Lord Śiva, Kuvera, the Yakṣas, and Lord Śiva's ghostly companions. Afterwards, thousands of cows were given away in charity to the brāhmaṇas, and at last, while placing Śrīla Vyāsa-deva in front, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira proceeded to where the gold was buried.

When he arrived at this spot, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira once again worshipped Kuvera and the Yakṣas, and thereafter, he proceeded to excavate the site. Soon, innumerable golden articles were dug up, and all told, the vast treasure was loaded up onto the backs of 60,000 camels, 120,000 horses, 100,000 elephants, as well as in numerous carts, and on mules and human carriers. Just to give an idea of how much wealth was acquired, it is mentioned that each camel carried 16,000 gold coins, and each elephant carried 24,000. After all of the gold had been loaded up, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira once again worshipped Lord Śiva with a grateful heart, and then he set out for Hastināpura. Due to the incredibly heavy weight of the burden, frequent stops were required, and thus the caravan was only able to proceed four miles per day.

Meanwhile, knowing that he time for the aśvamedha-yajña’s performance was soon to arrive, Lord Kṛṣṇa left Dvārakā, accompanied by Lord Balarāma, Kṛta-varmā, Sātyaki, Pradyumna, Subhadrā and many other members of the Yadu dynasty. Upon His arrival in Hastināpura, Lord Kṛṣṇa was received by Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura, because the Pāṇḍavas had not yet returned from the Himālayas. Soon, thereafter, all of the residents of Hastināpura prepared to celebrate the birth of Uttarā’s son, and in great expectation they lavishly decorated the entire city. However, since he had been afflicted by the brahmāstra of Aśvatthāmā, the baby came out of the mother’s womb devoid of life. Thus, the anticipated birth which had made the citizens of Hastināpura rejoice, became the very cause for their grief. When Lord Kṛṣṇa received the news, He also became very saddened, and along with Sātyaki, He rushed into the inner apartments of the royal palace. There, Lord Kṛṣṇa found Draupadī and Subhadrā shedding incessant tears. Kuntīdevī was
not only weeping aloud, but she was repeatedly calling out Lord Kṛṣṇa’s holy name. As soon as the Lord entered the room, the three ladies tearfully implored Him to revive the dead child. Kuntīdevī then pleaded, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, at the time when Aśvatthāmā was about to release his brahmāstra, You had vowed to revive Uttarā’s son if he were killed by that weapon. Abhimanyu had also assured his wife that her son would learn the science of weapons from the Yādavas. O my dear Lord, You should not allow all of these words to prove false! The Pāṇḍavas are depending upon this last remaining descendent of their dynasty."

After speaking, Kunti fell to the ground. Lord Kṛṣṇa then raised His aunt up by taking her hand, and as he proceeded to comfort her, Subhadrā pitifully implored, "My dear brother, Kṛṣṇa, if You do not fulfill Your promise and revive my grandson, then I shall give up my life at once!"

Lord Kṛṣṇa was also very aggrieved, and after hearing Subhadrā’s words, He promised to bring Uttarā’s son back to life without delay. Upon hearing this, the ladies became cheerful, and Draupadī then went into the maternity room in order to announce Lord Kṛṣṇa’s presence to Uttarā. When Lord Kṛṣṇa saw how the maternity room was very nicely arrayed with all kinds of auspicious articles and that many physicians and elderly ladies were in attendance, He remarked that the arrangements were very excellent. When Uttarā saw Lord Kṛṣṇa before her, she began to lament very bitterly. Then, while pleading with Lord Kṛṣṇa to revive her dead son, Uttarā also exclaimed that she would give up her life if He failed to do so. Indeed, while bewailing her cruel fate, Uttarā suddenly fell to the floor like a demented person, and upon seeing this, Kunti and the other ladies resumed their weeping. Uttarā soon regained consciousness, and she then picked up her dead baby and began to chastise him for not offering obeisances to Lord Kṛṣṇa, who was present before him. As Uttarā continued to rave like a madwoman, urging her son to rise up as if from sleep, she herself was picked up by the other grief-stricken women. At last, when she regained some composure, Uttarā bowed her head down before Lord Kṛṣṇa and once again implored Him to show mercy on her.

In response, Kṛṣṇa touched water for purification, and then, after withdrawing the energy of the brahmāstra, He announced to all those
who were present, "I shall now bring the son of Uttarā back to life!"
Immediately, a slight motion was observed in the body of the newborn child, and upon seeing this, all of the ladies became overwhelmed with joy. Within a moment, the baby became fully animated, and with tears in their eyes, everyone praised Lord Kṛṣṇa from the core of their hearts. Lord Kṛṣṇa and the brāhmaṇas then pronounced benedictions upon the newborn child, and after taking her baby into her arms, Uttarā very reverently offered her obeisances unto the lord. Lord Kṛṣṇa then gave many valuable jewels to the child, and at this time, He declared, "Since this boy has been born at a time when the Kuru dynasty had become almost extinct, his name shall be Parīkṣit!"

It was when the child Parīkṣit was one month old that the Pāṇḍavas returned to Hastināpura after retrieving the gold which had been left by the brāhmaṇas at the conclusion of King Marutta's sacrifice. When they learned of their king's impending arrival, all the citizens of Hastināpura hurriedly decorated the city while Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Yadus went out to greet the Pāṇḍavas. After entering Hastināpura, the Pāṇḍavas first of all went and offered their obeisances unto Dhrṣṭarāṣṭra, and then, one after another, unto all of the elderly personalities. When they heard about how Kṛṣṇa had performed a miracle by reviving their still-born grandson, the Pāṇḍavas worshipped the lord in great happiness. Śrīla Vyāsadeva arrived at Hastināpura a few days later, and with his permission, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra began preparations for the horse-sacrifice. The king first of all approached Kṛṣṇa and requested, "My dear lord, since it is only by Your grace that I have regained my kingdom, it should be You who performs the aśvamedha-yajña."
Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhīra, this sentiment is certainly very befitting a pure devotee like yourself. However, since the emperor must personally perform this sacrifice, you should appoint Myself, as well as others, to take charge of various departments in order to assist you."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then requested Śrīla Vyāsadeva to select an auspicious time for initiating him into the performance of the sacrifice. The son of Parāśara replied, "O King, I shall initiate you into the performance of the aśvamedha-yajña on the full-moon day in the month of Caitra. In the meantime, you must make sure that all preparations are
completed, the most important of which is the selection of a suitable sacrificial horse."

Thereafter, when all preparations had been made, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira informed Śrīla Vyāsadeva, who then ordered the king to release the challenge-horse that very day. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira asked who the horse's protector should be, Vyāsadeva replied, "My dear king, Arjuna alone is competent to conquer over the entire earth."

Bhīma and Nakula were then put in charge of protecting Hastināpura, and Sahadeva was assigned to the task of waiting upon all of the guests who would arrive for the performance of the aśvamedha-yajña. During the initiation ceremony, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was dressed in a black deerskin, and he held a sacred staff. Being surrounded by his brothers, as well as many great sages, the king shone magnificently, like the moon surrounded by the stars in the sky. All of Hastināpura then came out to see Arjuna's departure, and at that time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira instructed, "My dear brother, please try to avoid fighting with the kings who come forward to encounter you. Instead, invite them to attend the aśvamedha-yajña, and in this way, try to establish friendly relations."

The challenge-horse was then let loose, and as the sacrificial animal proceeded to wander about, Arjuna followed it, accompanied by a disciple of Yājñavalkya who was engaged in performing auspicious rites for his benefit. Many other brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas also accompanied Arjuna, and as he proceeded to tour all over the world, he had to engage in combat with innumerable kings who angrily sought revenge for the killing of their relatives at Kurukṣetra.

When the challenge-horse arrived at the kingdom of the Trigartas, the sons and grandsons of all the Samsaptakas who had been slain at Kurukṣetra came out of their capital. Desiring to capture the challenge-horse, these Trigartas surrounded it on all sides. Then, when Arjuna diplomatically forbade them with conciliatory speeches, the Trigartas replied with showers of arrows. Arjuna retaliated and soon, thereafter, when Suryavarman, the Trigarta king, was put into difficulty, his brother, Ketuvarman rushed at Kuntī's son with great impetuosity. Arjuna quickly sent Ketuvarman to the abode of Yamaraja, and so another brother of Suryavarman named Dṛtavarman rushed forward to fight. Dṛtavarman then displayed such great skill while releasing his
arrows that, out of a sense of appreciation, Arjuna decided not to kill him. However, as Arjuna fought mildly, Dråtavarman pierced him deeply in the hand, causing the famed Gâñdîva bow to fall down to the ground from his loosened grip. Considering himself to be a great hero, Dråtavarman laughed loudly, but then, after angrily picking up his bow, Arjuna proceeded to kill most of the principle Trigarta warriors within a very short time. At last, as the surviving Trigartas fearfully fled from the battlefield, Suryavarman wisely surrendered unto Arjuna in order to become a subordinate of Mahârâja Yudhiñôhira.

When the challenge-horse reached Prâgjyotisapura, the son of Bhagadatta named Vajradatta came out and seized it and then began returning to his capital. In retaliation, Arjuna rushed forward while releasing showers of arrows, causing Vajradatta to become so afflicted that he had to let the horse go and retreat to the shelter of his city. Then, after encasing himself in armor, Vajradatta urged his infuriated elephant on while at the same time sending forth showers of arrows. In retaliation, Arjuna cut off all the prince's arrows and then knocked him off from the back of his carrier. Vajradatta was undaunted, however, and after quickly remounting his gigantic elephant, he continued fighting. Finally, after three days of continuous combat, as Vajradatta's elephant furiously rushed toward him, Arjuna killed it with a fiery arrow. Arjuna then invited Vajradatta to attend Mahârâja Yudhiñôhira's horse-sacrifice, and since he had fallen on the ground, defeated, the prince wisely consented.

Thereafter, when the challenge-horse entered their territory, the remainder of the Saindhavas quickly came out on their chariots and surrounded Arjuna while bitterly remembering how he had slain Jayadratha. Arjuna was standing upon the ground, and he soon became overpowered by the Saindhavas' showers of arrows, and indeed, at this time, many inauspicious omens became visible. As meteors flashed across the sky, both the sun and moon became eclipsed so that even the demigods and sapta-ṛṣis became fearful. Then, as the residents of heaven uttered exclamations of dismay, Arjuna began to lose consciousness, and then his Gâñdîva bow fell down from his hand. While the Saindhava warriors continued to shower forth their arrows, the demigods and ṛṣis prayed for the return of Arjuna's strength, and thus, by the power of
their good wishes, the heroic son of Kuntī soon regained consciousness. Flaring up with rage, Arjuna soon drove away his enemies. Thereafter, when the Saindhavas rallied, Arjuna made up his mind to exterminate them, but then, upon remembering the words of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra, he controlled his anger. Although Arjuna advised the onrushing Saindhavas to surrender so that their lives could be spared, they were eager for victory, and so replied by releasing thousands of arrows. In retaliation, Arjuna began to angrily cut off the Saindhava's heads. Then, as the survivors turned their backs and fled from the battlefield, Queen Duḥśalā, the daughter of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, came before Arjuna with her grandson. When Arjuna saw his cousin-sister and the son of Jayadratha's son Suratha, he put down his bow and submissively asked what he could do to serve her. Duḥśalā then pushed forward her grandson and explained, "My dear Arjuna, this prince has come here in order to surrender unto you."

Arjuna then inquired about the boy's father, and so Duḥśalā replied, "O son of Pāṇḍu, upon the death of Jayadratha, Suratha had become very deeply aggrieved. Now, as soon as he heard of your arrival, he dropped down dead. Since this small boy is our only remaining descendent, I have come here in order to seek your protection." After saying this, Duḥśalā ordered the Saindhava warriors to desist from fighting, and in turn, Arjuna consoled his cousin-sister as far as was possible.

Thereafter, the challenge-horse wandered through diverse kingdoms, and at last it came to Manipura. As soon as he learned of his father's arrival, prince Babhruvāhana gathered together much wealth and then came out of his city along with many brāhmaṇas to welcome him. Arjuna did not approve of this reception, however, and so he harshly chastised his son by saying, "Alas! You have fallen down from the standard of kṣatriya behavior! If I had come here without weapons, then such a welcome would have been befitting. However, I have approached you with a desire to fight, and thus you must be eager to vanquish me!"

Ulūpī could hear her husband's words, and she immediately pierced through the earth and came before her stepson. After introducing herself, Ulūpī urged Babhruvāhana to satisfy his father by a display of chivalry rather than mildness. Babhruvāhana thus made up his mind to
fight, and for that purpose he mounted upon his chariot, which bore a flag of a golden lion. Thereafter, when Arjuna saw Babhruvāhana come out and order his men to seize the challenge-horse, he became filled with joy, and while standing upon the ground, he prepared to resist his son's attack.

A very fierce duel ensued, and when Babhruvāhana pierced him on the shoulder, Arjuna felt so much pain that he had to support himself with his bow while almost losing consciousness. Regaining his composure, Arjuna praised his son and then challenged him to remain on the battlefield just a little while longer in order to receive his onslaught of arrows. Thereafter, Arjuna cut down Babhruvāhana's emblem and then killed his horses. The duel thus continued with both combatants stationed upon the ground. Then, under the influence of fighting spirit, Babhruvāhana suddenly pierced Arjuna deeply in the heart, and as a result, the heroic son of Kuntī fell down dead onto the battlefield.

When he realized what he had done, Babhruvāhana fainted away, partly due to being wounded and exhausted, but mostly on account of the terrible grief which he had felt while considering himself to be the slayer of his own father. When Citrāṅgadā heard that her husband had been slain and that her son had also fallen down wounded, she came onto the battlefield with an agonized heart. The princess of Manipura was weeping profusely and her entire body trembled, and as soon as she saw Arjuna's lifeless body, she fainted onto the ground. After some time, upon coming to her senses, Citrāṅgadā saw Ulūpī present there and so angrily questioned her, "O princess of the Nāgas, how is it that you are not weeping after having caused the death of your own husband?"

Actually, Citrāṅgadā thought that Ulūpī had incited Babhruvāhana to kill Arjuna in retaliation for his having accepted another wife. she then sat down, and after taking her dead husband's feet upon her lap, she vowed, "Ulūpī, if you do not restore Arjuna to life, then I shall remain here and fast until death!"

Meanwhile, as his mother continued to indulge in piteous lamentations, Babhruvāhana regained consciousness. When the Manipura prince saw his father lying dead and his mother raving like a demented madwoman, he began to bewail his own cruel fate for having sinfully killed his father. Thinking that there was no expiration for this abominable act,
Babhruvāhana also decided to sit down and give up his life by executing the vow of prāya. After touching water, the price sat down, and at this time, Ulūpī thought of the special gem which the Nāgas use for bringing their dead back to life. Immediately upon being thought of, the jewel miraculously appeared in Ulūpī's hands. The Nāga princess then said, "My dear Babhruvāhana, rise up! Give up your grief, for Arjuna cannot be killed by anyone. This incident is actually an illusion which has been created for your father's benefit. Since Arjuna had desired to test your prowess, I had incited you to fight with him for his satisfaction. Now, just take this gem and put it upon your father's chest."
Indeed, as soon as Babhruvāhana put the wonderful jewel upon Arjuna's chest, the Pāṇḍava hero got up just like a person who arises after a sound sleep. The astonished prince then worshipped his father with great respect, and from the sky, Indra showered down flowers. As the sounds of celestial drums mixed with ecstatic exclamations of joy, Arjuna got up, and while embracing his dear, son, he smelled his head with great affection. Then, when Arjuna saw Ulūpī and Citrāṅgadā standing together, he inquired, "My dear daughter of the Nāga king, why have you come here?"
Ulūpī replied, "My dear son of Kuntī, after the fall of Bhīṣma, the Vasus had called for Gaṅgādevī and said, 'My dear goddess, because Arjuna has killed your son in a most unrighteous manner, we intend to curse him.' Gaṅgādevī gave her approval, and since I had overheard this conversation, I became terribly aggrieved at heart. After I informed my father of what had happened, he went to the Vasus and begged them to retract their curse. The Vasus finally agreed to do so, but only on the condition that you would have to be thrown down on the battlefield by your own son. O Arjuna, this incident was thus engineered by me just to counteract your unrighteous slaying of Bhīṣma with the help of Śikhaṇḍī. You should know that without this expiation, you would surely have sunk down into hell."
After hearing this, Arjuna became very pleased with Ulūpī, and he praised her very highly. Then, after inviting Citrāṅgadā and Babhruvāhana to attend Yudhiṣṭhira's horse sacrifice, Arjuna was requested by his son to spend the night at his palace along with his two wives. Arjuna had to refuse, however, for it was his duty to relentlessly
follow the challenge-horse wherever it might wander. Thus, after taking permission from Ulupī and Citrāṅgadā, Arjuna departed.

When the challenge-horse came to the city of Rājagrha within the kingdom of Māgadha, the son of Sahadeva named Meghasandhi came out and childishly challenged Arjuna to fight. Arjuna did not want to kill the prince, and so he proceeded to fight very mildly. Because of this, Meghasandhi was able to pierce Arjuna very deeply as he stood on the ground, and thus, the son of Pāṇḍu at last became a bit enraged. In retaliation, Arjuna quickly killed Meghasandhi's horses, broke his bow, and then beheaded his driver. Still, without becoming disheartened, the Māgadha prince picked up his mace, and after jumping down from his disabled chariot, he rushed at his foe. Arjuna then cut Meghasandhi's mace to pieces, and he then addressed the helpless prince as follows: "My dear boy, you have sufficiently displayed your prowess, and thus you can desist from further fighting. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira has commanded me not to kill my opponents, but instead, invite them to his horse sacrifice. Therefore, I request you to please give up your enmity and establish peace with the emperor."

Meghasandhi then approached Arjuna with folded hands, and while admitting his defeat, he worshipped the Pāṇḍava hero with great respect. Thereafter, Arjuna ascended his chariot and resumed following the challenge-horse until it at last came to the city of Śuktimā within the kingdom of the Cedis. Śarabha, the son of Śiśupāla, first of all fought with Arjuna, but after being defeated, he worshipped the Pāṇḍava. Thereafter, Arjuna wended his way through many kingdoms, and among the numerous battles which he fought, the duel with Ekalavya's son was especially fierce. Still, by the grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna defeated the niśāda prince. Indeed, Arjuna always came out victorious. When the challenge-horse came to Dvārakā, the Yadu princes wanted to capture it, but King Ugrasena made them desist. Ugrasena and Vasudeva then went out and gave Arjuna a royal reception, and with their permission, the son of Pāṇḍu departed.

When the challenge horse reached the kingdom of the Gandharas, the son of Śakuni remembered the hatred which his father had for the Pāṇḍavas, and so he came out with a large army, eager for battle. Arjuna
tried to pacify the Gândhāra warriors with words of conciliation, but, ignoring him, they continued to surround the challenge-horse. At this, Arjuna angrily began severing the beads of the Gândhāra soldiers with his arrows, and indeed, his attack was so sudden and violent that they had to let go of the challenge-horse and beat a hasty retreat. The son of Śakuni then rushed forward, and although Arjuna tried to dissuade him, he disregarded these words and replied by releasing his arrows. Arjuna then knocked the crown off from the son of Sakuni's head and at this, the prince panicked and fled, followed by all of his soldiers. Then, as Arjuna slaughtered a great number of Gándhāra warriors from behind, Śakuni's widow came out of the city. Accompanied by her son's ministers and carrying *arghya* for the worship of Arjuna, she forbade her son to continue fighting. Arjuna then consoled the prince by saying, "My dear son of Śakuni, I refrained from killing you because of your relationship with my aunt Gándhārī. Now, kindly give up your enmity and establish peace with us by admitting your subordination and attending Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's horse-sacrifice."

Thereafter, the challenge-horse turned back toward Hastināpura, and when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was informed of this, he summoned his brothers in order to give them the good news. Thereafter, the king ordered Bhēma to take some *brāhmaṇas* out of the city in order to select a suitable site for the sacrificial performance. Thus, Bhēma went out from Hastināpura with a number of *brāhmaṇaṇaś* as well as engineers who were expert in constructing sacrificial arenas. A beautiful spot was then selected, and within a short while, the ground was leveled. Hundreds of palaces with columns of gold were then constructed and new roads were cleared, leading to the sacrificial arena. When all of this had been accomplished, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira next directed Bhēma to send out messengers to invite all the great kings of the earth to attend the horse-sacrifice. Thus, before long, numerous kings began pouring into Hastināpura from all over the world, and they bore vast amounts of wealth to be presented as taxes for the emperor. In addition, all of the foremost *ṛṣis* came to attend the sacrifice, along with their disciples, and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira received and worshipped them with the utmost respect.

When the engineers completed the construction of the sacrificial arena,
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was notified, and thereafter, all of those who had assembled went there so that the yajña could begin. All of the invited kings were extremely impressed by the arrangements which had been made, because there was not a single item which was not entirely made out of pure gold. Since 100,000 brāhmaṇas were to be fed daily, there were lakes of yogurt and ghee. Actually, it appeared as if the whole of Jambūdvīpa had come to attend the aśvamedha-yajña. Lord Kṛṣṇa then arrived at the sacrificial arena, accompanied by Lord Balarāma, Sātyaki, Pradyumna, and many other members of the Yadu dynasty. After offering respects to His elder cousin, Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, while at Dvārakā I had received word that Arjuna is now approaching Hastināpura, after having become very fatigued and emaciated due to fighting numerous battles. Therefore, you should begin the preliminary rites for the sacrificial performance without delay. My envoy also delivered the following message from Arjuna to you: 'My dear brother, since innumerable kings will be attending your sacrifice, please make sure that they are especially well received. In addition, I hope that you can make some arrangements whereby there will be no such incident like the killing which had almost disrupted the Rājasūya sacrifice."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then inquired, "My dear Kṛṣṇa, why is it that the most auspicious personality - he who possesses impeccable character and faultless bodily features - has to endure the greatest amount of suffering and hardship?"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was thinking about how Arjuna had to undergo so much trouble just to enable him to perform the aśvamedha-yajña. After thinking over the matter for some time, Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "My dear king, I do not find any bodily feature in Arjuna which would indicate misfortune, except that perhaps his cheekbones are a little too high. This indicates that he always has to travel and thus remain far from home. Other than this, I do not see any fault in Arjuna."

When Lord Kṛṣṇa said this, Draupadī glared angrily at Him, for she could not bear to hear any criticism of her husband. Lord Kṛṣṇa simply smiled in return, however, for He was pleased to see this indication of Draupadī's pure love of His dear friend. Just then, while everyone was engaged in talking about Arjuna, a messenger arrived. Then, when the
envoy bowed down to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and informed him of Arjuna's impending arrival, the king became so overjoyed that his eyes filled up with tears, and he gave away abundant wealth to the bearer of good news. Finally, two days later, the challenge-horse arrived at the sacrificial arena, after having wandered over the entire earth, and it was followed by Arjuna. Keeping Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira at their head, the Pāṇḍavas and Lord Kṛṣṇa rushed forward to greet Arjuna with hearts which were throbbing due to transcendental affection. Arjuna first of all touched the feet of Dhātarāñöra, Yudhiñöhira, Bhéma, and all other elder personalities, and then he heartily embraced his dear friend Kṛṣṇa.

Later on that day, while Arjuna was taking some rest, Babhruvāhana arrived along with his mother and step-mother. As the prince entered Kuntīdevi's room in order to offer obeisances unto his grandmother, Citrāṅgadā and Ulūpī met with their co-wives, Draupādi and Subhadrā. Thereafter, when Babhruvāhana very humbly approached Lord Kṛṣṇa in order to worship Him, the lord reciprocated by presenting him a very excellent chariot. Then, three days later, Śrīla Vyāsadeva went to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and commanded, "O King, the sacrifice must begin this very day, and upon its completion you should give away three times the required dakṣiṇa to the priests. In this way, you will get as much benefit as if you had performed three aśvamedha-yajñas."

First of all, everyone was fed sumptuously by Bhīma. Then, animals, including the challenge-horse, were tied to the sacrificial stakes. The sacrifice continued for many days, and at intervals, the Gandharvas provided exceedingly delightful musical entertainment. After the other animals had been sacrificed, the challenge-horse was killed and then cut up into small pieces. Thereafter, Draupādi was made to sit down next to the cut-up horse while the brāhmaṇas took its marrow and cooked it. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers then smelled the smoke which was produced by the cooking marrow, for that scent had the power to cleanse all of one's sinful reactions. Thereafter, the remaining limbs of the horse were put into the sacrificial fire, and in this way, the yajña came to a successful close. Then, while receiving the blessings of the priests, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gave away the entire earth to Śrīla Vyāsadeva as dakṣiṇa. Śrīla Vyāsadeva graciously accepted the gift, and
then he returned the earth to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. The king was not inclined to take the property of a brāhmaṇa, however, and so he said, "My dear grandfather, the giving away of the earth after the performance of the aśvamedha-yajña is the ordained dakṣina which is mentioned in the sāstra. Now, after having given away the earth, I wish to take the vānaprastha order of life, and enter the forest, for this has been my long-cherished desire."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's announcement created a great stir in the assembly. The king's brothers and Draupadī then gave their consent, and from above, a voice declared the excellence of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's words. However, Śrīla Vyāsadeva insisted, "My dear king, this cannot, be for I have already returned the earth to you. Now, satisfy all of the brāhmaṇas who are present here by giving gifts of gold."

Thus, at Śrīla Vyāsadeva's urging, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira proceeded to give away billions of units of gold in charity to the brāhmaṇas. By doing so, the king more than tripled the required dakṣina which is to be given away at the completion of a horse-sacrifice. Śrīla Vyāsadeva accepted all of the gold and then divided it among the priests. In return, the priests distributed the gold to the brāhmaṇas so that all of them were able to take away as much of the precious metal as desired. Finally, whatever gold remained was distributed to the kṣatriyas, vaiśyas, śūdras and mlecchas.

The brāhmaṇas then took their leave and returned home, fully satisfied, while Śrīla Vyāsadeva gave his portion of dakṣina, which was the largest, to Kuntīdevī. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then took his avabhṛtha bath, and at the conclusion, he gave a fabulously large amount of wealth to the invited kings as gifts. After this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira privately summoned Babhruvāhana, and while lavishly bestowing priceless gifts upon him, the king gave him permission to return to Maṇipura. All of the other invited kings were then granted their leave, and after worshiping Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gave permission for the Yādavas to return to Dvārakā. However, before the completion of the aśvamedha-yajña, there was one very wonderful incident which occurred.

After gold had been distributed to all persons, from the most elevated
brāhmaṇa, down to the poor and disabled, everyone began to converse among themselves, and there was no topic of discussion other than the magnificence of the sacrifice they had witnessed. At this time, a blue-eyed mongoose, half of whose body had been transformed into gold, arrived at the sacrificial arena. Then, all of a sudden, with a loud and awe-inspiring voice, the mongoose announced, "O assembled kings, this sacrifice does not even equal the little quantity of barley powder which was once given away by a brāhmaṇa at Kurukṣetra who was following the uṇca vow."

Upon hearing this, everyone was astonished. The brāhmaṇas then approached the mongoose and inquired, "Who are you? How is it that you dare to criticize this great sacrifice, which has been performed exactly according to the śāstric injunctions, and which has satisfied all classes of living beings? O Mongoose, you appear to have a celestial body, and thus we are certain that your words convey some grave meaning. Because of this, we shall be very happy to hear whatever it is you wish to say in order to explain your statement."

The mongoose replied, "O brāhmaṇas, you can rest assured that what was spoken by me is not at all false. Kindly listen to me now, and you shall understand everything after hearing the following story:

There was once a brāhmaṇa living at Kurukṣetra who subsisted only upon the grains which were left in the field. Since this is the mode of life for a pigeon, such a vow is called 'uṇca'. While residing along with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law, this brāhmaṇa performed austerities and would eat only during the sixth part of the day. (In the Vedic paradigm, the 12-hour day is divided into 8 parts.) Once, there was a great drought, and as a result, a terrible famine, and because the brāhmaṇa never stored food, he had nothing to eat. Since all vegetation had dried up, the brāhmaṇa and his family were forced to pass many days without even a morsel of food. And yet, even though it was the middle of summer, and due to the drought there were no grains, the brāhmaṇa would still daily go to the agricultural fields, just to maintain his rigid vow. As the days passed, the brāhmaṇa and his family became extremely emaciated and severely afflicted by the pangs of hunger. Then, once, it so happened that during the sixth part of the day, the brāhmaṇa received a little quantity of barley. In order to make a preparation called
saktu, he then ground the barley into powder.

Finally, after performing his religious duties, the brāhmaṇa divided up the barley powder among his family members. However, just as the family sat down in order to eat, a brāhmaṇa guest happened to arrive there. All of the members of the brāhmaṇa’s family were completely freed from envy and its resultant anger, they were never impeded from the accomplishment of their purpose due to the agitation of the senses, they were never proud, nor were they ever pained upon seeing the happiness of others. Thus, the members of the brāhmaṇa family were very glad to welcome their guest, and after offering him their respects, they inquired about his welfare. Finally, after offering his brāhmaṇa guest a seat and water to wash his feet, the host-brāhmaṇa gave him his share of saktu. After accepting the barley powder, the brāhmaṇa quickly ate it, and when he saw that his guest's hunger was not yet appeased, the host-brāhmaṇa began to think of what else he could offer. When she saw her husband's dilemma, the wife suggested, "My dear lord, why are you hesitating? Just allow me to give my portion to the guest."

The host-brāhmaṇa could see how his wife was trembling due to undernourishment, however, and so he forbade her by saying, "My dear, a man's wife is the support of his entire family. Therefore, if you do not eat, then we shall all be put into a very dangerous position."

The wife replied, "My dear lord, even though you are starving, you gave your share to our guest. The wife is the follower of the husband, and so I also wish to give my share to the brāhmaṇa!"

After hearing this, the brāhmaṇa host took his wife's share of barley powder and offered it to the guest. Upon receiving the food, the brāhmaṇa guest ate it, and still, his hunger was not appeased. Then, as the host-brāhmaṇa was wondering what to do next, his son said, "My dear father, there is no cause for anxiety. Simply give our guest my share of the meal."

The brāhmaṇa tried to dissuade his son by saying, "My dear boy, the hunger which is felt by a young son is certainly stronger than that which is experienced by older people. Besides, you are my son and thus it is your duty to rescue me after my death. For this reason, I cannot bear to think of endangering your life."

The son was insistent and at last, the host-brāhmaṇa took his share of
the barley powder and offered it to the guest. And yet, even after eating the son's portion, the guest-\textit{brähmana}'s hunger was not appeased. Therefore, the host-\textit{brähmaṇa} was very ashamed, thinking that he had no more food to offer. When the daughter-in-law saw this she said, "My dear father-in-law, I shall always be indebted to you, because it is on account of your son that I will be able to give birth to my own son and thus earn great religious merit. Please give up your anxiety and offer my share to the guest."

The host-\textit{brähmaṇa} replied, "My dear daughter-in-law, I cannot bear to see you in such an emaciated condition. Therefore, please give up the idea of giving away your share of the meal."

The girl insisted, "My dear father-in-law, I only want to do that which is for your welfare. If you give the. \textit{brähmaṇa} my share of the barley powder, then you will fulfill your responsibility to feed guests properly."

While marveling at his daughter's-in-law firm devotion toward her superiors, the host \textit{brähmaṇa} took her share of food and gave it to the guest. The \textit{brähmaṇa} guest was actually Dharma, the god of righteousness, appearing in human form. Having become extremely satisfied, Dharma then said, "O \textit{brähmaṇa}, it has given me great pleasure to receive a gift offered with such purity of intent. Indeed, this wonderful act of charity has already become a topic of conversation in heaven. Look now! Just see how the demigods are sending forth showers of flowers from the sky as a token of the appreciation for your exalted behavior. My dear \textit{brähmaṇa}, by this wonderful act, you have earned the right to ascend to heaven without delay. Generally, hunger destroys a person's wisdom and makes him discard virtue all together. Therefore, one who can conquer hunger, easily conquers heaven."

"When a person possesses nothing but a glass of water and then gives it away in charity, the merit he earns is equivalent to that which is achieved by someone who gives away 100 of something that he possesses 1,000 of. Of course, the gift of anything which was not lawfully acquired is fruitless, and can never please the demigods. My dear \textit{brähmaṇa}, your sincere gift of this small quantity of barley flour is more meritorious than the performance of an \textit{aśvamedha-yajña}. I am Dharma, and I came here just to test your exalted character. Now, you and your family members can board the celestial chariot which is waiting to take you to
Brahmaloka.

The mongoose then said, "My dear brähmaṇas and kings, after the brähmaṇa and his family ascended to heaven, I came out from my hole in the ground. At that time, I was fortunate enough to accidentally touch some of the barley powder which had been offered, some of the water which had washed Dharma's feet, and some of the celestial flowers which had fallen from the sky. As a result, my head and half of my body instantly turned to gold. Ever since that time, I have wandered all over the earth, visiting the āśramas of great rṣis and the sacrificial arenas of great saintly kings, hoping to transform the other half of my body into gold. Indeed, it is for this purpose that I came here after hearing about Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's horse sacrifice. And yet, even though I came here with such high hopes, the remaining half of my body has not turned into gold. Now, you can understand why I had criticized this sacrifice as not being equivalent to the brähmaṇa's gift of a small quantity of barley powder!"

After saying this, the mongoose suddenly disappeared from view, and soon thereafter, the brähmaṇas departed for home. After hearing this, King Janamejaya became very curious to know about the real identity of the mongoose, and in reply to his inquiry, Vaiśampāyana narrated the following story:

Once upon a time, while preparing to perform the śraddhā ceremony, Jamadagni milked his kamadhenu cow and thus kept the milk in a new pot. In order to test this rṣi, Dharma assumed the form of Anger and spoiled the milk by entering into the pot. Jamadagni could understand this, and so he intelligently restrained his anger and thus did not exhibit even the slightest indication of being disturbed. At this, Anger became very afraid of Jamadagni's curse, and so he came before the rṣi in the guise of a brähmaṇa lady. Anger then admitted, "My dear Jamadagni, I have been conquered by you. Now that I have voluntarily come here in order to seek your protection, you should kindly forgive me."

Jamadagni replied, "O Anger, I will excuse you, but since you have spoiled the milk which I had intended to offer in the śraddhā ceremony, you had better go to the pitṛs and pacify them as well."

Dharma, in the form of Anger, did as he was told, but as a result, he was cursed by the pitṛs to accept the form of a mongoose. Anger begged them
to be merciful, and so the *pitṛs* agreed that by speaking disrespectfully of Dharma, he would soon be freed from their curse. Thus, ever since that time, the mongoose had wandered about to numerous sacrificial performances, criticizing them. Finally, by visiting the *aśvamedha-yajña* performed by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, the son of Dharma, the mongoose gained relief from the effects of the *pitṛs*’ curse.

After the completion of the *aśvamedha-yajña*, the Pāṇḍavas proceeded to rule over the earth righteously for fifteen years, and because of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira’s command, Dhṛtarāśtra and Gāndhārī were obeyed implicitly. Vidura, Sañjaya, Kṛpa, and Yuyutsu personally served Dhṛtarāśtra while Kuntīdevī and other ladies waited on Gāndhārī. At Yudhiṣṭhira’s urging, all kinds of royal luxuries were provided for the comfort of his aunt and uncle, and everyone tried their best to make the old couple forget the grief caused by the loss of their sons. The only exception was Bhima, for he could never forget the fact that it was Dhṛtarāśtra who had sanctioned the wicked plans of the evil-minded Duryodhana, thus causing him and his brothers so much suffering.

Śrīla Vyāsadeva regularly visited Hastināpura in order to recite the ancient histories to his son, and King Yudhiṣṭhira supplied vast amounts of wealth for Dhṛtarāśtra to distribute to the *brāhmaṇas*. Because the Pāṇḍavas respected him in the way that disciples behave toward their preceptor, Dhṛtarāśtra became very affectionate to them, just as if they were his own children. Indeed, Dhṛtarāśtra found himself to be in a more congenial position than he had ever experienced while living under the care of his own sons. While feeling great satisfaction with Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira’s perfect behavior, Dhṛtarāśtra would sometimes remember the wicked conduct of his son Duryodhana and thus become ashamed.

On the other hand, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira completely forgot all of the offenses which Dhṛtarāśtra and his sons had committed. Indeed, because the Pāṇḍava king was so dedicated to serving his elderly uncle, everyone was afraid to even mention the past wicked deeds of the Kauravas. Bhima also tried to force himself to treat Dhṛtarāśtra respectfully, but he hated very much to do so. Similarly, whenever Dhṛtarāśtra would think about his sons, he could not help but feel hatred toward Bhima for
having killed them.
In order to express his malice, Bhīma sometimes conspired with crooked servants in order to have Dhṛtarāṣṭra's commands disobeyed. One day, while conversing with his friends in the presence of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī, Bhīma began to slap his arms as he loudly bragged, "Just see! It is with these arms, which are as powerful as maces, that I killed all 100 sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra!"

When he heard these harsh words, which were spoken just to pierce his heart like darts, Dhṛtarāṣṭra became completely overwhelmed with despair due to being repeatedly attacked by the arrowy words of Bhīma. Still, the blind king hid his grief so carefully within the core of his heart that Yudhiṣṭhira and others could not even slightly detect it. One day however, Dhṛtarāṣṭra called together his associates and confided, "My dear friends, for some time I have been secretly undergoing austerities with my wife. Each day I eat only one meal, consisting of very little food and every day, behind locked doors, I put on a deerskin and perform silent meditation. At night, I lay down upon a bed of kuṣa-grass. I am executing these penances in order to expiate myself from the sinful reactions incurred by having installed Duryodhana upon the royal throne. Due to fear of the gentle hearted Yudhiṣṭhira, I had kept all of this a secret up until now."

After saying this much, Dhṛtarāṣṭra turned to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and said, "My dear nephew, I have lived very happily under your care, and I have also accumulated a great deal of merit by performing sacrifices and giving in charity. Now, however, in my old age, I have become very anxious to attire myself in rags and tree bark and retire to the forest along with my wife. I want to practice austerities while subsisting on air alone. Therefore, please give me your permission so that I may depart without delay."

In reply, Yudhiṣṭhira greatly condemned himself and said, "Alas! I must have become so much merged into enjoying my position as emperor of the world that I unwittingly forgot all about my poor old aunt and uncle! For this reason, you have become so desperate that you want to leave my ungrateful company in order to go live in the forest. My dear uncle, you are the factual lord of the Kuru dynasty, and thus you are free to make Yuyutsu, or anyone else whom you may choose, the emperor while I
retire to the forest along with my brothers. If you go to the forest then I shall follow you, for I consider you as my very father. I could never bear to go on maintaining my life while having to think about all of the sufferings which you would undergo while living as an ascetic.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then argued, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, in the Kuru dynasty, it has always been the tradition that a kṣatriya retires to the forest in old age for the purpose of performing austerities. It is for this reason alone that I wish to leave Hastināpura, and so once again I beg you to give me permission."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra's entire body trembled, and with folded hands he next said, "My dear Kṛpa, O Sañjaya, due to my very old age, I have become exhausted just by speaking. Therefore, I beg you to solicit Yudhiṣṭhira for the permission that I desire."

While speaking, Dhṛtarāṣṭra supported himself by leaning upon Gāndhārī, and indeed he looked practically on the verge of death. While beholding this pitiful sight, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira exclaimed in a grief-laden voice, "How remarkable it is that the person who had formerly possessed the strength of 10,000 elephants and had crushed to pieces the iron statue of Bhīma, is today leaning upon a woman!"

Actually, King Yudhiṣṭhira was convinced that he was the sole cause of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's melancholy, and out of repentance he made a silent vow to also begin fasting from that day onward. Then, in order to relieve Dhṛtarāṣṭra's exhaustion, Yudhiṣṭhira took some cold water and rubbed it over his uncle's face and chest. Indeed, just by receiving Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's touch, Dhṛtarāṣṭra recovered some of his strength and then said, "My dear nephew, please embrace me, for your auspicious touch has the effect of nectar. Because this is the eighth part of the day, when I am accustomed to take my meal, due to fasting I had practically fainted, simply from the exertion of talking so much."

Thereafter, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gently massaged every part of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's body, and the blind and aged king very affectionately responded by embracing his nephew and smelling his head. While witnessing this touching scene, Vidura and others wept due to the feelings of strong emotion which swelled within their hearts, although Gāndhārī bore her grief silently. Then, when Dhṛtarāṣṭra once again requested permission to depart for the forest, Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My
dear uncle, first of all eat something. Only then shall I be able to peacefully think about what should be done."

Finally, Dhṛtarāṣṭra agreed to take some food, and at this time, Śrīla Vyāsadeva appeared there and commanded, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you must grant Dhṛtarāṣṭra permission to retire to the forest so that he will not die an inglorious death at home. Let your uncle follow in the footsteps of the previous great saintly kings."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then replied, "My dear grandfather, I am always ready to obey your order. I shall certainly let Dhṛtarāṣṭra retire to the forest."

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then said, "My dear grandson, a kṣatriya must either die while fighting upon the battlefield, or having executed austerities in the forest. O Yudhiṣṭhira, rest assured that your uncle's desire to leave home is not at all motivated by ill-will towards you."

After saying this, Śrīla Vyāsadeva departed, and King Yudhiṣṭhira then said, "My dear uncle, I am now prepared to fulfill all of your requests. Please just eat something before departing for the forest."

Dhṛtarāṣṭra then retired to his rooms, followed by Vidura, Sañjaya, and Kṛpa. There he performed some religious rituals and finally ate something. The Pāṇḍavas also had their meal, and then they once again approached their old uncle. After his nephews had taken their seats surrounding him, Dhṛtarāṣṭra proceeded to instruct them at length about the duties of a virtuous king. Afterwards, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira expressed his appreciation by saying, "My dear uncle, now that Bhīṣma has departed for heaven and Lord Kṛṣṇa has returned to Dvārakā, and since Sañjaya and Vidura will soon accompany you to the forest, there will be no one left who can give us such good instructions."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira encouraged Dhṛtarāṣṭra to go on speaking, but the old king expressed his fatigue and then retired to his rooms. Gāndhārī then inquired, "My dear husband, now that you have received the blessings of Śrīla Vyāsadeva and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, when will you actually depart for the forest?"

Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, "O Gāndhārī, I shall leave Hastināpura very soon, but first of all I want to give away in charity vast amounts of wealth for the benefit of my departed sons."
Dhṛtarāṣṭra then summoned Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and when the Pāṇḍava king learned of his old, blind uncle's desire, he ordered that immense wealth be brought and all of the citizens assembled. In this way, charity was distributed to all persons of the four social orders, and at the conclusion, Dhṛtarāṣṭra made the following announcement: "My dear subjects, I shall now accept the vānaprastha stage of life along with my wife, and so I beg all of you to grant me permission to retire to the forest."

Upon hearing this, a loud roar arose from the crowd as anguished exclamations of lamentation uttered by voices that were choked up with tears filled the air. Then, amidst cries of "Alas!" and "Oh no!" Dhṛtarāṣṭra continued to speak as follows: "Although my son Duryodhana was by nature wicked and greedy, he never harmed the ordinary citizens while executing the state duties. Still, I want to take this opportunity to beg forgiveness for any wrong which I or my son may have committed while ruling over the kingdom. I bow down to all of you and beg for your pardon so that I may retire to the forest with a clear conscience."

After hearing this very humble submission, the citizens simply stood looking at one another with expressions of great wonder. Being unable to utter a word, the people began to cry, and so they covered their faces with their garments. Then, after gaining some composure the subjects appointed a brāhmaṇa named Sāmba to reply on their behalf. The brāhmaṇa said, "My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, all of the citizens want to assure you that they are your well-wishers and that they have always considered you to be their benefactor. They furthermore assure you that they have never felt even the slightest inconvenience or injustice while living under the rule of your son. The citizens give you their permission to depart to the forest, but at the same time they regret that they shall always have to live in sorrow while remembering your good qualities."

The crowd heartily applauded the brāhmaṇa's words, and after expressing his gratitude for the citizens' loving sentiments, Dhṛtarāṣṭra dismissed the assembly and retired to his palace. The next morning, Dhṛtarāṣṭra sent Vidura to inform Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira that he would depart for the forest on the full-moon day in the month of Kārtika, after completing all of the necessary preliminary rituals. When Vidura
delivered this message, he further informed Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira of how Dhṛtaraṣṭra had requested that he be given some wealth so that he could perform the śraddhā ceremony for Bhīṣma, Droṇa, his sons and other departed souls. Bhīma could not tolerate the idea of assisting in the performance of a śraddhā ceremony for the benefit of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, however. Therefore, after hearing Vidura's request, he very angrily declared, "My dear brother, please do not give Dhṛtarāṣṭra anything! Let Kuntīdevī and ourselves perform the śraddhā ceremony for Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa. Forget about Duryodhana and his brothers! Let them sink further down into hell!"

Arjuna tried to pacify Bhīma by reminding him that great souls do not cherish enmity toward persons who had previously harmed them. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then allowed Vidura to take as much wealth as Dhṛtarāṣṭra required, and at the same time he urged Bhīma not to be unhappy. Bhīma was not easily pacified, however, and so he continued to cast angry glances at Arjuna. Vidura then returned to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and while relating everything that had happened, he urged the old king to forgive Bhīma's harsh words in consideration of the great suffering which the Pāṇḍavas had to endure while in exile. Thereafter, Dhṛtarāṣṭra invited thousands of brāhmaṇas, and for the benefit of his departed relatives, he gave them great quantities of clothing, gold, jewels, villages, agricultural fields, animals, maidservants, and whatever else that was requested. Then, at Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's command, whatever Dhṛtarāṣṭra had give away was increased tenfold, and when the distribution of charity was completed, the brāhmaṇas were very sumptuously fed. For ten days, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's performance of the śraddhā ceremony continued like a great festival, and thus all of the brāhmaṇas appeared to have become inundated in an ocean of charity. Food and drink were also distributed in abundance, and professional singers, dancers, actors, and comedians all contributed to the merriment. Thereafter, when Dhṛtarāṣṭra had decided upon his exact hour of departure, he performed certain preliminary rituals under the guidance of expert brāhmaṇas, and then called for the Pāṇḍavas. In the presence of his nephews, Dhṛtarāṣṭra laid aside his royal dress once and for all, and then put on deerskin and tree bark. After attiring himself in this way, Dhṛtarāṣṭra went outside and performed a ceremony to worship the
palace wherein he had resided for so many years. At the conclusion of this ritual, the old king lavishly distributed gifts to all of the palace servants who had so faithfully rendered him service. While watching this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became so overwhelmed by grief that he suddenly fell down in a swoon upon the ground.

Arjuna rushed forward to raise up his elder brother, and as Dhṛtarāṣṭra set out for the forest, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira followed him, along with his brothers, Vidura, Sañjaya, Kṛpa, Yuyutsu, Dhaumya, and all the brāhmaṇas. Kuntidevi led the procession while keeping the blindfolded Gāṇdhārī's hands upon her shoulders, and behind the men walked the ladies, including Draupadī, Uttarā, Citrāṅgadā, and many others, all of whom were wailing loudly. Each and every citizen came out in order to see Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and they became just as distressed as when they had formerly witnessed the Pāṇḍavas' departure for the forest. Even ladies who had never before seen the sun or the moon stood in the street in order to behold Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāṇdhārī. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was trembling due to weakness as he made his way through the crowded streets, and thus it was with great difficulty that he proceeded.

At last, Dhṛtarāṣṭra left the city of Hastināpura through its principle gate, and he repeatedly urged the citizens to return home. Dhṛtarāṣṭra allowed Vidura and Sañjaya to accompany him, but he forbade Yuyutsu and Kṛpa by handing them over to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Gradually, all of the subjects turned back, and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, was also about to return to his palace, along with his brothers, when he suddenly realized that his mother was intent upon accompanying Dhṛtarāṣṭra. This was a great shock for Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, and he tearfully pleaded, "My dear mother, please desist! If you are concerned about the welfare of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāṇdhārī, then please allow me to accompany them in your place."

Kuntidevi continued walking, however, and then, after a long silence, she turned to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and said, "My dear son, I am also fully determined to retire to the forest in order to take to the execution of austerities. After smearing dirt all over my body, I shall engage in the service of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāṇdhārī."

After hearing their mother speak like this, the Pāṇḍavas became
exceedingly distressed. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira remained silent for some time, as if deeply absorbed in thought. Then, he once again begged his mother to relent. Bhīma then implored, "My dear mother, why did you urge us to fight against the Kauravas in order to regain our kingdom if you now intend to abandon us?"

Kuntīdevī was adamant, however, and she ignored the lamentations of her sons. The Pāṇḍavas continued to follow their mother, as did Draupadī and Subhadrā, and so Kuntī finally turned to them and said, "My dear children, previously I had incited your wrath so that you would not sink down into oblivion and thus have to live out your lives as subordinates of others. Personally, I never had any ambition to gain sovereignty over the earth. Ever since the death of my husband, I have cherished the hope of one day being able to perform austerities in order to reach that exalted destination which he has attained. Now, please give up your attempt to dissuade me from my determination and return to Hastināpura."

The Pāṇḍavas were moved by the noble words of their mother. After circumambulating Dhṛtarāṣṭra and offering respects unto him, the Pāṇḍavas prepared to return home. While being supported on both sides by Vidura and Gāndhārī, Dhṛtarāṣṭra then ordered his wife to make Kuntīdevī desist from following him any further. Gāndhārī thus tried her best to persuade Kuntī to return to Hastināpura along with her sons. She was unable to convince her so Dhṛtarāṣṭra at last relented. Thereafter, when the Pāṇḍavas entered the Kuru capital, they saw how all of the citizens were wearing cheerless expressions, and they themselves, being bereft of their mother, were also very aggrieved. By nightfall, Dhṛtarāṣṭra had reached the banks of the Gaṅgā, and he stopped there in order to take rest. The brāhmaṇas accompanying the party lit a sacrificial fire, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra made offerings of libations just as the sun was setting. Vidura and Saṅjaya then made a bed of kuṣa-grass for the old king, and nearby, they prepared a similar one for Gāndhārī. Kuntī laid down next to Gāndhārī, while the others, headed by Vidura, slept close within hearing distance.

The next morning, the party set out after all had performed their religious duties. From the banks of the Gaṅgā, Dhṛtarāṣṭra went to Kurukṣetra, where he came to the āśrama of the saintly, retired Kekaya
king, Satayupa. After exchanging greetings, Satayupa accompanied Dhṛtarāṣṭra to the abode of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, who then initiated the old Kuru king into the vānaprastha mode of life. Thereafter, Dhṛtarāṣṭra returned to Satayupa's āśrama, and as he continued to reside there, the Kekaya king instructed him regarding all the details of forest life. Not only Dhṛtarāṣṭra, but everyone who had followed him, such as Gāndhārī, Kuntī, the widow of Bhūriśravas, the son of Bāhlika, and the widows of the Dhṛtarāṣṭras, commenced the performance of austerities after dressing themselves in deerskin and tree bark. Not before very long, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's body became so emaciated that it appeared to be no more than a bag of skin and bones, bedecked with matted hair.

One day, many great ṛṣis headed by Nārada Muni, Parvata Muni, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, and Devala, came to Dhṛtarāṣṭra in order to enliven him with their spiritual discourses. When the ṛṣis concluded their narrations, Nārada Muni said, "My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, formerly, many kings had attained very high destinations after executing austerities in the forest. Rest assured that, by the mercy of Śrīla Vyāsa Deva, you and Gāndhārī will also achieve very elevated positions in your next lives. Pāṇḍu is now residing in Indraloka, and he often thinks of you. Kuntīdevī will go to join her husband after giving up her present body."

After hearing this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra worshipped Nārada Muni in great happiness. Satayupa then said, "O Devarṣi, you are able to ascertain the future lives of all living beings by dint of your spiritual vision. Therefore, please tell us exactly what the destination of Dhṛtarāṣṭra will be."

Nārada Muni then replied, "My dear king, during my last visit to Indraloka, I met with both Pāṇḍu and the king of heaven. At that time, the subject of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his severe austerities came up. Indra himself then declared that three years from the present, the Kuru king and his wife will give up their mortal bodies, and after boarding a celestial chariot, they will go reside in the abode of Kuvera."

Everyone was very pleased to hear this, and soon thereafter, all of the ṛṣis took their leave and departed. Meanwhile, back in Hastināpura, the Pāṇḍavas could not find a moment's happiness nor peace of mind after the departure of their elderly mother and uncle. Not only the Pāṇḍavas, but all of the citizens were very morose. Everyone simply wondered, "Alas! How will the old couple and Kuntīdevī endure the harsh forest
life, especially considering how they had always been accustomed to so much royal luxury?"
The Pāṇḍavas no longer found any pleasure in ruling over the earth, nor did they experience any happiness in the company of women or by studying the Vedas. Indeed, the Pāṇḍavas became so distracted on account of grief that they practically gave up the performance of their royal duties. Day and night, they remained totally absorbed in thinking about the loss of their sons and the retirement of their mother. Upon many occasions, when the Pāṇḍavas were spoken to, they simply remained silent without giving any reply. The only thing that gave the Pāṇḍavas any solace was the sight of their dear grandson, Parikṣit.

One day, Sahadeva suggested to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira that they all go to the forest in order to see their mother. Draupadī then also expressed her ardent desire to see Kuntidevi, and so Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira commanded that his army be made ready to march to the forest. The king next arranged for numerous conveyances, and then he made a public announcement that any of the citizens who desired to visit Dhṛtarāṣṭra would be allowed to accompany him. The Pāṇḍavas then very eagerly departed the next day, but after leaving Hastināpura, they remained outside the city gate for five days, just to allow all those citizens to join them who desired to do so. Thereafter, the procession set out, some proceeding upon chariots, camels, and elephants, and others walking. Almost all of the prominent citizens accompanied the Pāṇḍavas, except Yuyutsu and Dhaumya, who remained behind in order to protect Hastināpura.

Upon arriving at Kurukṣetra, the Pāṇḍavas crossed the river Yamunā, and then they came to the āśrama of Satayupa. The Pāṇḍavas got down from their chariots at some distance and ordered their army to set up camp. Proceeding on foot, the Pāṇḍavas were then soon met by numerous rṣis who came out to greet them. With tears in his eyes, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired as to the whereabouts of his old uncle, and in reply, the rṣis explained how he had gone to take bath in the Yamunā. The Pāṇḍavas then hurried to the spot which was pointed out to them, and when they saw their mother from a distance, they quickened their pace. Sahadeva ran ahead, and after falling down before
his mother, he cried aloud while touching her feet. Kuntīdevī lifted up her son and embraced him, and all the while she shed incessant tears. Then, when she saw the others approaching, Kuntīdevī grabbed hold of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī and began to drag them along as she went forward to meet her sons. Overwhelmed by surging emotions, the Pāṇḍavas fell down upon the ground before their mother, offering obeisances, and when Dhṛtarāṣṭra recognized his nephews' voices, he began to comfort them.

All those persons who had accompanied the Pāṇḍavas soon arrived, and when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira introduced them to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, one after another, the old king felt as if he were back in Hastināpura, surrounded by his retinue, and thus tears came to his eyes. The Pāṇḍavas then picked up the water jugs which their mother, aunt, and uncle had been carrying, and returned to Satayupa's āśrama. Thereafter, when everyone sat down surrounding Dhṛtarāṣṭra, many of the rṣis came there, desirous of seeing the Pāṇḍavas. Sañjaya pointed out the Pāṇḍavas and their wives to the rṣis. and while doing so, he named wives of Bhēma, Nakula and Sahadeva who were previously unmentioned. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then inquired about Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's welfare, and about the administration of state affairs, and in turn, the Pāṇḍava king asked about his old uncle's well-being and that of his mother. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then noticed that Vidura was absent, and in reply to his inquiry, Dhṛtarāṣṭra said, "My dear nephew, Vidura is living alone in the forest nearby, and he is quite well. He is performing very severe austerities, and he maintains his life by subsisting upon air alone."

Indeed, as Dhṛtarāṣṭra spoke, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira suddenly caught sight of Vidura in the distance. His completely naked body was smeared over with dirt, his hair was matted, and he kept his mouth full of stones. When Vidura saw that a crowd had congregated at Satayupa's āśrama, he began to run away, and upon seeing this, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira quickly got up and ran after him while calling out his name. Thereafter, when Vidura reached a solitary place within the forest, he suddenly stopped running and remained perfectly still, leaning up against a tree. Vidura was hardly recognizable because his body had practically changed its form due to being so greatly emaciated. Still, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could recognize his uncle, and after coming before, him, he worshipped
him with great reverence. Vidura simply stood silently staring at Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, however, for his mind was completely absorbed in the trance of mystic yoga. Then, while in that state of transcendental consciousness, Vidura began to amalgamate his very existence with that of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, limb by limb. In this way, Vidura subtly entered Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's body and merged his life-breath with his. While this was imperceptibly going on, Vidura's material body remained leaning up against the tree, and at last, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could understand that the in-dwelling life had departed. Simultaneously, the Pāṇḍava king could feel his own existence strengthened by the acquisition of new powers. Indeed, at this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could realize his celestial position as being identical with Dharma, his father, who had been cursed to take birth as Vidura. Then, when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira thought of cremating Vidura's body, a voice from an invisible person declared, "O King, you must not burn the body of Vidura. for he is Yamarāja himself, having been born upon the earth for assisting the Supreme Lord in His mission. O Yudhiṣṭhira, considering all of this, you should not lament because of the passing away of your uncle."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then returned to Satayupa's āśrama, and when he told Dhṛtarāṣṭra about Vidura's remarkable disappearance, everyone became struck with awe and great wonder. Thereafter, Dhṛtarāṣṭra provided his guests with food and drink, and after eating, the Pāṇḍavas lay down upon the beds which they had prepared near to their mother. The next morning, after performing their religious duties, when the Pāṇḍavas took a tour of Satayupa's āśrama, they saw many ṛṣis engaged in sacrificial performances as well as herds of deer that roamed about fearlessly. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then gave away golden vessels and other useful articles in charity to the ṛṣis, and thereafter, he returned to where Dhṛtarāṣṭra was staying aloog with Gāndhārī and Kuntī. When the Pāṇḍavas sat down with Dhṛtarāṣṭra, many ṛṣis also came there, as did Satayupa. Śrīla Vyāsadeva then arrived, and so everyone stood up in order to very respectfully receive him. After being given the seat which was especially reserved for him, Śrīla Vyāsadeva inquired, "My dear Dhṛtarāṣṭra, how is your life in the forest progressing? I hope that the grief which you had felt due to the death of your sons is now
completely dispelled. My dear son, you should not lament for the passing away of your brother Vidura. Having been cursed by Māṇḍavya Muni, Yamarāja took birth as the son of a maidservant. Now, after having entered the body of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Vidura has regained his original post as the lord of the pīṭḥa. My dear son, I have specifically come here in order to dispel all of your remaining doubts. I know of the grief which burns in your heart on account of the death of your sons, and I know that this anguish is shared by Gāndhārī, Kuntī, Draupadī, and Subhadrā. Now, by displaying to you something extraordinary, which has never before accomplished by any ānī, I shall accomplish whatever it is that you may desire."

The Pāṇḍavas resided at Satyupa's āśrama for about one month, and it was at the close of this period that Śrīla Vyāsadeva came there. While the grandfather of the Pāṇḍavas was thus speaking, Nārada Muni, Parvata Muni, Devala, and many other great ānīs arrived there, and so everyone got up from their seats in order to worship them. Thereafter, having carefully considered Śrīla Vyāsadeva's offer of a benediction, Dhṛtarāśtra replied, "My dear father, there is one doubt which has always tortured my heart. When I remember the evil deeds that my son had performed, I become exceedingly afraid of the horrible condition of life which he may have fallen into. O foremost of ānīs, you know everything past, present, and future. What has happened to all of my sons and grandsons, as well as the others who had given up their lives on the battlefield at Kurukṣetra? I wish to know what destinations they have attained."

By hearing Dhṛtarāśtra give vent to his grief, the anguish of Gāndhārī, Kuntī, and all others became magnified. Gāndhārī then confided, "My dear father-in-law, for the last sixteen years, ever since the battle of Kurukṣetra, Dhṛtarāśtra has never been able to sleep at night due to remaining continually absorbed in thinking about the destruction of his sons."

Śrīla Vyāsadeva could understand that Kuntīdevī was also very anxious about the son whom she had given birth to before her marriage. The great sage thus requested Kuntī to disclose what was on her mind, and in response, she very bashfully described the whole story of Karṇa's birth and how she had discarded him. Kuntīdevī then said, "My dear father-in-
law, I had never disclosed Karṇa's real identity, and I was never accepted as his true mother. Therefore, I have lamented greatly on account of his death. O foremost of powerful ṛṣis, I long to see my eldest son again, and so I beg you to fulfill my desire."
Śrīla Vyāsadeva replied, "My dear Kuntī, rest assured that there was absolutely no fault on your part for having given birth to Karṇa before your marriage. For greatly powerful personalities such as Sūrya, there is nothing which is sinful. Whatever such persons do is exemplary, pure, and meritorious."
Śrīla Vyāsadeva then turned to Gāndhārī and said, "My dear daughter-in-law, this very night you shall be able to see all of your sons and other relatives as if they had arisen from a long sleep. Kuntīdevī will be able to see Karṇa, Draupadī will see her five sons, and the Pāṇḍavas will be able to see Abhimanyu. My dear Gāndhārī, you should not lament for those who were slain. Many of them were incarnations of demigods who had come to the earth in order to fulfill the mission of the Supreme Lord. Your husband is an incarnation of the Gandharva king, Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Pāṇḍu was an expansion of the Maruts, Duryodhana was an incarnation of the personality of Kali, and Śakuni was an incarnation of Dvāpara. Duḥṣāsana, Śīkhaṇḍī and others were Rākṣasas, Abhimanyu was a portion of Soma, Dhrītarāṣṭra was a portion of Agni, and Droṇa was a portion of Bṛhaspati. Having accomplished their mission, they have now returned to their heavenly abodes."
Śrīla Vyāsadeva then invited Dhrītarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī and the others to go to the banks of the Gaṅgā, assuring them that they would behold all of these slain heroes that evening. Everyone was filled with tremendous excitement at this prospect, and thus they set out in great haste. Thereafter, a vast crowd assembled on the banks of the Gaṅgā, and because everyone was on the edge of their seats with expectation, the day seemed to pass so slowly that all considered it to be an entire year. At last, when night began to fall, everyone came and surrounded Śrīla Vyāsadeva. The son of Parāśara first of all bathed in the sacred river, and thereafter, he dramatically summoned all of the deceased warriors. Instantly, a deafening roar was heard from within the river, and at the next moment, all of the great heroes, headed by Bhīṣma and Droṇa,
began to rise up from the water. Thousands upon thousands of kings appeared there, including Viśā, Drupada, the sons of Draupadi, Ghaṭotkaca, Karṇa, Duryodhana, Duḥṣasana, Abhimanyu, Śakuni, and the rest of Dhrītarāṣṭra's sons. All of the warriors appeared just as when they were on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. Indeed, all of them wore the same clothes and rode upon the same vehicles. All of the heroic kṣatriyas were wonderfully resplendent, and none of them exhibited even a trace of pride, anger, or malice. And, surrounding the great heroes were hosts of Gandharvas and Apsaras who waited upon them while singing their praises. Everyone who beheld this miraculous appearance of the slain warriors was struck with wonder. Everyone stared with a steadfast gaze, and everyone's hair stood up on end. The Pāṇḍavas met with Karṇa and were reconciled, and all of the widows were able to sport with their husbands on that glorious night. The ladies also met with their slain fathers, sons, and other relatives. Because of this, the night passed away very quickly in great happiness. Then, when the light of dawn appeared, Śrīla Vyāsadeva began to dismiss those whom he had summoned. Thus, after having been embraced by their wives and given their leave, all of the slain warriors suddenly disappeared into the Gaṅgā. After the departure of all these great kṣatriyas for their heavenly abodes, Śrīla Vyāsadeva addressed their widows while standing in the water, "O fortunate ladies, if you are able to cast off all attachment for your material bodies, then plunge into the river at once so that you can immediately follow your husbands to their celestial abodes."

Upon hearing this, many of the women gave up their lives by entering the water, and at the next moment, they were seen in their celestial bodies, riding upon chariots which had been sent from heaven, and all of their grief and anxieties were completely dispelled. Then, in order to benedict all of the men who were present there, Vyāsadeva assured them of the fulfillment of their most cherished desires. King Janamejaya inquired, "O Vaiśampāyaṇa, how was it possible for those who had died, and thus given up their material bodies, to once again appear in the same forms?"

Vaiśampāyaṇa replied, "My dear king, the eternal self is completely different from his material embodiment. And, all kinds of sorrow are caused by separation from whatever temporary, material arrangements
the eternal living being becomes attached to. Thus, it is a foolish person who indulges in lamentation upon experiencing the loss of a beloved person or object. On the other hand, a wise person, by seeing this fault, abandons all material attachments and thus avoids all kinds of sorrow. Although the material bodies of the conditioned souls are temporary, the elements from which they are formed are eternal. Thus, by the use of mystic power, it is possible to reassemble someone's previous form and make him once again appear in it."

King Janamejaya then said, "O Vaiśampāyana, I shall be able to believe all of this if Śrīla Vyāsadeva would be merciful to me and show me my father just as I had known him."

Upon receiving this request, Vyāsadeva summoned Mahārāja Parikṣit from heaven and brought him before his son. In addition, Śamīka Rṣi and his son Śrṅgi were called for. Finally, after conversing with them for some time, Janamejaya took his avaḥṛtha bath, and he then poured the remaining sacred water upon his father. King Janamejaya then turned to Āstika Rṣi, the son of Jaratkāru, and exclaimed, "How fortunate I am to have been able to see my father once again and thus receive so much happiness!"

Āstika Rṣi replied, "O King, any sacrifice where Śrīla Vyāsadeva is personally present will certainly award its performer the highest auspiciousness. Now, you should worship the literary incarnation of Godhead, for he is the compiler of this magnificent narration which you are fortunate enough to be hearing."

By the mercy of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, Dhṛtarāṣṭra had met his sons, and thus he at last gained relief from his grief. Finally, after dismissing the ṛṣis as well as the common people who had assembled on the banks of the Gaṅgā, Dhṛtarāṣṭra returned to Satayupa's āśrama. Śrīla Vyāsadeva then came to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and advised, "My dear son, now that you have directly witnessed the exalted achievements of your family members, do not once again give way to grief. Urge the Pāṇḍavas to take their leave and return to Hastināpura so that Yudhiṣṭhira can resume his responsibility of ruling the kingdom."

Soon thereafter, Dhṛtarāṣṭra called for Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and said, "My dear nephew, please rest assured that I have now become relieved of all unhappiness. It has been a great pleasure for me to see you once
again, but now you should return to Hastināpura. I am also very eager to resume my austerities, for they have become somewhat slackened due to your visit here."

In reply, Yudhiṣṭhīra pleaded, "My dear uncle, please do not discard me like this! Let my brothers return to Hastināpura while I remain here in order to serve you and my mother."

At this, Gāndhārī said, "O Yudhiṣṭhīra, please give up this idea and return to Hastināpura at once. The welfare of the world depends upon its emperor."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra then tearfully replied, "My dear aunt and uncle, I know that I have to obey you both, but my heart is now fully set upon living an ascetic life. I no longer find even the slightest happiness in ruling over a vast kingdom."

At this point, Sahadeva suddenly spoke up, addressing Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra, "My dear brother, the rest of you can return to Hastināpura, but I cannot bear to leave my poor old mother. Therefore, I shall stay here in order to practice austerities and ever engage myself in her service."

Kuntīdevī then embraced Sahadeva and ordered, "No, my dear son. You must depart along with your brothers. If you remain here then the bondage of family affection will certainly ensnare me and thus obstruct my life of austerity."

In this way, the Pāṇḍavas were pacified, and at last, they began to prepare for their return trip. Then, just before setting out, when the Pāṇḍavas went to receive the blessings of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Kuntīdevī, even Bhīma became submissive to his old uncle. At the time of parting, Kuntīdevī affectionately smelled her sons' heads and embraced their wives, and after circumambulating Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the Pāṇḍavas departed.

Upon their return to Hastināpura, the Pāṇḍavas resumed the execution of their royal duties. Then, after more than two years had passed, Nārada Muni came to visit Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra. The king very respectfully worshipped Devarṣi Nārada, and thereafter, when they were seated together at ease, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra anxiously inquired about the news of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Nārada Muni then replied, "My dear king, soon after your departure, Dhṛtarāṣṭra went to Gaṅgādvārā, accompanied by
Gāndhārī, Kuntī, Sañjaya, and their priests. There, your uncle began to perform extremely severe austerities by subsisting upon air alone and refraining entirely from speech after having placed pebbles in his mouth. After six months of such practice, Dhṛtarāṣṭra became reduced to little more than a skeleton. Gāndhārī maintained her life only by drinking water, and Kuntīdevī ate just a little food every sixth day. The priests continued to perform fire sacrifices as a regular daily function, but Dhṛtarāṣṭra actually lived without any fixed residence. As he wandered about from forest to forest, Sañjaya acted as his eyes, and Kuntīdevī performed the same function for Gāndhārī. "Then, one day, after Dhṛtarāṣṭra had bathed in the Gāṅgā and was wending his way back to the āśrama, a strong wind suddenly came up, and a great fire was ignited which began to consume the entire forest. Even the animals were burned to death in the great conflagration, and so what to speak of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was so weak due to living without food that he could hardly even move. Gāndhārī and Kuntī were just as weak and emaciated, and so Dhṛtarāṣṭra urged, 'O Sañjaya, you can escape while the three of us give up our lives and thus attain an exalted destination.' "Sañjaya argued, 'My dear king, this sort of death is inauspicious! Still, I am unable to think of what can be done, and so I beg you to advise me.' "Dhṛtarāṣṭra then said, 'My dear Sañjaya, death by means of fire, fasting, drowning, or due to wind is always praised by the ṛṣis. Therefore, give up all anxiety and leave this place while you are still able to.' "Dhṛtarāṣṭra then sat down facing east, and he began to concentrate his mind in meditation while Gāndhārī and Kuntī followed suit. Sañjaya then circumambulated his master and quickly departed. My dear Yudhiṣṭhīra, in this way, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī, and your mother were consumed in that forest fire as they remained immovable, just like wooden posts. I personally saw the remains of these three exalted souls, and soon thereafter, I met Sañjaya in an assembly of ṛṣis on the banks of the Ganges. After taking leave from me, Sañjaya departed for the Himālayas, because he had also become intent upon performing austerities." After receiving this news from Nārada Muni, the Pāṇḍavas became overwhelmed by an intense grief, and indeed, their loud wailing could be heard throughout the royal palace. When they saw Mahārāja
Yudhiṣṭhira weeping like a small child on account of his mother's death, all the palace residents became very aggrieved. Then, at last, after summoning his patience, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira restrained his tears and declared, "O Nārada, how pitiable is the fate of human beings that such a great king who had many living kinsmen could perish like this! Imagine, my own mother has burnt to death while her children still live and rule over the earth! Of what use was it that Arjuna had enabled Agni to devour the Khāṇḍava forest? That ingrate has now burned to death his benefactor's mother! How is it possible that after having performed so much austerity Dhṛtarāṣṭra could be burned to death in an unsanctified fire?"

As they continued to lament in this way, the Pāṇḍavas appeared to be as bereaved as the living beings at the time of the universal dissolution. Nārada Muni then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, your mother and uncle were not burned by an unsanctified fire as you imagine. What actually happened was this: One day, after ordering his priests to ignite the sacrificial fire, Dhṛtarāṣṭra performed his religious rituals and then departed to wander in the forest. After some time, the brāhmaṇas left the sacred fires unattended in order to go about their usual business. My dear king, it was these fires which started the conflagration that consumed the surrounding forest. I heard all about this from the ṛṣis who reside there on the banks of the Gaṅgā. Therefore, you should not lament, for Dhṛtarāṣṭra was burned by his own sacrificial fire. Rest assured that your old uncle and mother have attained very exalted destinations. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, you and your brothers should now perform the funeral ceremonies for Kuntīdevī, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and Gāndhārī."

Soon thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas and their wives proceeded to the banks of the Gaṅgā, while all of the citizens followed, and everyone was dressed in a single piece of cloth. Upon Yuyutsu's arrival, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira placed him in front and then entered the river. Finally, after the offerings of Ganges water were made to the departed souls of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī, and Kuntī, the party returned, but without actually entering Hastināpura, they continued to reside at the city gate. During this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira sent some men to Gaṅgādvārā for the purpose of cremating the remains of their mother's, aunt's, and
uncle's bodies. After twelve days had passed, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira properly purified himself and then performed the śraddhā ceremony. At the conclusion, the king gave away such an abundance of charity that everyone received as much of everything as their hearts desired. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then entered his capital, and at that time, the men returned from Gaṅgādvārā and informed him of how they had accomplished their task. Finally, after speaking some words of condolence to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Nārada Muni took his leave and departed. Thereafter, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira continued to bear the great burden of ruling over the earth, although he could never forget the deep sorrow which overwhelmed him upon learning of the death of his mother, aunt, and uncle.

During the 36th year after the Kurukṣetra war, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to see many inauspicious omens: strong winds constantly blew gravel here and there, and the skies were filled with a terrible anxiety. Shortly thereafter, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira heard about the annihilation of the Yadu dynasty and how only Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma had survived. Then, after calling together his brothers, the Pāṇḍava king began to consult with them as to what should be done next. At this time, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira narrated the story of the annihilation of the Yadu dynasty as follows:

One day, Nārada, Viśvāmitra, and Kanva Ṛṣi came to Dvārakā. Then, as they were seated together at their leisure, the children of the Yadus came before the three great sages after having disguised Sāmba as a pregnant woman. The boys inquired, "My dear foremost of the ṛṣis, this is the wife of Babhru. Being very anxious to receive a son, she requests that you kindly invoke your spiritual insight to inform her whether her offspring will a boy or a girl."

Upon seeing this crude attempt at deception for the purpose of joking at their expense, the ṛṣis became enraged, and in great anger they cursed Sāmba by saying, "You foolish boy! As punishment for your impudent behavior, you shall soon give birth to a fierce club which will be meant for the destruction of all the Vṛṣṇis and Andhakas!"

After cursing Sāmba, the ṛṣis went to Lord Kṛṣṇa and informed Him of
the incident. Lord Kṛṣṇa then summoned all of the Yadus and related to them how Sāmba had been cursed. Without displaying the least desire to alter the ṛṣis' curse, Lord Kṛṣṇa simply informed His family members of the inevitability of their destruction and then entered His rooms. The very next day, Sāmba gave birth to an iron club. As soon as he received the news, King Ugrasena ordered that the club be ground into powder and thrown into the sea. Then, as a precautionary measure, King Ugrasena had it proclaimed throughout Dvārakā that the manufacture of all kinds of intoxicating beverages was henceforward banned, and that anyone caught doing so would be sentenced to death along with his entire family. Besides this, many other steps were taken in the hopes of avoiding the predicted annihilation of the Yadu dynasty. However, in spite of all such preventative measures, Time personified (Death) began to wander through the streets of Dvārakā, peering into the houses of the Yādavas. Having a bald head and black complexion, Time looked very frightening, and even though the Yadu heroes released thousands of arrows at him, no one succeeded in piercing him. Gradually and steadily, day by day, more and more evil omens became prominent: the streets of Dvārakā became infested with rats, clay pots cracked for apparently no reason, while sleeping at night mice ate at the hair and nails of the Yadus, birds chirped within the houses without letting up for a moment, asses were born from cows, elephants were born from mules, and dogs gave birth to cats. The citizens began to commit all kinds of sinful acts without feeling the slightest shame: husbands and wives deceived each other and people in general disrespected the brāhmaṇas and other superiors. Even though food was prepared with great care, upon being served, it was seen to be full of worms. While engaged in meditation, men would hear the sounds of crowds running through the streets, although in actuality there were none. When conchshells were blown within the houses, asses brayed in response, filling all directions with the vibrations. After observing these symptoms, Lord Kṛṣṇa called together all of His relatives and said, "My dear Yadus, Gāndhārī had cursed us to become the cause of our own annihilation, and certainly the time for this occurrence is at hand." Indeed, desiring that the words of Gāndhārī come true, Lord Kṛṣṇa then
ordered, "My dear friends and relatives, I wish that you all would go and bathe in the sacred lake at Prabhāsa, which is situated near the shore of the western ocean."

During this period, the Yadu ladies nightly dreamt of a black woman who ran through the streets of Dvārakā while laughing hysterically. After entering their houses, she would snatch the auspicious threads from their wrists and then vanish. The men dreamt that ferocious vultures entered their houses and began to feast upon their bodies. One day, while many members of the Yadu dynasty were looking on, Lord Kṛṣṇa's Sudarśana-cakra suddenly ascended into the sky. Then, in the very sight of Dāruka, the four horses: Śaivya, Sugrīva, Meghapaṭa and Balāhaka, carried away Lord Kṛṣṇa's chariot across the ocean. Every day, the Apsarās came to Dvārakā in order to encourage the members of the Yadu dynasty to go on pilgrimage as advised by Lord Kṛṣṇa. One such day, the Apsarās stole away Lord Kṛṣṇa's emblem of Garuḍa and Lord Balarāma's palmyra emblem. After witnessing all of these ominous occurrences, the Vṛṣṇis and Andhakas became eager to go to Prabhāsa, and so they at last set out, taking all kinds of provisions with them.

Thereafter, while the Yadus were residing at Prabhāsa, Uddhava came there. Knowing of the imminent destruction of his family members, Uddhava wanted to take permission from Lord Kṛṣṇa in order to depart from this mortal world. Lord Kṛṣṇa did not make the slightest endeavor to discourage Uddhava, and thereafter, that great devotee, who was also a master of mystic yoga, left his material body within everyone's sight. Indeed, as the soul of Uddhava passed through the sky, he filled all directions with his splendor.

A few days later, a great merry-making began within the sight of Lord Kṛṣṇa, as Lord Balarāma, Kṛtavarmā, Sātyaki and others began to drink wine while innumerable singers, dancers, musicians, and comedians displayed their various talents. Then, after becoming intoxicated, Sātyaki began to deride Kṛtavarmā for his having helped Aśvatthāmā slaughter all of the sleeping Pancalas. Pradyumna applauded Sātyaki, and Kṛtavarmā pointed at him with his left hand and began to deride him for his cowardly killing of Bhūriśravas. When He heard this, Lord Kṛṣṇa angrily glanced at Kṛtavarmā. Sātyaki then took the opportunity to inform Lord Kṛṣṇa about Kṛtavarmā's part in the conspiracy to kill
Satyajit at the time of the Syamantaka jewel's theft. When she heard this, Satyabhāmā became very aggrieved. With tears in her eyes, she came and sat upon Lord Kṛṣṇa's lap and began to incite His anger against Kṛtavarmā. Then, all of a sudden, Sātyaki stood up and declared, "O Satyabhāmā, please hear me! I hereby vow to kill Kṛtavarmā in retaliation for all of his evil deeds!"

After saying this, Sātyaki unsheathed his sword, rushed at Kṛtavarmā, and severed his head within everyone's sight. Having become mad with rage, Sātyaki then went on a rampage, striking down the others who had supported Kṛtavarmā, and so Lord Kṛṣṇa rushed forward in order to restrain him. It was too late, however, for numerous Bhojas and Andhakas had already surrounded Sātyaki, determined to gain revenge. Understanding that the time had come for the anihilation of His dynasty, Lord Kṛṣṇa then gave up His anger and desisted from any further attempt to restore order. Then, as Lord Kṛṣṇa stood apart and aloof, the crowd proceeded to beat Sātyaki with the pots and plates from which they had been eating. Pradyumna angrily rushed forward in the hopes of rescuing Sātyaki, and although both of them fought heroically, they were mauled to death in the very sight of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

After witnessing the murder of his eldest son, Lord Kṛṣṇa angrily picked up a handful of the erakā grass which was growing nearby, and by dint of His touch, those blades of grass became fierce weapons, as powerful as thunderbolts. When they saw that Lord Kṛṣṇa had taken up weapons, many of the enraged Bhojas and Andhakas tried to attack Him. However, with the empowered erakā grass, the Lord effortlessly killed all of those who came before Him. Meanwhile, as the Bhojas, Andhakas, and Vṛṣṇis became more and more mad with rage on account of the violence, they began to slay one another without discrimination. Whoever picked up the blades of grass found that they instantly became converted into powerful weapons as a result of the ṛṣis' curse. Being intoxicated with wine and war, even fathers killed their own sons and vice-versa. Lord Kṛṣṇa knew that the destruction of His dynasty was predestined, and so He made an effort to stand by aloof. However, when the Lord saw how all of His dear sons were being slain, including Sāmba and Cārudeśṇa, as well as His grandson, Aniruddha, and His brother Gada, He once again flared up with rage and entered the melee,
exterminating whatever survivors remained.

Babhru and Dāruka then approached Lord Kṛṣṇa and suggested that since Lord Balarāma had already left the scene, He should follow the example of His elder brother. Lord Kṛṣṇa agreed, and after the three had left the scene of battle, they came upon Lord Balarāma in a lonely forest, reclining against a tree, and He appeared to be in a very thoughtful mood. Before speaking to His elder brother, however, Lord Kṛṣṇa ordered Dāruka to go to Hastināpura in order to inform Arjuna of the Yadus' annihilation and then bring him to Dvārakā. After Dāruka had departed upon His chariot, Lord Kṛṣṇa next dispatched Babhru to go and protect the ladies so that thieves and rogues would not take advantage of them. However, after Babhru had gone only a little distance, a part of the iron club which King Ugrasena had not been able to grind into powder and which had later on become attached to a mallet, suddenly sprung from the hands of the hunter who held it. Babhru was the lone remaining survivor of the Yadu dynasty, and this mallet struck and killed him. After seeing this, Lord Kṛṣṇa requested Balarāma to wait a bit until He could return after placing the ladies under someone else's care.

Lord Kṛṣṇa then rushed to Dvārakā and requested Vasudeva to care for the ladies until Arjuna's arrival. The Lord then said, "My dear father, since I cannot bear the thought of living at Dvārakā without the Yadus, I shall now retire to the forest in order to perform austerities along with Balarāma."

After saying this, Lord Kṛṣṇa touched His head to His father's feet and then departed. Soon thereafter, when Lord Kṛṣṇa's intention was understood by His wives, a loud wailing arose throughout the palace. Upon hearing these pitiful sounds, Lord Kṛṣṇa turned back in order to assure His beloved consorts that Arjuna would take care of them and dispel all of their anguish. Lord Kṛṣṇa then quickly returned to the forest near Prabhāsa, and there He saw that His elder brother was sitting in a yoga-posture. Then, as Lord Kṛṣṇa looked on, a great white serpent suddenly emerged from Balarāma's mouth. That thousand-hooded serpent was actually Balarāma Himself, and after leaving behind an illusory body, He expanded Himself to become as large as a mountain.
and proceeded toward the ocean. Thereafter, when He arrived at the seashore, Lord Balarāma was received and worshipped with great honor by many celestial snakes, headed by Vāsuki and Takṣaṅka, as well as personified rivers, the Ocean himself, and the demigod Varuṇa. After witnessing the departure of Balarāma, Lord Kṛṣṇa wandered about in the forest for some time, deeply thinking over the words of Gāndhārī and Durvāśa Muni. Finally, after deciding that the time for His own departure had arrived, Lord Kṛṣṇa took His seat upon the bare ground. The Lord then proceeded to withdraw His senses and concentrate His mind in a trance of mystic yoga. At this time, a fierce hunter named Jara was searching for deer in the nearby forest. When he saw Lord Kṛṣṇa in the distance, Jara mistook Him for a deer and so released his deadly arrow. Then, when he rushed to the spot where Kṛṣṇa was sitting in order to capture the so-called deer, the hunter found out that he had pierced the Lord in the heel with his arrow. Lord Kṛṣṇa was absorbed in samādhi, and upon realizing what he had done, Jara became very afraid. Thinking that he had committed a great sin, Jara reverently touched Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet, and at this, the Lord opened His eyes and mildly smiled. Lord Kṛṣṇa then assured Jara that he had been forced to act as the instrument of Destiny and thus would not be held responsible for any sinful reaction. Then, in order to make a show of death for the fools and atheists, Lord Kṛṣṇa ascended into the sky. Upon reaching the heavenly planets, Lord Kṛṣṇa was welcomed and worshipped by all of the demigods. Then, from heaven, Lord Kṛṣṇa further ascended to His own transcendental abode, beyond the influence of the three modes of material nature.

Meanwhile, when Dāruka arrived at Hastināpura, he informed the Pāṇḍavas about the annihilation of the Yadu dynasty, and after receiving this most unpalatable news, their hearts began to burn with grief. Then, in accordance with Lord Kṛṣṇa’s order, Arjuna bid his brothers farewell and departed for Dvārakā in great anxiety. Upon his arrival, the 16,108 wives of Lord Kṛṣṇa surrounded Arjuna, and due to intense grief, they wailed loudly. And when Arjuna saw how a terrible look of doom pervaded Dvārakā, which was now bereft of all its great heroes, he became so overwhelmed by depression that he suddenly fell
down unconscious onto the ground. Rukmînî, Satyabhâmâ, and other wives of Lord Krṣṇa rushed forward, and after raising Arjuna up, they led him into their palace. The ladies had Arjuna seated upon a golden throne, and after sitting down surrounding him, they began to express their intolerable grief. Arjuna tried to comfort the ladies as far as possible, and then he went to see Vasudeva. Arjuna found the father of Balarâma and Krṣṇa lying down upon the ground, overwhelmed with grief on account of separation from his sons. When Arjuna touched his feet, Vasudeva got up and embraced him. Then, while weeping aloud, Vasudeva indulged in very piteous lamentations:

"O Arjuna, after the annihilation of the Yadu dynasty, Krṣṇa had returned to Dvārakā in order to inform me that you would soon be coming here to take care of His wives and children. Krṣṇa also predicted that soon after your departure, Dvārakā will become completely swallowed up by the ocean. Then, just before departing, Krṣṇa explained how He and Balarâma intended to dedicate the rest of their lives to performing austerities in a holy place. O son of Kuntī, without even knowing the whereabouts of my two sons, I no longer desire to maintain my life, and so I have abstained from all eating. Because I shall soon give up my life, I want you to take charge of the kingdom, just as Lord Krṣṇa had instructed."

Arjuna replied, "My dear uncle, my brothers and I have also lost all desire to continue our lives. Still, in order to execute Lord Krṣṇa’s order, I will take all of the Yadu women, children, and aged persons to Indraprastha before departing from this mortal world."

After saying this, Arjuna entered the Sudharmā assembly house in order to meet with the government officers. After the ministers had greeted him and they were all seated together, Arjuna said, "Since Lord Krṣṇa has disclosed that Dvārakā will soon become immersed into the ocean, I shall set out for Indraprastha on the seventh day from today, taking with me all of the surviving members of the Yadu dynasty. I will then install Vajra at Mathurā as the king of the Yādavas, Bhojas, and Andhakas."

Under Arjuna’s supervision, preparations were quickly made so that his departure would not be delayed. That night, Arjuna slept in Lord Krṣṇa’s principal palace, and early the next morning, Vasudeva left his material body by means of yogic perfection. Thus, after leaving his room,
Arjuna came upon the wives of Vasudeva, headed by Devakī and Rohinī, wailing aloud and beating their breasts in great agony. Arjuna comforted Vasudeva's wives as far as possible, and then he arranged for the funeral ceremony. Thereafter, as Vasudeva's body was carried out from the palace on a carrier which was borne on the shoulders of men, his widows followed, as did his 16,108 daughters-in-law and all of the citizens. When Vasudeva's body was cremated, four of his wives entered the fire: Devakī, Rohinī, Bhadrā, and Madirā. Oblations of water were then offered for the departed soul of Vasudeva, and when all of the funeral rituals were completed, Arjuna set out to visit the site where the Yadus had massacred themselves.

After viewing the ghastly scene at Prabhāsa, Arjuna took the dead bodies of all the slain Yadu heroes and did what was necessary for performing their funeral ceremony. Thereafter, while searching for Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, Arjuna found their so-called material bodies, which were in reality illusory manifestations of their universal forms. Arjuna cremated these 690 bodies, and then, after performing the śraddhā ceremony for all of the departed souls, he set out from Dvārakā on the scheduled day.

In addition to the 16,108 queens of Lord Kṛṣṇa, millions of other ladies, who were all widows of the slain Yādavas, accompanied Arjuna, as did their children and aged relatives. The accumulated wealth of Dvārakā had been collected together and whatever Yādava soldiers remained went to guard the caravan. As it slowly proceeded, the great procession appeared to be as extensive as a vast ocean. Just after Arjuna's departure, the sea flooded Dvārakā. Indeed, it was observed that whatever land was traversed by the caravan became immediately covered over by water, and thus everyone quickened their pace out of fear. Finally, after entering the forest, Arjuna stopped the procession and had a camp set up because darkness was already setting in. There was a group of plunderers called Ābhīras who inhabited this jungle area. When they saw the immeasurable opulence and numerous women in the caravan, and how it was hardly being protected, they became overwhelmed by lust and greed. Considering the soldiers who guarded the caravan to be weak, and only Arjuna to be feared, the Ābhīras gathered together in
thousands and then rushed toward the camp with upraised weapons. When they heard the loud shouts of the invaders, everyone became frightened, except Arjuna, who challenged, "Desist, if you at all value your lives!"

The dacoits did not care for such threats however, and when they proceeded to attack him, Arjuna was shocked to find that he could string his Gāṇḍīva bow only with great effort. Thereafter, when the fighting became fierce and Arjuna tried to think of his celestial weapons, he could not remember the mantras for invoking them. Then, as Arjuna continued to resist the attackers, he could vividly see that his strength had become greatly diminished, and thus he felt highly ashamed and frustrated. Soon, within his very sight, many of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s wives were forcibly dragged away by the Ābhīras while others went of their own accord. Then, all of a sudden, the arrows from his formerly inexhaustible quivers became exhausted, and upon seeing this, Arjuna became incredibly disheartened. As a last resort, he beat off the plunderers by striking them with the ends of his bow. Still, when the Ābhīras fled, they took away vast amounts of wealth and most of the wives of the slain Yadus. Meeting with defeat was something which Arjuna was hardly accustomed to, and so he became horribly aggrieved, considering what had happened to be the work of Destiny. At last, after having given up all efforts to chase after the fleeing plunderers, Arjuna took whatever wealth and women remained and cheerlessly proceeded on.

Rukmīṇī and Jāmbavatī had entered the fire when the bodies of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma were cremated. Satyabhāmā and other wives of Lord Kṛṣṇa had departed for the forest in order to execute severe austerities while absorbing their minds fully in meditation upon their beloved husband. After crossing over the Himālayas, these women remained at a place called Kalpa. Arjuna distributed the other women in various places, and thereafter, he went to the āśrama of Śrila Vyāsadeva. When Arjuna approached his grandfather, as he was seated at ease in a secluded place, the ṛṣi offered him a seat, and then inquired about the cause of his obvious depression. Arjuna replied, "My dear grandfather, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma have left this mortal world, and 500,000 members of the Yadu dynasty have also given up their mortal bodies by
massacring each other at Prabhāsa. Although the disappearance of Lord Kṛṣṇa is unbearable for me, the remembrance of how the Ābhīras were able to carry away the Vṛṣṇi women right within my very sight has become an even greater cause of anguish! Of what use is life now that my beloved friend, Kṛṣṇa, has left me alone? My dear grandfather, please instruct me so that I can be delivered from this ocean of grief into which I have become so deeply plunged."

Śrīla Vyāsadeva then replied, "My dear Arjuna, you should not excessively lament, because everything that has transpired took place with Lord Kṛṣṇa’s supreme sanction. Lord Kṛṣṇa can effortlessly alter the course of all events, anywhere within the universe, and so what to speak of a mere brāhmaṇa’s curse? The truth is that Lord Kṛṣṇa has now departed for His own abode after having fulfilled his mission by relieving the earth of its burden. You five sons of Pāṇḍu were the Lord’s primary instruments in accomplishing this mission, and thus you should be confident that you will attain the highest destination at the end of this life. My dear son of Kunti, the time has now come for you and your brothers to also depart from this mortal world. Do not be aggrieved on account of your loss of strength and inability to utilize your weapons. After having accomplished their purposes, all of your weapons have also returned to wherever they had come from. Time awards everyone with prosperity and then later on, time takes everything away. This is the inevitable situation within this material world. Now, please return to your brothers and inform them of my words."

After offering his obeisances unto Śrīla Vyāsadeva, Arjuna returned to Hastināpura and described to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Nalrula, and Sahadeva all that had transpired.

When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira heard about the annihilation of the Yadu dynasty and the disappearance of Lord Kṛṣṇa, as well as other subsequent events, his heart became firmly set upon leaving this mortal world. King Yudhiṣṭhira first of all installed Parīkṣīt upon the royal throne at Hastināpura and instructed him to rule over the kingdom under the guidance of Yuyutsu and his grandmother, Subhadrā. The Pāṇḍavas then performed the śraddhā ceremony for Lord Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and other departed relatives, and at the conclusion, they fed
all of the great ṛṣis who had attended, headed by Nārada Muni, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, and Mārkaṇḍeya, and they also gave away abundant wealth in charity. Kṛpācārya was then appointed as Emperor Parikṣit's priest, and thereafter, before all of the assembled citizens, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira announced his intention of retiring to the forest. Upon hearing this, the subjects became filled with anxiety, and in response, they loudly declared their strong disapproval of the king's determination. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was not to be swayed, however, and at last, he managed to persuade the citizens to give him their blessings so that he could depart without regret.

Without further ado, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira at once took off his royal dress and then dressed himself in tree bark. The other Pāṇḍavas followed suit, and thereafter, when the brāhmaṇas had completed all of the preliminary rites for departure, they threw the sacred fire into the water. Although the ladies wept loudly upon seeing how the mighty Pāṇḍavas were dressed in forest clothing, the five brothers felt quite cheerful at the prospect of retiring from all social, political, and family responsibilities.

When the Pāṇḍavas set out from Hastināpura, Draupadī followed them, and a dog also followed. The citizens followed the Pāṇḍavas for some distance, but because they were afraid to make any further attempt to dissuade Yudhiṣṭhira, they eventually turned back and re-entered their city. After leaving Hastināpura, Ulūpī entered the water of the Gaṅgā in order to return home, and Citrāṅgadā also went back to his father's house at Maṇipura. The Pāṇḍavas traveled east, with minds firmly fixed in the trance of meditation upon their eternal Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. After passing through many lands, when the Pāṇḍavas reached the Red Sea, Agni stood before them in his personal form, blocking their way. Being still attached, Arjuna was carrying his Gāṇḍīva bow and two inexhaustible quivers, and Agni requested that they now be given back to Varuṇa. When his brothers urged him to comply with Agni's command, Arjuna threw the bow and quivers into the water, and as soon as this was done, the god of fire disappeared from view.

Thereafter, the Pāṇḍavas continued walking, with Yudhiṣṭhira in front, and then, one after another, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva, Draupadī, and the dog. After turning toward the south and then toward
the southwest, the Pāṇḍavas at last reached Dwārakā. From there, they headed north, and after crossing over the Himavat (Himālayas), they came to a desert country. After passing over the desert, the Pāṇḍavas beheld Mount Meru and began to proceed more quickly. Then, while absorbed in meditation upon Lord Kṛṣṇa, Draupādi suddenly fell down onto the ground. With great shock, Bhīma inquired, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, why has the sinless Draupādi fallen down like this?"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear Bhīma, even though all of us treated her with equal respect and adoration, Draupādi favored Arjuna. It is for this reason that she has fallen."

After saying this, Yudhiṣṭhira continued on, undaunted, and after some time, Sahadeva fell down to the ground. Being exceedingly pained at heart, Bhīma asked, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, how could someone who was so humble and who had always served us willingly, fall down like this?"

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear Bhīma, Sahadeva thought that there was no one in the world equal to him in terms of wisdom. It is for this reason that he has fallen to the ground."

Once again, King Yudhiṣṭhira proceeded on, indifferent to Sahadeva's plight, and soon thereafter, Nakula fell down upon the ground. This time, in answer to Bhīma's inquiry, Yudhiṣṭhira said, "My dear brother, even though Nakula was fully righteous and most intelligent, he thought that there was no one in the entire world equal to him in terms of bodily beauty. It is for this reason that he has fallen down."

After seeing how his wife and twin-brothers had fallen away, Arjuna became so aggrieved that soon thereafter he also fell down upon the ground. Bhīma was astonished to see how his incomparably heroic brother was on the verge of death, and so he inquired, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, how is it possible that a person who had never once told a lie can meet with such an end as this?"

Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear brother, being overly proud of his prowess, Arjuna had once declared that he would vanquish his enemies in a single day. Since he had failed to fulfill this vow, he has now fallen down onto the ground."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira theft proceeded on without even looking back, and soon afterward, Bhīma fell down upon the ground. While lying there, Bhīma inquired about the cause of his fall, and so Yudhiṣṭhira
said, "My dear brother, you were too inclined to boasting, and you were so gluttonous that while eating, you would forget all about the needs of others. It is for these reasons that you have fallen."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira continued walking, without even turning his head and the only one who remained following him was the dog. Indra then suddenly appeared overhead, seated upon his celestial chariot. the king of heaven then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, please come with me, for I wish to take you to heaven."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "O Indra, without being accompanied by my brothers and Draupadī, I have no desire to go to heaven."

Indra then said, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, rest assured that your wife and four brothers have already attained their deserved destinations, and so you will meet them once again after your arrival in heaven. They had to cast off their material bodies before ascending to heaven, but it has been ordained that you can go without a change of body."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then requested, "O Indra, since this dog has so devotedly followed me, I wish that he be allowed to accompany me to heaven."

Indra replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, forget this dog and just accept the heavenly enjoyment you have earned. You should know that for the purpose of going to heaven, the neglect of an insignificant dog is not considered even the least bit cruel."

Still, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira insisted, "O king of heaven, it is not possible for me to cast off someone who has become devoted to me."

At this, Indra rebuked Yudhiṣṭhira by saying, "O foolish king, there is no room in heaven for persons who keep dogs! Therefore, you had better think over the matter very carefully and then abandon this lowly animal."

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira argued, "O Indra, the act of rejecting one who is devoted is so sinful that it is compared to the killing of a brāhmaṇa. Therefore, simply for enjoying personal happiness, I would never dream of committing such an abominable act."

Indra countered, "Dogs are untouchable! Indeed, sacrificial offerings become spoiled merely by their glance. O Yudhiṣṭhira, since you have already abandoned your fallen brothers, how is it that you are now
unable to give up such an abominable creature?"
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "My dear Indra, there can be no friendship nor enmity with the dead. I had abandoned my wife and brothers only after they had given up their lives."
At this point, the dog suddenly revealed himself to be Dharma, and with great pleasure, he praised Yudhiṣṭhira for his compassion toward all creatures. Dharma then said, "My dear son, formerly, I had tested you at Dvaitavana. Now, due to your having completely renounced the chariot of Indra in favor of a mere dog, you have earned unequaled merit."
Finally, at the urging of Dharma, as well as Indra and all of the ṛṣis and demigods who had assembled there, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira mounted the celestial chariot and proceeded toward heaven. Thereafter, while en route, as he was seated among the ṛṣis inside Indra's chariot, Nārada Muni declared, "How wonderful it is! Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's greatness is unparalleled, for by ascending to heaven without a change of body, he has accomplished what no other rājaṛṣi has done."
However, when Yudhiṣṭhira heard that his destination was to be superior to all others, instead of being overjoyed, he felt very unhappy. He then pleaded, "O great demigods and ṛṣis, whether it be a place of happiness or of misery, I wish to live in the company of my brothers. I do not aspire for any other destination."
Indra then pointed to a region which was inhabited by Siddhas and celestial ṛṣis and said, "O Yudhiṣṭhira, you should cast aside all of these human sentiments. You have earned residence in this celestial abode, and so give up your grief, knowing well that your brothers have also attained to regions of great merit."
However, in spite of Indra's words, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could not even bear to think of living without his brothers.

Upon his arrival in heaven, the first person whom Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira saw was Duryodhana, who was seated upon a golden throne, blazing with effulgence and surrounded by numerous celestial beings. This sight caused Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira to quickly turn away his head in disgust. Then, with great agitation born of anger, he declared, "I do not want to live with the wicked-minded son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who caused the annihilation of practically all the kṣatriyas on earth! I want to go to
where my brothers are staying, wherever it may be!"

While mildly smiling, Nārada Muni then said, "My dear Yudhiśthira, there is no enmity here in heaven. You should now forget whatever may have happened in the past. Do not be envious of Duryodhana because he is now enjoying the heavenly abode which is earned by *kṣatriyas* who die heroically on the battlefield. Instead, approach the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra with sweet words and polite behavior, and in this way, reconcile yourself with him."

In reply, Mahārāja Yudhiśthira remarked, "O Devarṣi, if this is the region which is reserved for sinful rogues like Duryodhana, then I would like to see those places which are meant for righteous heroes like my brothers, Karṇa, and Dhṛṣṭadyumna."

Mahārāja Yudhiśthira could not see any of these persons present, and so he requested, "O residents of heaven, please take me to where my brothers and friends are residing, for without them I have no desire to remain here. Wherever my brothers are staying is heaven for me. Similarly, if they are not here, then this place cannot be heaven."

At this, the demigods summoned a messenger and then said, "My dear Yudhiśthira, you can follow this person, for he will take you to where your brothers are staying."

Thereafter, as the messenger proceeded along, Mahārāja Yudhiśthira followed him, and it soon became obvious that the path which they were traversing was not very auspicious. Everything became enveloped in darkness, and sinful men were seen to be going along the same path. Because this path was covered over with moss, hair, flesh, and blood, the entire area swarmed with gnats, flies, and bees. Besides this, there was an unbearable stench due to the rotting corpses which were strewn here and there. Bones were littered about, and the ground was crawling with numerous varieties of worms and insects. There were blazing fires on both sides of this path, and iron-beaked crows and vultures abounded. Gradually, the path wended through treacherous mountain passes, and the human corpses lying by the side of the road presented a most ghastly scene because their intestines hung out from their abdomens, and their limbs were chopped off. While going along, Mahārāja Yudhiśthira saw a river full of boiling water, and thereafter, a forest full of trees whose leaves were in the form of swords and razors. After that, he passed by flat
lands of blazing fire in which there were numerous pots fun of boiling oil. In this way, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira witnessed some of the tortures which are inflicted upon sinful men. Finally, when it became almost unbearable, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira inquired, "O celestial messenger, how much further shall we have to proceed along this horrible path? What is this ghastly region? Where are my brothers?"
The messenger replied, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, I was ordered to take you just this far. Now, if you feel fatigued, you can return to the place from where we had started our journey."
Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was exceedingly depressed, and indeed, he was almost unconscious due to the foul odor. Being overwhelmed by intense grief, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira at last made up his mind to turn back. However, as soon as he had retraced but a few steps, piteous voices began to call out to him from all sides:
"O King, please remain here for a little while because our torments cease on account of your auspicious presence."
When he heard these painful voices appealing to him, the compassionate Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira stopped walking. The voices seemed to be very familiar to him, but at first Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could not recognize them and so he called out, "Who are all of you? Why are you here?" Then, from all sides came responses:
"I am Karna," "I am Bhima," "I am Nakula," "I am Sahadeva," "I am Dhṛṣṭadyumna," "I am Drupada," and "We are the sons of Draupadī."
When he heard these painful cries, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to wonder, "What kind of perverse Destiny is at work? What sinful activities could my brothers have performed so that they are now forced to reside here? How could Duryodhana have attained to a position which is almost on the level of Indra? Am I dreaming, or have I gone mad?"
Being extremely perplexed, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira pondered over this paradoxical situation for a long time. At first, he had simply felt aggrieved and depressed on account of this unexpected turn of events. However, as he gradually became overwhelmed with anger, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira began to condemn all of the demigods with great hatred, especially Dharma. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira then declared, "O Messenger, I am not going to return to heaven because my brothers and relatives find
that my presence here is comforting!"
The messenger then returned to Indra and described to him all that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had said. However, it was for just a moment that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira had to stand on the path alone before Indra and all of the demigods suddenly appeared. Upon the arrival of the demigods, the darkness of that place was immediately dispelled and the Vaitaraṇī River, repulsive corpses, and all other horrible things also instantly vanished. While a gentle and fragrant breeze began to blow, Indra comforted Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira by saying, "My dear king, all that you had witnessed was just an illusion, and it is now finished. Indeed, it was I who had created this ghastly scene as a favor to you. By enduring this token amount of suffering, you are now free to uninterruptedly enjoy the fruits of your accumulated pious merit. Because you had failed to unhesitatingly follow Lord Kṛṣṇa's instruction to deceive Dronācārya, you have been shown hell by this act of deception. Similarly, for various reasons, your brothers and Draupadī also had to endure the same treatment. Now, all of you are fully cleansed of your sins. Please come and meet the great heroes who had died at Kurukṣetra and who are now residing here in heaven. The destination which you have earned is higher than that which is achieved by ordinary kings. Thus, you shall have the companionship of such illustrious personalities as Māṇḍhāṭr, Bhāgīrathī and Duṣmanta's son, Bhārata."

Thereafter, when Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira arrived at the banks of the celestial Gaṅgā, Dharma informed him, "My dear son, this was the third test that I put you through. Now I have become even more pleased on account of your exalted character and unwavering devotion. My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, all kings must see hell at least once."

Indra then commanded, "My dear Yudhiṣṭhira, just plunge into the water here, and you will at once ascend to your celestial abode, freed from all tinges of enmity and grief."

Indeed, as soon as Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira entered the Gaṅgā, he simultaneously gave up his human body and assumed a most beautiful celestial form, devoid of all anger and lamentation. Then, in the company of all the demigods, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira went to the place where the Dhṛtarāṣṭras and Pāṇḍavas were enjoying life together.
without animosity. There, he saw Lord Kṛṣṇa in His original, transcendental form, being worshipped by Arjuna. Upon seeing Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra before them, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna received him with great honor. Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra then saw Karna. He saw Bhima sitting beside Vāyu, and in another place, he saw Nakula and Sahadeva sitting with the Aśvinī-kumāras. When Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra saw Draupadi, Indra said, "My dear king, your wife was the goddess of fortune."

Indra then pointed out five Gandharvas and identified them as Draupadi's sons. Thereafter, Indra pointed out Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the king of the Gandharvas, and Abhimanyu, who was residing along with Soma. Mahārāja Yudhīṣṭhīra also saw how Pāṇḍu was reunited with Kuntīdevī and Mādrī, and he saw Bhīṣma in the midst of the Vasus, and Drauṇa by the side of Brhaspati. Thus, all of those great heroes who had died during the battle of Kurukṣetra attained very exalted destinations.

At the conclusion of this great narration, which is known by the name Mahābhārata, and which he had heard during the intervals at his snake-sacrifice, King Janamejaya was filled with wonder. In great happiness, the king satisfied all of the brāhmaṇas by giving them abundant wealth in charity. The rṣī Āstika was also very happy, for he had accomplished his mission by rescuing those snakes who deserved to be saved. Finally, after giving the brāhmaṇa permission to depart, King Janamejaya also left the sacrificial arena in order to return to the Kuru capital. Sūta Gosvāmī then said, "My dear Śaunaka Rṣi, I have narrated everything which Vaiśampāyana had spoken to King Janamejaya at the command of Śrīla Vyāsadeva. This Mahābhārata was compiled by the great literary incarnation of the Lord especially for the purpose of broadcasting the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa's pure devotees, the Pāṇḍavas. Anyone who listens to this wonderful history with great respect and rapt attention, becomes cleansed of all sinful reactions. Altogether, Śrīla Vyāsadeva composed six million verses of Mahābhārata. Three million verses were delivered to the heavenly planets, one and half million to the Pitṛlokas, one million four hundred thousand to the Yakṣas, whereas one hundred thousand are known within human society. Nārada Muni had first recited the Mahābhārata to the demigods; Asita-Devala had recited it to
the *pitṛs*; Śukadeva Gosvāmī had recited it to the Yakṣas and Rākṣasas; and Vaiśampāyana had been selected to deliver it unto the human society. The *Mahābhārata* should be recited by a pure, learned and handsome person, and whoever hears this great work should give away in charity as much as possible during the course of its recitation. OM

TAT SAT

Abhijit - The younger sister of the star Rohini.
Abhimanyu - The son of Arjuna and Subhadrā. He was killed by the son of Duḥśāsana during the battle at Kurukṣetra.
Ābhīras - Plunderers who attacked the caravan under Arjuna's protection that contained the remaining wealth and citizens of Dvārakā.
A bhiṅekā - A ceremonial bath.
Acala - A son of King Subala and brother of Śakuni who was killed by Arjuna.
Ācārya - A teacher or guru.
Acyutāyus - A warrior who fought on the side of Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Arjuna.
Adhiratha - The charioteer who adopted Karṇa as a baby. He was also the father of Saṅgrāmajit.
Aditi - The mother of Indra and Vāmana.
Āditya - 1. One of the names of the sun god. 2. A weapon used by Arjuna during the battle of Kurukṣetra. 3. A holy place where the sun god had once performed sacrifices.
Ādityas - Twelve residents of the heavenly planets, such as the sun, moon, and Lord Viṣṇu, the only one who is unconquerable and eternal.
Adrikā - An Apsarā who was cursed to turn into a fish.
Adṛśyantī - The wife of Śakti, the son of Vasiṣṭha.
Agastya - A great sage who helped the demigods defeat the Dānavas by drinking up the ocean they were hiding in. He also gave the *brahmaśīra* weapon to Droṇa.
Āgneya - A powerful weapon that causes intense heat and arrows to fall from the sky.
Agni - The god of fire. He consumed the Khāṇḍava forest with the help of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.
Agniḥotra - A fire sacrifice offered to the demigod Agni.
Agniśtuta - A sacrifice that worships only Agni.
Agniveṣa - The sage who taught the entire science of weapons to Droṇa. He learned the science from Brhaspati.
Ahalyā - The wife of Gautama.
Ahicchatrā - The capital city of Drupada, the king of the Pañcālas, which was taken away by force by Arjuna and given to Droṇa.
Aindra - A weapon which causes thousands of arrows to fill the sky or issue forth from a bow.
Airāvata - 1. The bull carrier of Lord Indra. 2. A Nāga. 3. A dik-gaja created by Ghaṭotkaca. 4. A king of the Nāgas.
Ajās - A word which can mean either seeds or goats.
Ajātaśatru - A name of King Yudhiṣṭhira, meaning 'one who is loved by all'.
Akampana - A powerful king whose son hari was killed in battle. He took counsel from Nārada Muni to overcome his grief.
Akṛṭavṛṣa - A great sage and a devotee of Lord Paraśurāma.
Akrūra - A hero of the Yadu dynasty.
Akrūha - A division of troops consisting of 21,870 chariots, 21,870 elephants, 65,160 horses and 109,350 soldiers.
Akpāra - A very old tortoise who facilitated King Indradyumna's return to heaven.
Alakanandā - A river that runs near Mount Mandara.
Alambuṣa - 1. A Rākṣasa who fought on the side of Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Ghaṭotkaca. 2. Another Rākṣasa by that name who was killed by Ghaṭotkaca at Kurukṣetra. 3. The Apsarā sent by Indra to distract Dadhīci from his austerities.
Ālamba - A place Garuḍa visited while searching for a place to land and eat his prey.
Alāyudha - A Rākṣasa who fought on the side of Duryodhana. He was killed by Ghaṭotkaca.
Āmārapuri - The heavenly city of Indra, also called Āmāravatī and Āmāravana.
Ambā - One of the daughters of the King of Kāśi who were abducted by Bhīṣma to marry Vicitravīrya. Bhīṣma released her because she desired to marry Śālva, but when Śālva refused her she worshipped Lord Śiva for a
benediction that allowed her to be re-born as Śikhaṇḍī, the son of
Drupada, and be able to kill Bhīṣma for revenge.
Ambālikā - The youngest daughter of the King of Kāśi. She was married
to Vicitravīrya, and when he died she begot Pāṇḍu by the great sage
Vyāsadeva.
Ambarīṣa - A great king glorified by Nārada Muni.
Ambikā - The second daughter of the King of Kāśi. She was married to
Vicitravīrya, and after his death she gave birth to Dhṛtarāṣṭra by
Vyāsadeva.
Ambuvīca - A ruler of the Māgadhas.
Amāta - Nectar, the food of the gods, which makes the drinker immortal.
Amśumān - The son of Asamañjasa.
Anaṅga - The son of Kardama.
Ananta - The serpent incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu who supports Him as he
rests upon the Garbhodaka Ocean.
Andhakas - A clan of the Yadu dynasty, along with the Bhojas and
Vṛśṇis.
Aṅga - The kingdom bestowed upon Karṇa by Duryodhana. Its capital
city was Campā.
Aṅgāraparṇa - A king of the Gandharvas.
Aṅgirā - The father of Sudhanva.
Aṅgirāś - One of the sapta-āñis and the father of Brhaspati and
Samvarta.
Aniruddha - A grandson of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Aṅjalikā - A powerful arrow with a broad head that Arjuna used to
behead Karṇa.
Aṅjanāparvan - The son of Ghaṭotkaca. He was killed by Aśvatthāmā
during the battle of Kurukṣetra.
Antardhana - A weapon Kuvera gave Arjuna that puts the enemy to
sleep.
Anu - A son of Śarmiśṭhā and King Yayāti.
Anuladda - The demigod who empowered Dhṛṣṭaketu, the King of the
Cedis, as his incarnation.
Anuvinda - Along with Vinda, one of the kings of the Avantī province.
He was killed by Arjuna at Kurukṣetra.
Apāntaratamā - The ṛsi created by the vibration when Lord Viṣṇu uttered the syllable 'bho'. Lord Viṣṇu became pleased with his compilation of the Vedas and gave him the benediction that he would be immortal and the primary propagator of Vedic knowledge in each manvantara. He reincarnated asVyāsadeva.

Apava - A sage who cursed Kārtavīryārjuna that his arms would be cut off by Paraśurāma.

Apsarā - A heavenly courtesan. They are the most beautiful women in the heavenly planets.

Arghya - Water offered to a guest for washing his hands or feet.

Ariṣṭanemi - A secondary name Sahadeva used to hide his identity during the Pāṇḍavas's thirteenth year in exile. He was more usually called Tantripal during that time.

Ariṣṭāsenā - A sage whom the Pāṇḍavas stayed with for some of their exile.

Arjuna - 1. The third Pāṇḍava and intimate friend of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He was begotten from Indra when Kuntī used a mantra to invoke him for that purpose. In Arjuna's previous life he was Nara, the eternal associate of Lord Nārāyaṇa. 2. The son of King Kṛtavīrya who was killed by Paraśurāma. He was also called Kārtavīryārjuna.

Arjunaka - A bird hunter.

Arka - A tree with pungent leaves. Eating them caused Upamanyu, a disciple of Ayoda-Dhaumya, to go blind.

Artha - Profit, one of the three major pursuits of human beings.

Artha - The demigod personification of artha.

Aruna - 1. The son of Kaśyapa and Vinatā, and the brother of Garuḍa. He became the charioteer of Śūrya. 2. A very purifying branch of the river Sarasvatī. Bathing in it allowed Rākṣasas to go directly to the heavenly planets, and cleansed Indra of the sinful reaction for killing a brāhmaṇa.

Arundhatī - The wife of the sage Vasiṣṭha.

Aruni - A disciple of the sage Ayoda-Dhaumya.

Arurva - The son of a brāhmaṇa lady in the Bhṛgu dynasty. She hid the embryo within her right thigh for 100 years to protect it from the Kārtavīryās. He cast his anger over the destruction of his fore-fathers.
into the ocean.

**Arvavasu** - One of the sons of the sage Raivya.

**Āryakā** - 1. A Näga, and the great-grandfather of Kuntī. He gave Bhīma Rāsakuṇḍa nectar, which increases one's strength. 2. The father of the Näga Cikura.

**Aryama** - He performed austerities on the banks of the river Yamunā along with Indra and Agni.

**Aryan** - One who knows the value of life and has a civilization based on spiritual realization.

**Asamaṇjasa** - The son of King Sagara. Because of his wickedness he was banished from the kingdom.

**Āsāni** - A fiery weapon of Lord Śiva's.

**A čoka** - A kind of tree.

**āçrama** - 1. A hermitage. 2. The four stages of life are called āśramas. They are brahmacarya, grhaṣtha, vānaprastha, and sannyāsa.

**Aṣṭa** - The mountain in the west where the sun sets.

**Aṣṭaka** - The son of Viśvāmitra, and the grandson of Yayāti through his mother, Mādhavī.

**aññāi ga-yoga** - An eight-fold path of yoga, consisting of moral practices, bodily postures, breath control, sensory withdrawal, steadying the mind, meditation, and deep contemplation on Lord Viṣṇu within the heart.

**Aṣṭāvakra** - The son of Kahoda. While still in his mother's womb, he was cursed by his father and was thus born with a body that was crooked in eight parts.

**Asti** - A daughter of Jarāsandha who was married to Kāṁsa.

**Āstika** - The great sage who saved the race of serpents from being destroyed in the snake-sacrifice of King Janamejaya. He was the son of the sage Jāratkāru and a Näga princess with the same name.

**açvattha** - A peepul tree (banyan tree).

**Açvatthāmā** - The son of Droṇa. He fought on the side of Duryodhana during the Kurukṣetra war, and was one of the few survivors. He killed the sons of Draupadī while they were awaking from sleep and attempted to kill Parīkṣit while he was in Uttarā's womb.

**Asita** - A celestial sage.

**Asita-Devala** - A sage who recited the Mahābhārata to the pīṭṛs. He
ascended to the eternal spiritual sky by adopting the path of liberation.

Aśmaka - A prince of Ayodhyā. Because his father Kalmāṣapāda was unable to beget children, he was born through the sage Vasiṣṭha.

asuras - A race of demons, also called Daityas and Dānavas, who are the enemies of the demigods.

asuric - Referring to aspects or characteristics of the asura race.

Āśutoṣa - Another name for Lord Śiva.

Aśva - The river which Kuntī abandoned Karṇa on as a baby.

Açvamedha-yaṇī - The horse sacrifice. A horse is sent to all the kingdoms as a challenge, and any king who tries to capture the horse will have to fight with the horse's protectors to prove his superiority. A king who was able to perform the horse sacrifice became the emperor of the world through conquest.

Aśvapati - A king of the Madras.

Aśvasena - The son of the Nāga Takṣaka who survived the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest.

Aśvinī-kumāras - Twin heavenly physicians. These two demigods were invoked by Mādrī, the wife of Pāṇḍu, and through them Mādrī gave birth to Nakula and Sahadeva.

Aśvins - A short name for the Aśvinī-kumāras.

Atharva Veda - One of the four sections of the Vedas.

Atharvāṇīgiras - A name given to the sage Āṅgirāś when he pleased Lord Indra by reciting the Atharva Veda.

atiratha - One who is capable of simultaneously fighting against 60,000 ordinary warriors.

Ātreya - A disciple of the sage Vāmadeva.

Atri - One of the sapta-ṛṣis.

avabhātha - A bath taken in sacred water at the completion of a sacrifice.

Avantī - A province in India.

Avikṣit - The son of King Karandhama. Avikṣit's son was King Marutta.

Avisthala - One of the five villages requested by the Pāṇḍavas as a compromise in an attempt to avoid the Kurukṣetra war.

Ayoda-Dhaumya - A sage known for harshly testing his disciples.

Ayodhyā - The capital city of the kingdom of Kośala.

Āyu - 1. A king in the Soma dynasty and the father of Nāhuṣa. 2. The
ruler of the frogs.

**Babhru** - A member of the Yadu dynasty.

**Babhruvāhana** - The son of Arjuna and Citrāṅgadā. He became the king of Maṇipura, and when Arjuna was following the sacrificial challenge-horse, Babhruvāhana fought with him and killed him by accident. Arjuna was brought back to life by Ulūpi.

**Badarī** - A short name for Badarikāśrama.

**Badarikāśrama** - A holy place in the Himalayas where the great sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa had a hermitage and performed austerities. The Pāṇḍavas visited it during their exile in the forest.

**Bakāśura** - A demon in the form of a duck who was killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Baladeva** - A name for Lord Balarāma.

**Balarāma** - An incarnation of Lord Nārāyaṇa who appeared as the son of Vasudeva and Rohiṇī, and thus the brother of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He taught the art of fighting with a club to Bhīma and Duryodhana, but chose not to become involved with the Kurukṣetra war.

**Bali** - The son of Virocanā and the king of the Daityas and Dānavas.

**Bāṇāśura** - A Dānava, and the son of Bali Mahārāja. He was killed by Skanda.

**Bārhāspatya** - Brhaspati's summarization of the *daṇḍanīti*, the science of chastisement.

**Benaras** - A city in India.

**Bhadrā** - 1. The wife of King Vyusitasva. 2. A princess of Viśāla. 2. One of the wives of Vasudeva. She entered the fire he was cremated in when he died.

**Bhāga** - A demigod.

**Bhagadatta** - The incarnation of an *asura* named Vaskala. He was the king of the Prāgyotisās, and fought on the side of Duryodhana during the Kurukṣetra war, but was killed by Arjuna.

**Bhagavad-gītā** - Instructions given to Arjuna before the battle of Kurukṣetra by Lord Kṛṣṇa concerning *bhakti-yoga*, the path of devotional service.

**Bhagavān** - The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who resides in His own abode and Who expands Himself unlimitedly by means of innumerable personal forms.
**Bhāgīrathī** - The descendant of King Sagara who brought Gaṅgādevī to earth from the heavenly planets through his austerities.

**bhakti-yoga** - The path of devotional service and the only means for realizing the Supreme Lord. This knowledge can only be taught by a pure devotee.

**Bhangasura** - The father of King Ṛtūparṇa.

**Bhaṅgasvāna** - A king who was cursed by Indra to turn into a woman.

**Bhanusena** - A son of Karṇa who was killed by Bhīma during the battle of Kurukṣetra.

**Bhāradvāja** - 1. The father of Droṇa. 2. One of the saṁta-ṛṣis and the father of Yavakri and Sruvavāti.

**Bharata** - 1. The dynasty in which the Pāṇḍavas were born, named after their ancestor Bhārata. 2. King Bhārata, the son of King Duṣmanta and Śakuntalā. He became the emperor of the world.

**Bhāratavarṣa** - The earth.

**Bhārgava** - A powerful weapon that causes millions of arrows to stream forth.

**Bhārgavas** - brāhmaṇa descendants in the line of Bhṛgu.

**Bhauma** - A weapon that creates land.

**Bhīma** - 1. The second son of Pāṇḍu. Because Pāṇḍu was cursed not to conceive children, Kuntī used a mantra to invoke Vāyu, and thus Bhīma was born. 2. A king of Vidarbha, and the father of Damayanti, Dama, Danta, and Damana.

**Bhīmasena** - One of the sons of King Janamejaya. 2. Another name for Bhīma, the brother of Yudhiṣṭhira.

**Bhiṣma** - The son of King Śantanu and Gaṅgā, and an incarnation of the Vasu named Dyu. He born with the name Devavrata, but when he took a vow of life-long celibacy so that his father could marry Satyavatī he was given the name Bhiṣma (the terrible). His father gave him the benediction that he would never be able to die against his will. Through his brother Vīcitravrīḍya he was the grandfather of the Pāṇḍavas, and he fought on the side of Duryodhana during the Kurukṣetra war as a commander-in-chief. He allowed himself to be killed by Arjuna.

**Bhiṣmaka** - The king of Kuṇḍina and the father of Rukmī and Rukmīṇī, the wife of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Bhogavatī - 1. A lower planet where many Nāgas live and Śeṣa helps support the earth. 2. A river on one of the lower planets.

Bhojakāta - The city founded by Rukmī after his defeat at the hands of Lord Krṣṇa.

Bhojas - A clan of the Yadu dynasty, along with the Andhakas and Vṛṣṇis.

Bhrigu - 1. The great sage who was created by Brahmā from the sacred fire of a Varuṇa sacrifice. 2. The dynasty of the descendants of Bhrigu, who are also called Bhārgavas.

Bhrigu-tārtha - A holy place on the banks of the River Vadhūśāra. Paraśurāma bathed there to regain his lost prowess.

Bhūlinga - A species of birds which lives north of the Himālayas.

Bhūmi - The presiding goddess of the earth.

Bhuminja - The son of King Virāṭa, also known as Uttara.

Bhūridyumna - The son of King Virāḍyumna.

Bhūrīśravas - The son of Somadatta and one of the commanders of Duryodhana's army at Kurukṣetra. He was killed by Sātyaki.

Brahmā - 1. The universal grandsire. He is the first created being. He was born from the lotus flower that grows from Lord Viṣṇu's navel, and he is the creator of the universe. 2. A vow of austerity for 1,000 years.

brahmacārī - A religious student, unmarried, who lives with his spiritual guide, devoted to study and service.

brahmacārī - A female brahmacārī.

brahmacyāra - One of the four stages of life, when one is still a student and strictly celibate.

Brahmadatta - The king of Kāmpilya.

brahmajyoti - The all-pervading bodily effulgence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Those who are absorbed in an impersonal conception of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, can become merged within the brahmajyoti if they purify themselves of all material contamination. This is an imperfect destination, however, because one's original personal existence and constitutional activity remain undiscovered. There is every chance of once again falling down from the brahmajyoti, because senselessness and inactivity cannot stand forever.

Brahmaloka - The topmost planet within the universe, and the abode of
Brahmā.
Brāhma-muhūrtta - The hour when one is supposed to rise from bed, about two hours before sunrise.
**Brahman** - One of the three features of the Absolute Truth. By meditating upon the impersonal Brahman, in Whom there exists no material dualities such as happiness and distress, one can attain liberation by entering into the **brahmajyoti**.
**brāhmaēa** - A holy person and a member of the highest caste, whose occupation is to study and teach the Vedas.
**brahmaēi** - A female brāhmaṇa, or the wife of a brāhmaṇa.
**Brahmā-raksasas** - Demons who watch for any fault in the performance of a Rājasūya-yajñā and use that opportunity to cause war or even the destruction of the entire earth.
**brahmārṇī** - A great sage.
**Brahmañara** - A holy place visited by the Pāṇḍavas.
**brahmaçira** - A powerful weapon capable of destroying the entire world. Both Aśvatthāmā and Arjuna gained the knowledge of how to invoke it from Droṇa.
**brahmāstra** - A powerful weapon invoked with mantras that is presided over by Brahmā.
**brahminical** - Referring to, or having the qualities of, the brāhmaṇa caste.
**Brhadaśva** - 1. A great sage who was a source of comfort to Yudhiṣṭhira during his exile. He also taught Yudhiṣṭhira the art of playing dice. 2. A king in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku and the father of King Kuvalayāśva.
**Brhadbala** - The king of Kośala. He joined the side of the Kauravas and was killed by Abhimanyu.
**Brhadgarba** - The son of King Śibi.
**Brhadratha** - 1. A king of Māgadha, and the father of Jarāsandha. 2. The ruler of the Kaikeyas. He fought for Yudhiṣṭhira at the battle of Kurukṣetra.
**Brhadyumna** - A king who had the assistance of the sons of the sage Raivyā to perform sacrifices.
**Brhannala** - The name used by Arjuna to hide his identity during the Pāṇḍavas' thirteenth year of exile.
Bṛhaspati - The son of the sage Aṅgirāś, and the spiritual master of the demigods. A portion of Bṛhaspati took birth as Droṇācārya 2. The brother of the sage Utathya.
Buddha - The son of Soma in the Yadu dynasty.
Cāitra - The month in which Yudhiṣṭhira was initiated into the performance of the aśvamedha-yajñā.
Caitraratha - A forest.
Cāityaka - A mountain peak outside the city of Māgadha that was broken by Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma, and Arjuna.
Cakra - A discus.
Cākṣuṣi - The mystic Gandharva art of illusion.
Cāmara - A hand held fan made of animal hair.
Campā - The capital city of the kingdom of Aṅga.
Caṇḍakauśika - A great sage who enabled King Bṛhadratha to have a son.
caēōāla - A person of a degraded caste.
Caṇḍāla - A tribe of degraded persons, or a person belonging to that tribe.
Candraka - An owl mentioned in a story told to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīṣma.
Candrāśva - One of the sons of King Kuvalayāśva in the Ikṣvāku dynasty.
Cārana - A class of heavenly beings.
caru - A preparation similar to sweet-rice.
Cārudeṣṇa - A son of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Cārvāka - A Rākṣasa friend of Duryodhana who tried to kill Yudhiṣṭhira by posing as a brāhmaṇa and convincing him to commit suicide. He was killed by the real brāhmaṇas who were present.
Cāturmāṣya - The name of a season lasting four months.
Cedi - A kingdom in India.
Cekitāna - One of the commanders of Yudhiṣṭhira's army at Kurukṣetra. He was killed by Duryodhana.
Cikura - A Nāga who was killed by Garuḍa.
Cīraķarīn - The son of a sage named Gautama.
Cīrīṇi - A river.
Citra - A Nāga.
Citrāṅgadā - 1. A son of King Śantanu and Satyavatī. He was killed by a
Gandharva with the same name. 2. The daughter of Citravāhana, the king of Manipura. She married Arjuna and their son was Babhruvāhana. 3. A Gandharva king. 4. A king of Kaliṅga. His daughter was married to Duryodhana.

Citraratha - 1. A Gandharva friend of Arjuna who was also named Citrasena. 2. A king of Aṅga.

Citrasena - 1. A Gandharva friend of Arjuna, who taught him singing, dancing, and music during his visit to the heavenly planets. He helped the Pāṇḍavas by attacking and defeating Duryodhana before he could embarrass them, and he also gave each of them 100 celestial horses as a gift. 2. One of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, all of whom were killed by Bhīma. 3. A son of Karṇa who was killed by Yudhiṣṭhira.

Citravāhana - The king of Manipura. His daughter, Citrāṅgadā, married Arjuna.

Cyavana - A sage and the son of Bhṛgu and his wife Pulomā.
crore - Ten million.

Dadhīci - A sage who was the most powerful being in creation and was generated by Bhṛgu Muni. He gave up his life so that the demigods could make his bones into weapons to defeat the demons, especially Vṛtrāsura. Indra's thunderbolt was made of his bones.

Daityas - The race of demons and the eternal enemies of the demigods. Also called asuras and Dānavas.

Daityasena - A daughter of Lord Brahmā.

Dakṣa - A being created by Lord Brahmā and delegated the task of generating many varieties of living beings to populate the universe.
dakñēa - A gift given to a priest after receiving his assistance, or given to a spiritual master by a disciple out of gratitude.

Dala - A king in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku who ruled Ayodhyā.

Dalvya-vaka - A sage who once cursed Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

Dama - A son of King Bhīma of Vidarbha.

Damaghoṣa - A king, and the father of Śiśupāla.

Damana - 1. A brāhmaṇa who blessed King Bhīma of Vidarbha with children. 2. A son of King Bhīma the Vidarbha.

Damayantī - The daughter of King Bhīma of Vidarbha. She married King
Nala.
Dambodhava - An emperor of the entire earth. Because of his pride he attacked Nara and Nārāyaṇa and was defeated.
Dānavas - The race of demons and the eternal enemies of the demigods. Also called asuras and Daityas.
Daṇḍa - A prince of Māgadha who fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Arjuna.
Daṇḍadharā - The king of the Māgadhas who fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Arjuna.
daṇḍanéti - The science of government through chastisement, created by Brahmā as a guide for kings.
Dansa - An asura.
Danta - A son of King Bhīma of the Vidarbhas.
Dantavakra - A king who supported Jarāsandha.
darçan - An audience with a worshipable person.
Dāruka - Lord Kṛṣṇa’s charioteer.
Daśaratha - A king of Ayodhyā and the father of Rāmacandra and Lakṣmaṇa.
Daśārṇa - A kingdom in India.
Daśārṇakas - The people of Daśārṇa.
Daśāsva - The tenth of Ikṣvāku's one hundred sons, and a ruler of Māhiṣmatī.
Deva - A member of the race of demigods, who are called the Devas.
Devadatta - A conchshell given to Arjuna by Maya Dānava
Devahūti - The mother of Lord Kapiladeva.
Devaka - A king whose daughter Devākī married Vasudeva and became the mother of Lord Kṛṣṇa. A daughter of his through a śūdra woman married Vidura.
Devākī - The wife of Vasudeva of the Yadu dynasty, and the mother of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Devala - A great sage and the elder brother of Dhaumya.
Devāpi - One of the sons of King Pratīpa of the Kuru dynasty, and the brother of King Śantanu.
devarṇī - A great ṛṣi among the demigods.
Devasena - A daughter of Brahmā who married Skanda.
Devaśarmā - A great sage.
Devasthāna - A sage who advised King Yudhiṣṭhira.
Devavrata - The son of Mahārāja Śantanu and Gaṅgā, also called Bhiṣma.
Devayāni - The daughter of Sukracharya. She married King Yayāti.
Devī - A title meaning 'goddess'.
Dhanañjaya - One of the names of Arjuna, given to him because he acquired vast amounts of wealth after conquering numerous kings.
Dhannusakṣa - A sage.
Dharma - The lord of justice and religious principles, also called Yamarāja. He was summoned by Kuntī for the purpose of getting a son, and thus Yudhiṣṭhira was his son.
dharma - Virtue, one of the major pursuits of ordinary human beings.
Dharmadhyaja - A ruler of Mithilā, and a descendant of King Janaka.
Dharmarāja - Another name for Dharma, the lord of justice.
Dharmaranya - A brāhmaṇa descendant of Atri.
dharma-çāstra - Holy scriptures which speak on the topic of duty and virtue.
Dhṛtarāṣtras - The collective name for all the sons of Dhritarashtra.
Dhātā - One of the demigods representing day and night.
Dhātreyikā - A maidservant of the Pāṇḍavas.
Dattātreya - An incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
Dhaumya - The brāhmaṇa priest of the Pāṇḍavas.
Dhenuka - An āśrama where the personification of Death performed austerities.
Dhrṣṭadyumna - The son of King Drupada of the Pañcālas, born from a sacrificial fire for the destruction of Droṇa, which he achieved during the battle of Kurukṣetra. He was later killed by Aśvatthāmā while awaking from sleep. His sister, Draupadī, married the five Pāṇḍavas.
Dhrṣṭaketu - The son of Śiṣupāla, and the king of the Cedis. He took the side of the Pāṇḍavas during the Kurukṣetra war and was killed by Droṇa.
Dhṛtarāṣtra - 1. The father of the Kauravas (Duryodhana and his ninety-nine brothers). He was born of the union of Vyāsadeva and Ambikā. Although he was born blind, he had the strength of ten thousand elephants. 2. A Gandharva king.
Dhṛtavarman - A brother of Suryavarman, the king of the Trigartas.
Dhundhu - A Dānava, and the son of Madhu and Kaiṭabha. He was killed by King Kuvalayāśva.
Dhundhumāra - The name given to King Kuvalayāśva of the Ikṣvāku dynasty for killing the demon Dhundhu.
dik-gaja - An elephant created by Ghaṭotkaca with his mystic power of illusion.
Dilīpa - 1. A rājarṣi living in Amarāvatī. 2. A king in the line of Sagara, and the father of Bhāgirathī.
Ḍibhaka - The elder brother of Haṁsa. Together, they were supporters of Jarāsandha.
Ḍindaka - A mouse in a story told to Dhṛtarāṣṭra by Nārada Muni.
Ḍirghatama - The son of the sage Utathya and his wife Mamatā. He was cursed to be born blind.
Divodāsa - A king of Kāśi.
Drahyuyu - A son of Śarmiṣṭhā and King Yayāti.
Draupadī - The daughter of King Drupada. She was born from a sacrificial fire like her brother Dhṛṣṭadyumna. She was won by Arjuna at her svayaṁvara, but was married to all five Pāṇḍavas.
Ḍṛḍhāśva - A son of King Kuvalayāśva.
Ḍṛḍhāśyū - The son of the sage Agastya and Lopamudrā.
Droṇa - 1. The martial preceptor of the Pāṇḍavas, the Kauravas, and many other princes and kings. He was the son of the sage Bhāradvāja. Aśvatthāmā was his son. He fought on the side of Duryodhana during Kurukṣetra and was killed by Dhṛṣṭadyumna. 2. A Śāṅgakā bird.
Droṇācārya - Another name for Droṇa, the preceptor of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas.
Drupada - The king of Paṅcāla. He lost half of his kingdom to Droṇa, and engaged sages to create a son who could kill Droṇa. With their help Dhṛṣṭadyumna was born from a sacrificial fire, and also his daughter Draupadī. His son Śikhaṇḍī was born as a woman and was later turned into a man. Drupada was killed by Droṇa during the battle of Kurukṣetra.
Dundubha - A species of snakes who do not bite men.
**Durgā** - A name of Yogamāyā, the sister of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Durjaya** - One of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who were all killed by Bhīma.

**Durmada** - One of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who were all killed by Bhīma.

**Durmarśana** - One of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who were all killed by Bhīma.

**Durmukha** - One of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who were all killed by Bhīma.

**Durvāsā Muni** - A great sage and a partial incarnation of Lord Śiva. He gave Kuntī a mantra that would invoke a demigod for the purpose of begetting children.

**Duryaha** - The abode of the sage Agastya.

**Duryodhana** - 1. The first born of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Because of his envy of the Pāṇḍavas, he tried many times to kill them, and finally succeeded in taking away their kingdom, causing the war at Kurukṣetra. He was killed by Bhīma, who broke his thighs on the last day of the battle. 2. A king of Māhiṣmatī.

**Dušala** - One of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who were all killed by Bhīma.

**Duḥśala** - The daughter of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī, born after Duryodhana and his brothers. She was married to Jayadratha.

**Duḥśāsana** - One of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who were all killed by Bhīma. He particularly angered the Pāṇḍavas by attempting to take off Draupadī’s clothes in the assembly of the Kurus.

**Duṣkara** - One of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who were all killed by Bhīma.

**Duṣmanta** - A king who once ruled the entire earth. He married Śakuntalā and their son was King Bhārata.

**Dvaipāyaṇa** - 1. A name given to Vyāsadeva, because he was born on an island. 2. A lake hidden in by Duryodhana.

**Dvaita** - A lake in the Dvaitavana forest which the Pāṇḍavas lived near during their exile.

**Dvaitavana** - A forest in which the Pāṇḍavas lived during their exile.

**Dvārakā** - The capital city of the Yadus. Lord Kṛṣṇa built this island city
to protect the Yadus from the attacks of demons. When Lord Kṛṣṇa left this world, the ocean swallowed the island and the city.

**Dvāpara** - The demigod personification of the Dvāpara-yuga.

**Dvāpara-yuga** - The second of the four ages. It lasts 2,000 celestial years (a celestial year equals 360 solar years).

**Dvīta** - 1. A son of the sage Gautama. 2. A son of Lord Brahmā.

**Dwivīda** - A ruler in the caves of Kiṣkindhā. Mainda and Dwivīda were the monkey sons of the twin Aśvins.

**Dyū** - One of the Vasus, who were cursed by take birth on earth. Dyu was born as Bhīṣma.

**Dyumatsena** - A king of the Śālvas, and the father of Satyavān.

**Dyutimāṅ** - A king in the line of Ikṣvāku.

**Ekacakra** - A village where the Pāṇḍavas and Kuntī stayed after escaping the burning of the house of lac.

**Ekalavya** - The son of Hiranyadhanus, the King of the niśadas. Since Droṇa refused to teach him the science of archery because of his low birth, he made a statue of Droṇa and learned by practicing in front of it. Out of affection for Arjuna, Droṇa made Ekalavya offer him his thumb as *dakṣiṇa* so that he would not surpass Arjuna in skill. Ekalavya was later killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Ekat** - 1. A son of the sage Gautama. 2. A son of Lord Brahmā

**Elāpatra** - A Nāga.

**erakā** - A grass growing at Prabhāsa which the Yadus used to attack each other. When grabbed, this grass became powerful weapons as a result of a ṛṣi’s curse.

**Gada** - A brother of Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Yadu dynasty.

**Gāḍhi** - 1. The father of Viśvāmitra. 2. A king whose daughter, Satyavatī, married the sage Ricika.

**Gālava** - A disciple of Vishvamitra.

**Ganda** - A maidservant of the sapta-ṛṣīs.

**Gāndhāmaḍana** - A mountain where Nara and Nārāyaṇa performed austerities. Kuvera has a city on its peak.

**Gāndhāra** - A province in ancient India.

**Gāndhārī** - The daughter of King Subala of Gāndhāra. When she was married to
Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was blind, she voluntarily blindfolded herself for the rest of her life. She had one hundred sons, including Duryodhana, and one daughter.

**Gandharva** - A class of demigods who are expert at music and dance.

**Gandhavatī** - Another name of Satyavatī, given to her because of her sweet scent.

**Gāṇḍīva** - A powerful bow given to Arjuna by Varuṇa.

**Gaṇeśa** - The son of Lord Śiva and Pārvatī. He is called the celestial scribe because he wrote down the *Mahābhārata* for Vyāsadeva as he narrated it.

**Gaṅgā** - A famous holy river in India, or the goddess of that river personified. She married King Śantanu and gave birth to Bhīṣma.

**Gaṅgādevī** - Another name for the personification of the river Gaṅgā.

**Gaṅgāvārā** - A holy place.

**Garbhodaka** - The ocean in which Garbhodaśāyi Viṣṇu rests.

**Garbhodaśāyi Viṣṇu** - The form of Lord Viṣṇu Who lies upon the great ocean and generates Lord Brahmā for the work of creation.

**Garga** - A great sage.

**Gṛhāpatya** - A fire burning in the household.

**Garuḍa** - The son of Kaśyapa and Vinatā, born as a bird from an egg. Garuḍa stays on Lord Viṣṇu's flagpole and also acts as His personal carrier.

**Gaurumukha** - A disciple of Śāmīka ṛṣi.

**Gautama** - 1. One of the *sapta-ṛṣis* and the father of Śaradvān. 2. The father of Ekat, Dvita, and Trita. 3. A *brāhmaṇa* who fell from his caste. 4. Another name of the ṛṣi Medhātithi, who appeared in the line of the *sapta-ṛṣi* Gautama.

**Gautamī** - A wise lady whose son was killed by a serpent.

**Gaivalgaṇa** - The father of Saṅjaya, and a *sūta* by caste.

**Gaya** - A king famous for performing grand sacrifices.

**Gāyatrī** - 1. A *mantra* which is so powerful that it frees one from all sinful reactions when chanted regularly. 2. Another name of Sāvitrī, the wife of Brahmā.

**Gāyatrīdevī** - Another name of Sāvitrī, the wife of Brahmā.
Gharmanvati - A river.

Ghaṭotkaca - The powerful Rākṣasa son of Bhima and the rākṣasi Hiḍimbi. He was a favorite of the Pāṇḍavas and helped them during their exile. He fought for them at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Karna.

ghee - Clarified butter.

Ghṛtacī - An Apsarā.

Gīrīka - The daughter of the river Śuktimati, who was married to King Vasu.

Girivraja - The capital city of the province of Māgadha.

Goloka Vṛndāvana - Lord Kṛṣṇa’s eternal abode, which is beyond the material universe.

Gomati - A river.

gopé - A cowherd girl.

goçālā - A place where cows are kept.

Gosvāmī - A tide for a holy person and a teacher.

Govardhana - A hill which was lifted by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Govinda - One of the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa, meaning Reservoir of Pleasure.

Granthika - The name used by Nakula to hide his identity during the Pāṇḍava's year in hiding.

Grḥadevī - A demi-goddess created by Brahmā who presides over the households of human beings.

gāhastha - The second of the four stages of life. During this stage one marries and lives as a householder.

Guha - Another name of Skanda.

Guhyakas - The residents of a heavenly region.

gumcha - A bathing cloth.

Guṇākesī - The daughter of Mātali. She married the Nāga Sumukha.

guru - A spiritual master or teacher.

Haba - A Gandharva.

Haihayas - A dynasty of kṣatriyas.

Haimavatī - A river also called Śatadrū.


Hanumān - The brother of Bhīma, and the son of the wind-god, Vāyu.
As a favor to Bhīma Hanumān rides upon Arjuna's flagstaff. Hanumān is a great devotee of Rāmacandra.

**Hari** - 1. A name and incarnation of Lord Krṣṇa. 2. The son of King Akampana who was killed in battle. 3. The demon son of Tārākṣa. 4. A mountain region.

**Hariścandra** - A former emperor of the entire earth.

**Hārīta** - The name of a mongoose in a story told to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīma.

**Harivarṣa** - The celestial realm of the Northern Kurus.

**Haryāśva** - A king in the Ikṣvāku dynasty who ruled over Ayodhyā. The father of Vasumanaś.

**Hastināpura** - The capital city of the Kurus.

**Hayagrīva** - An incarnation of the Supreme Lord, having a horse's head. At the beginning of creation, Hayagrīva rescued the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha.

**Hemakūṭa** - Another name for Ṛṣabha Hill.

**Hiṭimba** - A Rākṣasa who wanted to devour the Pāṇḍavas and was killed by Bhīma.

**Hiṭimbī** - The sister of the Rākṣasa Hiṭimba. She married Bhīma, and their son Ghaṭotkacā was very loyal to the Pāṇḍavas.

**Himālaya** - A range of mountains.

**Himavān** - A mountain visited by the Pāṇḍavas.

**Himavat** - A mountain in the Himālayas that is also called Naubandhana.

**Hiranvati** - The river Yudhiṣṭhira's army camped next to during the battle of Kurukṣetra.

**Hiranyadhanus** - A niśāda king and the father of Ekalavya.

**Hiranyakaśipu** - An asura who took birth again as Śiśupāla

**Hiranya-pura** - A city constructed by the architect Maya Dānava, which was inhabited by many kinds of Dānavas and Daityas.

**Hiranya-śṛṅga** - A mountain peak composed entirely of precious jewels.

**Hiranyavarman** - The king of the Daśārṇakas. His daughter married Śīkhanḍi.

**Hotravāhana** - The maternal grandfather of the princess Ambā He advised Ambā to take shelter of Paraśurāma.
Hūḥū - A Gandharva.
Hūṇas - An uncivilized tribe.
Idhmavāha - Another name of Drḍhasyu, the son of the sage Agastya.
Ikṣvāku - 1. A king. 2. The dynasty of the descendants of King Ikṣvāku.
Ilvala - A Daitya who hated brähmaṇas. He would turn his brother Vātāpi into a ram and feed him to guest brähmaṇas, and then use his mystic power to summon him. The brähmaṇa would be killed when Vātāpi emerged from his body.
Indra - The king of the demigods, and the father of Arjuna.
Indradyumna - 1. A saintly king. 2. A lake created by the hoofprints of cows.
Indrakīla - A sacred place where Arjuna met Indra.
Indraloka - The heavenly abode of Indra.
Indraprastha - The capital city of the Pāṇḍavas, built at Khāṇḍavaprastha.
Indrasena - 1. The son of Nala and Damayantī. 2. The chief servant of the Pāṇḍavas. He acted as Yudhiṣṭhira's charioteer.
Indrasenā - The daughter of Nala and Damayantī, and the twin sister of Indrasena.
Indravarman - A king of the Mālavas.
Irāvān - The son of Arjuna and the Nāga princess Ulūpī. He fought for the Pāṇḍavas at Kurukṣetra, and was killed by the Rākṣasa Alambuṣa.
Jāgīṣavya - A self realized sage who was able to attain the spiritual world.
Jaimini - A disciple of Vyāsadeva.
Jājali - A brähmaṇa.
Jalasandha - A king of the Māgadhas. He fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Śātyaki.
Jamadagni - The father of Paraśurāma, and the husband of Reṇukā. Jamadagni's father was Ricika.
Jāmbavatī - A wife of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and the mother of Śāmba.
Jambha - A demon.
Jambūdvīpa - The ancient name of India.
Jānamejaya - 1. The son of King Parīkṣit. He performed a snake-sacrifice to destroy all snakes as revenge for his father's death at the hands of
Takṣaka, but he was stopped by the sage Āstika. 2. A Pañcāla prince.

Janapādi - An Apsarā.

Janārdana - Lord Kṛṣṇa is called Janārdana because He is the soul of all souls.

Janasthana - A place where Lord Rāmacandra lived while He was on the earth.

Jantu - The son of king Somaka.

japa - The chanting of mantras.

japa-mala - A ring of beads for chanting mantras with.

Jarā - 1. A rākṣasi who joined the two pieces of the baby Jarāsandha and thus brought the child to life. 2. The personification of old age. 3. A hunter who, under the influence of Destiny, pierced Lord Kṛṣṇa’s foot with his arrow and thus facilitated the Lord's show of death.

Jarāsandha - The king of Māgadha. He was born from two mothers and in two pieces, which, when joined together, came to life. Bhīma killed him by tearing him in half again.

Jaratkāru - 1. A sage who agreed to marry to save his forefathers. His son, Āstika, saved the race of serpents from the snake-sacrifice of King Janamejaya. 2. The sister of the Nāga Vāsuki, who was given in marriage to the sage Jaratkāru.

Jarita - A female bird whose children survived the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest.

Jaritari - The son of the birds Mandapāla and Jarita.

Jaṭāsura - A Rākṣasa who disguised himself as a brāhmaṇa and tried to kidnap Draupadī, Yudhiṣṭhīra, Nakula, and Sahadeva. He was killed by Bhīma.

Jaṭilā - A woman who married seven sages.

Jaya - 1. One of the names used by the Pāṇḍavas to call upon each other for help during their year in hiding. 2. An exclamation of praise in honor of someone, or of anticipation of victory.

Jayadratha - The king of Sindhu. He married Duḥśalā, Duryodhana’s sister, and fought for Duryodhana as a commander. He once tried to kidnap Draupadī, but because of his shame at his consequent defeat at the hands of the Pāṇḍavas, he worshipped Śiva for the benediction that he would be able to halt all the Pāṇḍavas but Arjuna in battle. Because
of this, Abhimanyu was slain. Jayadratha was killed by Arjuna the next day.

Jayadvala - One of the names used by the Pāṇḍavas to call upon each other for help during their year in hiding.

Jayanta - One of the names used by the Pāṇḍavas to call upon each other for help during their year in hiding.

Jayatsena - 1. One of the names used by the Pāṇḍavas to call upon each other for help during their year in hiding. 2. A king of Māgadha and Pāṇḍya who joined with Yudhiṣṭhira at Kurukṣetra.

Jimūta - A wrestler killed by Bhīma.

Jiṣṇu - One of the names of Arjuna, given to him because he is the son of Indra and also because he is irrepresible in battle and subdues all adversaries.

Jītavatē - A friend of the wife of Dyu.

Jīvala - A charioteer of King Ritupārṇa of Ayodhyā.

jēva-tattva - An ordinary living entity.

jī āna-yoga - The path of spiritual realization through a philosophical search for truth.

jujube - A kind of fruit.

Jyotiṣka - A weapon that causes darkness to be dispelled.

Jyotsnākali - A daughter of the demigod Soma.

Kaccha - The son of Bṛhaspati. He obtained the knowledge of sañjīvanī, how to bring someone back to life, for the demigods.

Kadru - A daughter of Dakṣa who was married to the sage Kaśyapa. She had 1,000 snakes for her sons.

Kahoda - A disciple of the rṣi Udālaka. Kahoda married Udālaka's daughter Sujāta and their son was Aṣṭāvakra.

Kaikeya - A province in India.

Kaikeyas - The citizens of the province of Kaikeya.

Kailāsa - A mountain where Lord Śiva resides.

Kaṭtabha - One of two demons who were born at the beginning of creation and were killed by Lord Viṣṇu.

Kāla - Time, and also the name of the demigod personification of time.

kāla-cakra - The wheel of time.

Kālakā - A woman who received a benediction that her children would
be unslayable by the demigods.
Kālakeyas - A race of powerful Dānavas, the children of Kālaka.
Kalakhañjas - A race of demons.
Kālanemi - A Dānava. Kāmsa was an incarnation of him.
Kāla-rati - Another name of Kāla, the god of time, who inevitably causes everyone's death.
Kāla-ratri - The shadow of Lord Śiva, or death-night.
Kali - 1. The last and darkest of the four ages. It lasts for 432,000 years. 2. The demigod personification of the age of Kāli.
Kaliṅga - A kingdom in India.
Kāliya - A serpent killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Kali-yuga - The last and darkest of the four ages. It lasts for 432,000 years.
Kalki - An incarnation of God predicted to appear in the future and destroy the demoniac persons in order to usher in a new age.
Kalmāñapāda - A king of Ayodhyā in the line of Ikṣvāku, who was cursed to be possessed by a demon because of his pride.
Kalpa - A place where some of the wives of Lord Kṛṣṇa stayed after His disappearance.
kāma - Pleasure, one of the major pursuits of ordinary human beings.
Kāma - The god of love.
kāmadhenu - A celestial cow that can supply any article upon request.
Kamalākṣa - A son of the demon Tāraka. He and his brothers were killed by Lord Śiva.
Kāmbhojas - The citizens of the province of Kāmbhoja.
Kāmpilyā - A city.
Kāṁsa - The son of Ugrasena. He married two of Jarāsandha's daughters, and had many powerful allies. He harassed the Yadu dynasty severely before Kṛṣṇa killed him. Kāṁsa also killed six of Kṛṣṇa's brothers upon their birth.
Kāmyakavana - The forest of Kāmyaka, where the Pāṇḍavas stayed for some time during their exile.
Kandarpa - Another name of Kāma, the god of love.
Kanikā - The chief minister of King Dhrūtarāṣtra.
Kāṅka - The name used by Yudhiṣṭhira to hide his identity during the
Pāṇḍava's year of hiding.
Kāṇva - A brāhmaṇa who adopted Śakuntalā.
kanyā - A young unmarried girl.
Kapālamocana - A holy place on the banks of the river Sarasvatī also called Uśanā.
Kapaṭaraman - A son of King Śibi.
Kapiladeva - Kapila, the son of Devahūti.
Kapilāśva - A son of King Kuvalayāśva in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku.
Kārakaṛṣa - A warrior who fought for Yudhiṣṭhira at Kurukṣetra.
Karandhama - A king who had once ruled over the entire earth, and a predecessor of King Marutta.
Kardama - A great sage, and the son of Krittimat. Kardama's son was Ananga.
Karkoṭaka - A Nāga who helped King Nala.
karma - The reactions experienced by a living entity as a result of its own previous acts.
karma-yoga - The practice of dedicating the results of one's work to God for the purpose of spiritual realization.
Karṇa - The eldest son of Kuntī, born from the sun god before her marriage to Pāṇḍu. She abandoned the child due to fear of her relatives, and he was adopted by Adhiratha and Rādhā. He became a friend of Duryodhana, and thus an enemy of the Pāṇḍavas, especially Arjuna. He learned the science of weapons from Droṇa and Paraśurāma, and was killed by Arjuna on the battlefield at Kurukṣetra.
Kārtavīryārjuna - The son of Kṛtavīrya. He was also named Arjuna, and because of a benediction he had 1,000 arms. He was killed by Paraśurāma.
Kārtavīryās - The descendants of the king Kṛtavīrya.
Kārtika - A month in autumn.
Kārttikeya - Another name of Skanda, the son of Śiva, and the commander-in-chief of the demigods.
Karūṣa - A kingdom in India.
Kārūṣas - The citizens of the kingdom of Karūṣa.
Kāśī - A kingdom in India.
Kāśirāja - The king of Kāśī and the father of Ambā, Ambikā, and Ambālikā.
Kaśyapa - 1. One of the sapta-ṛṣis. He married thirteen of Dakṣa's daughters, and was the father of all snakes, and Garuḍa and Aruna. 2. A young brāhmaṇa.
Kaumodakī - The name of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s mace.
Kaunteya - A term meaning 'son of Kuntī'.
Kauravas - Those born in the dynasty of King Kuru.
Kauravya - A Nāga king and the father of Ulūpī.
Kauśika - 1. A brāhmaṇa. 2. A sage with the same name.
Kavi - A great teacher of yoga.
Kayavya - A thief who was known for his wisdom.
Kekaya - A kingdom in India.
Kesāri - A chief of the monkeys, and the husband of Hanumān's mother.
Keśava - A name of Lord Kṛṣṇa
Keśi - A demigod.
Keśin - A demon who was defeated by Indra.
Ketumāt - The son of a niṣāda king. He fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra.
Ketuvarman - A brother of the Trigarta king Suryavarman. He fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Arjuna.
Khagāma - A sage.
Khāṇḍava - A forest devoured by Agni, the god of fire, with the help of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.
Khāṇḍavaprastha - Another name of Indraprastha, the part of the kingdom given to the Pāṇḍavas by Dhṛtarāṣṭra They built a great city there.
Khusiki - A river visited by the Pāṇḍavas.
Kīcaka - 1. A kingdom. 2. The commander-in-chief of King Virāṭa, and the brother of Virāṭa's wife Sudeṣṇa. He was killed by Bhīma during the Pāṇḍava's year in hiding because he attacked Draupadi.
Kīcakas - The citizens of the kingdom of Kīcaka.
Kīlīka - An elderly mouse in a story told to Dhṛtarāṣṭra by Nārada Muni.
Kimpuruṇas - A class of heavenly beings.
Kindama - A sage who was killed by Pāṇḍu. Because Kindama was enjoying sex with his wife in the form of a deer at the time, he cursed Pāṇḍu that he would die the next time he approached his wife for sex.
Kiṅkara - A Rākṣasa who possessed King Kalmāśapāda.
Kiṅkarās - Demons assigned by Maya Dānava to guard King Yudhiṣṭhira's assembly hall.
Kinnaras - A class of residents of the heavenly planets.
Kirāta - 1. A tribe of uncivilized people, usually hunters. 2. A member of a Kirāta tribe. 3. A place where Arjuna did penance.
Kirīṭi - One of the names of Arjuna, given to him in commemoration of the time when Indra placed a crown on his head and sent him to fight the Dānavas.
Kirmīra - A Rākṣasa, and the brother of Baka. He was killed by Bhīma.
Kiśkindhyā - An region of India.
Kolāhala - The name of a mountain.
Kośala - A kingdom in India. Its capital city was Ayodhyā.
Koṭiśaśya - A prince and a companion of King Jayadratha. He was killed by Bhīma.
Krātu - A great sage.
krauncha - A battle formation used by Yudhiṣṭhira at Kurukṣetra.
Krauņca - A mountain.
Krṛpa - The son of Śaradvān. Although he was born a brāhmaṇa, he was more inclined to be a kṣatriya. He was a teacher of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, and he fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra. He was also called Kṛpācārya.
Krṛpi - The sister of Kṛpācārya. She married Droṇa and their son was Aśvatthāmā.
Krṛṣṇa - The Supreme Personality of Godhead. He appeared in the Yadu dynasty as the son of Vasudeva and Devakī, and became the close friend of Arjuna and the Pāṇḍavas. He assisted and advised them during the battle of Kurukṣetra.
Krṛṣnā - Another name of Draupadī.
kāṭa - A word that means 'perfect'.
Krṛtvārmā - A hero of the Yadu dynasty who fought for Duryodhana at
Kurukṣetra.

Kṝtavīrya - 1. A great king. The Kṝtvāryās were his descendants. 2. The father of Kṝtvāryārjuna.

Kṝta-yuga - The first of the four ages, and the most perfect one. The duration of the Kṝtayuga is 4,000 celestial years (a celestial year equals 360 solar years). It is also called Satya-yuga.

Kṝttikā - 1. A constellation made up of six stars. 2. A demigod assigned as a star to that constellation.

Kṝttimāt - The son of Virajas.

Krodha - A demigod.

Krodhasvas - A group of Rākṣasa's who guard a lake owned by the demigod Kuvera.

Kṣatradharman - The son of Dhṛṣṭadyumna who was killed by Droṇa during the battle of Kurukṣetra.

kṝṣṭriya - One of the four orders of life. Kṝṣṭriya's are the warrior cast whose duty it is to rule and protect.

kṝṣṭriya-dharma - The rules and obligations that govern the caste of kṝṣṭriyas and define their duties.

Kṣemāṅkāra - A king of the Trigartas.

Kṣemāvṛiddhi - The commander-in-chief of the demon Śālva. He was killed by Sāmba, the son of Kṛṣṇa.

kērā - A preparation of sweet-rice.

Kṣīrodaśāyī Viṣṇu - The form of Viṣṇu which is the source of all the incarnations within the universe.

Kulapati - A title for a leader of rṣis who has at least 10,000 disciples.

kulīīga - A species of birds.

Kumāra - A Pañcāla prince who was killed by Droṇa while protecting Yudhiṣṭhira's chariot.

Kumāras - A group of four self-realized sages.

Kumbhakarṇa - A legendary Rākṣasa.

Kumbhīnāsī - The wife of the Gandharva Āṅgārapārna.

Kuṇḍadhāra - 1. A demigod of a cloud. 2. One of Dhṛtaraṣṭra's 100 sons.

Kuṇḍina - The capital city of the kingdom of Vidarbha.

Kuṇi-Garga - A powerful sage.

Kuntī - The mother of Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, and Arjuna, and the wife of
Pāṇḍu. She was the daughter of Śūrasenā, and the sister of Vasudeva, but because she was adopted by King Kuntibhoja, she was also called Kuntī or Kuntīdevī along with her given name of Pritha.

Kuntibhoja - A king in the Yadu dynasty, and the foster father of Kuntī. He fought for Yudhiṣṭhira at Kurukṣetra.

Kūrma - The tortoise incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Kuru - 1. The king whose descendants formed the Kaurava dynasty. 2. The dynasty of the descendants of King Kuru.

Kurujāṅgala - A region of India.

Kurukṣetra - A holy place of pilgrimage on the banks of the river Sarasvatī. The battle between the Pāṇḍavas and Duryodhana was fought there so that all of the warriors who were slain would achieve a heavenly destination.

kuça - A sacred kind of grass.

Kuśasthali - A town near Raivataka Hill and Dvāракā city.

Kuśika - A king and the father of Gāḍhi.

Kuvalayāśva - A king in the Ikṣvāku dynasty and the son of Śrīhaḍasva. He killed the demon Dhundhu with the help of Lord Viṣṇu, and thus he was also called Dhundhumāra.

Kuvera - The demigod of wealth.

Lakṣmaṇa - 1. The son of King Daśaratha and Rāmacandra's brother. 2. Duryodhana's son. He was killed by Abhimanyu at Kurukṣetra.

Lakṣmi - The goddess of fortune, also called Lakṣmīdevī.

Lāṅkā - The island of Śrī Lāṅkā, or Ceylon.

Lapita - A female Śārṅgāka bird.

Likhita - A brāhmaṇa living on the banks of the river Varuda.

lēā - The pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Lohitākṣa - An engineer who helped set up the arena for King Janamejaya's snake sacrifice.

Lokapālas - The chief demigods, such as Indra, Agni, Yamarāja, and Varuṇa.

Lomasa - 1. A great sage who guided the Pāṇḍavas on a tour of all the holy places during their exile. 2. The name of a cat in a story told to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīma.
Lopamudrā - The wife of the sage Agastya.
Mada - A huge demon created by the sage Cyavana.
mada - Intoxication.
Madayantī - The wife of king Kalmāṣapāda and the mother of Aśmaka.
Mādhavī - 1. A species of vines. 2. The daughter of King Yayāti and the mother of Vasumanaś, Pratardana, Śibi, and Aṣṭaka.
Madhu - One of two demons who were born at the beginning of creation and were killed by Lord Viṣṇu.
madhuparka - An offering given during worship.
Madirā - One of the wives of Vasudeva.
Madirākṣya - A brother of King Virāṭa.
Madirāśva - A king of Māhiṣmati in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku.
Madrakas - The citizens of the kingdom of Madras.
Madras - A kingdom in India.
Mādri - The sister of Śalya and the second wife of Pāṇḍu. She conceived Nakula and Sahadeva through the Aśvinī-kumāra demigods. When Pāṇḍu died she entered his funeral fire.
Māgadha - A kingdom in India.
Māgadhās - The citizens of the kingdom of Māgadha.
Mahaṁbhārata - A literary work written by Vyāsadeva. It is specifically intended to give women, laborers and degraded members of the higher classes a chance to understand Vedic wisdom. The Mahābhārata essentially teaches through the medium of historical narrations which deal with the lives of great personalities.
Mahābhīṣa - A king in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku who was forced to be reborn as Śantanu, the son of King Pratīpa.
Mahādeva - Another name of Lord Śiva.
mahājana - A great person who knows the purpose of religion.
Mahākarni - The minister of King Ambuvīca of Māgadha.
Mahāmuni - A title meaning 'great sage'.
Mahāpadma - A town on the southern banks of the Gaṅgā.
mahā-prasādam - Food that has been offered to God.
Mahārāja - A title meaning 'great king'.
mahāratha - A powerful chariot warrior.
mahātmā - A great soul.
Mahā-Viṣṇu - An expanded form of Lord Kṛṣṇa. As Mahā-Viṣṇu, He generates the innumerable universes in seed-like forms.

Mahendra - 1. A mountain. 2. A weapon which produces showers of blazing arrows.

Mahiṣa - A powerful demon killed by Skanda. He was also called Mahiṣasura.

Māhiṣmati - A kingdom in India, and its capital city.

Mahodara - A sage.

Maināka - A mountain range.

Mainda - A ruler in the caves of Kiṣkindhyā. Mainda and Dwivida were the monkey sons of the twin Aśvīns.

Maitreya - A powerful sage. Because his instructions were disregarded by Duryodhana, Maitreya cursed him that his thigh would be broken in battle.

Mākandī - One of the five villages requested by the Pāṇḍavas as a compromise in an attempt to avoid the Kurukṣetra war.

makara - A battle formation used by both sides during the battle of Kurukṣetra.

Mālava - A province in India.

Mālavas - The warriors and citizens of the province of Mālava.

Malavi - The wife of King Aśvapati and the mother of Śāvitrī.

Mālinī - 1. A river in the Himalaya mountains. 2. A town presented to Karna by Jarāsandha.

Mamatā - The wife of the sage Utathya and the mother of Dīrghatama.

Māṇasa - 1. A mountain. 2. A lake, also called Māṇasa-sarovara.

Māṇasa-sarovara - A celestial lake.

Mandākinī - A river.

maēòala - A battle formation.

Mandapāla - A sage who was reborn as a Śārṅgakā bird.

Mandara - A mountain.

Māṇḍavya - A sage who cursed Yamarāja, the god of justice.

Mandhātā - The son of King Yuvanāśva. He became the emperor of the entire world.

Māṇḍhātr - A legendary king.

Maṇībhadra - The leader of the Yaksas.
Maṇimān - A friend of Kuvera and the commander-in-chief of Kuvera's army. He was killed by Bhīma.
Maṇimati - A city.
Manipura - A kingdom in India, and its capital city.
Mankanaka - A sage blessed by Śiva.
Manki - A man in a moral story told to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīṣma.
mansa - A word for meat that also means 'me, he will eat'.
mantra - An incantation.
Manu - A son of Brahmā who agreed to rule the earth. He was known as the father of mankind.
manvantara - A great age composed of many yugas.
Marici - One of the sapta-ṛṣis.
Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi - A great sage who looked like a young man even though thousands of years old. He visited Yudhiṣṭhira during the Pāṇḍavas' exile.
Maruts - A class of heavenly beings ruled by Vāyu.
Marutta - A king and the son of Avikṣit. He was famous for his lavish sacrifices. Yudhiṣṭhira retrieved a large amount of gold that was left over after one such sacrifice.
Mātali - The charioteer of Indra and the father of Guṇākeśī.
Mathurā - A city of the Yādavas that Kṛṣṇa had once lived in.
matsya - 1. The adopted son of King Vasu. 2. A kingdom in India.
matsya-avatāra - A fish incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
Matsyas - The citizens or warriors of the matsya kingdom.
māyā - The illusory power of God.
Maya Dānava - A great architect in the Dānava race. Arjuna saved his life from the fire burning the Khāṇḍava forest, and in exchange he constructed Yudhiṣṭhira a wonderful assembly hall.
Māyāvāda - An impersonalist philosophy.
Medhātithi - A great sage. Because he was a descendant of Gautama, he was also called Gautama.
Medhāvī - The son of the sage Vāladhī.
Medhāvin - An intelligent sage who was interested in self-realization.
Meghapuṣpa - The name of one of the four white horses of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
that pulled His chariot.

Meghasandhi - The grandson of Jarāsandha, and a ruler of Māgadha.
Menakā - An Apsarā and the mother of Pramadvara and Śakuntalā.
Menjavat - A mountain range.
Meru - A mountain.
Meruvraja - A city that belonged to the Rākṣasas.
Minjika - A child of Lord Śiva.
Mithilā - A kingdom in India and its capital city.
Mitra - The mother of the sage Agastya.
mleccha - An uncivilized tribe or an uncivilized, unclean person.
mokña - Liberation, one of the material aspirations of a conditioned soul.
mokña-dharma - The path of liberation.
Mrtyu - The demigod personification of death.
Mucukunda - A king who once conquered the entire earth.
Mudgala - A virtuous sage once living at Kurukṣetra.
Mujika - A child of Lord Śiva.
Mūka - A demon who took the form of a boar and attempted to kill Arjuna.
Muni - A title for a sage.
Mুনিজাবন - A mountain peak on which Lord Śiva lives.
mূর্তি - A deity for worship.
Näciketā - The son of the sage Uddalaki.
Nadijaṅghā - A prince of cranes, and a son of Kaśyapa and Dakṣa's daughter. He was also called Rāja-Dharmān.
Nāgaloka - The kingdom of the serpents.
Nāgas - The race of serpents.
Nāhuṣa - 1. A Nāga and a son of Kadru and Kaśyapa. 2. The son of Āyu in the Soma dynasty. He occupied the post of Indra as the king of the demigods for a time, but when he offended the sages, they cursed him to fall back to earth as a serpent. Yudhiṣṭhira released him from that curse. He was also the father of King Yayāti.
Naimiṣa - A forest and a holy place.
Naimiṣāranyā - Another name for the Naimiṣa forest.
Niṣāda - Another name for Nala, who was the king of the niṣādas.
Nakula - The son of Mādrī by the Aśvinī-kumāra demigods. His twin
brother was Sahadeva, and they were taken care of by Kuntī when Mādrī entered her husband's funeral pyre.

**Nala** - A king of the niñādas and the son of Vīrasena. He married Damayantī, and he was known for being righteous and truthful.

**Namuci** - A demon betrayed and killed by Indra.

**Nandaka** - A warrior who fought for Duryodhana during the battle of Kurukṣetra.

**Nandana-kāṇa** - The Nandana garden in heaven, which is the playground of the Apsarās.

**Nandinī** - A kāmadhenu cow born from Kaśyapa and Surabhi.

**Nāra** - The foremost of all human beings and the eternal associate of Nārāyaṇa Rṣi. He appeared along with Lord Nārāyaṇa as a great sage for the benefit of the entire universe. They performed austerities at Badarikāśrama in the Himālayas. Arjuna was an incarnation of him.

**Nārada** - A great devotee of God and a son of Lord Brahmā.

**nara-deva** - A term meaning 'earthly god'.

**Naraka** - A demon killed by Lord Viṣṇu. He was the son of the demigoddess of the earth, Bhūmi, and was also called Narakāsura.

**Nārāyaṇa** - 1. The Supreme Personality of Godhead. 2. The foremost of weapons, belonging to Lord Nārāyaṇa. He gave this weapon to Droṇa, who passed it on to Aśvatthāma. When Aśvatthāma tried to use it against the Pāṇḍavas' army, Kṛṣṇa told them how to neutralize it.

**Nārāyaṇa cowherds** - Warriors given to Duryodhana by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Nārāyaṇa Rṣi** - An incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead as a sage.

**nārāyaṇa-āśtra** - The weapon of Lord Nārāyaṇa.

**Narmadā** - A celestial river.

**Naubandhana** - The name of the highest peak of the Himavat mountains.

**neti** - A word meaning 'not this'.

**Nikumbha** - A great asura and the father of Sunda and Upasunda.

**Niḷa** - A king of Māhiśmatī. He and his army fought for Duryodhana during the battle of Kurukṣetra.

**niṅādas** - Members of a forest tribe.

**niṅḍa** - A word meaning 'sit down'.

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Nivāta-kavacas - A race of nearly invincible Dānavas defeated by Arjuna.

nivātti - Abstention from work, or renunciation.

nivātti-mārga - The path of renunciation, which leads to liberation.

Nṛśimha - The halfman, half lion incarnation of God.

Oghavat - A king and the father of Oghavatī, the wife of Sudarśana.

Oghavatī - 1. A river and part of Oghavatī, the wife of Sudarśana. 2. The daughter of King Oghavat and wife of Sudarśana. She was blessed that part of her would become the celebrated river Oghavatī.

O à - A sacred syllable and a sound representation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Padmanābha - A very pious Nāga king.

Paila - A disciple of Vyāsadeva.

palāca - A kind of plant.

Palita (lit: grey hair) - A wise mouse in a story told to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhiṣma.

Paṅcacinā - An Apsarā.

Paṅcajanāya - The name of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s conchshell.

Paṅcāla - A kingdom in India.

Paṅcālas - The citizens of the kingdom of Paṅcāla.

Paṅcalī - Another name for Draupadī.

pai cama-puruñärtha - Unalloyed and spontaneous devotion unto the Lord, life's ultimate goal. It is the fifth dimension of human life, beyond dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa.

Pañeḥarātra - A description in scripture of Lord Nārāyaṇa.

Pañeḥasīkhā - A great sage.

Paṇḍavas - The five sons of King Pāṇḍu; Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva.

paëòīta - One greatly learned in the scriptures.

Pāṇḍu - A king of Hastināpura. He was the son of Vyāsadeva and the princess Ambālikā, and the brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura. He married Kuntī and Mādrī, but when he was cursed by a sage, his five sons, the Pāṇḍavas, were born by calling upon demigods. When he died Mādrī entered his funeral fire.

Pāṇḍya - 1. An kingdom in India. 2. A warrior for the Pāṇḍavas, who was
killed at Kurukṣetra by Aśvatthāmā.

**Parama Dhāma** - The eternal realm of Lord Viṣṇu.

**Paramātma** - The part of the Lord Who resides as the Supersoul in everyone's heart.

**Parambrāhma** - The Supreme Personality of Godhead.

**Paramparā** - Disciplic succession.

**Parāśara** - The son of Śakti and Adṛśyantī, and the grandson of the sage Vasiṣṭha. Parāśara was the father of Vyāsadeva.

**Paraśurāma** - A warrior incarnation of God Who appeared as the son of the sage Jamadagni. He annihilated the class of kṣatriyas twenty-one times and then later taught the science of weapons to Droṇa and Karṇa. He was also called Rāma.

**Parāvasu** - One of the sons of the sage Raivya.

**Parīgha** - 1. A powerful arrow weapon. 2. The name of a hunter in a story told to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīma.

**Pārijāta** - A heavenly flower forcibly taken from heaven by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Parikṣit** - 1. The son of Abhimanyu, and the grandson of Arjuna. He ruled the world after the Pāṇḍavas retired, and King Janamejaya was his son. 2. A king in the line of Ikṣvāku who ruled Ayodhyā.

**Parjanya** - An arrow weapon that creates clouds and water.

**Parṇāda** - A brāhmaṇa.

**Parnasa** - The name of a river and the goddess personification of that river.

**Parva** - A literary section or chapter.

**Parvata** - A celestial sage.

**Pārvatī** - The goddess wife of Lord Śiva and the mother of Gaṇeśa. She is also called Umā.

**Parvatya** - An arrow weapon that creates mountains.

**Pāçupata** - The favorite weapon of Lord Śiva. It was given to Arjuna, and he used it to kill Jayadratha.

**Pāçupata-astra** - The pāśupata weapon of Lord Śiva in the form of a missile or arrow.

**Pāśupati** - A cult of Lord Śiva.

**Paśusakha** - A śūdra woman.

**Pātāla** - The lowest planet in the universe.
Pätälaloka - The lower regions of the universe, or Pätāla.
Pausaloma - A race of Dānavas and the children and descendants of the woman Pauloma.
Pauṇḍraka - A king who, pretending to be Viṣṇu, was killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Pauṇḍraka - A king who, pretending to be Viṣṇu, was killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Paurika - A cruel king who had to be reborn as a jackal.
Pausya - A king.
Phālgunī - A name of Arjuna, given to him because at the time of his birth the Uttarā Phālgunī constellation was ascendant.
pièoā - Offerings made during the śraddhā ceremony.
Piṅgalā - A prostitute.
Piśācas - A race of carnivorous demons.
pitri - An ancestor.
Pitṛloka - Heavenly regions where the ancestors reside.
pitās - The ancestors and forefathers who are worshipped by their children after their death.
Prabhañjana - An ancestor of Citravahana, a king of Maṇipura.
Prabhāsa - A holy place where the river Sarasvatī enters into the Western sea. The Yadu dynasty was destroyed there.
Prabhavati - The wife of Citrarātha, the king of the Aṅgas.
Pradvesi - The wife of the sage Dīrghatama.
Pradyumna - The son of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Rukrnini.
Prāgjyotisapura - A city.
Prāgjyotisās - The citizens of Prāgjyotisa.
Prahlāda - A king of the asuras.
Prajāpati - The progenitors and creators of all living entities. Brahmā is the foremost Prajāpati.
Prajñā - A weapon.
Pramadvara - The adopted daughter of the sage Sthūlakeśa. Her real parents were the Apsarā Menakā and the Gandharva Viśvāvasu. She married Ruru.
Pramāṇā - The name of a great banyan tree on the banks of the river Gaṅgā.
Pramāṇākotī - A resort on the banks of the Gaṅgā where Duryodhana tried to kill Bhīma.
Pramati - The son of the sage Cyavana and Sukanyā. Pramati's son was Ruru.
Pramohana - A weapon which causes the enemy to fall into a stupor.
praēśayama - Breathing exercises.
Prāpti - A daughter of Jarāsandha who was married to Kaṁsa.
prāśadam - Food that has been offered to God.
Prasena - A son of Karṇa who was killed by Śātyaki during the battle at Kurukṣetra.
Prasenajit - A king. His daughter, Reṇukā, was the mother of Parasurāma.
Pratardana - The son of king Divodāsa and Mādhavī.
Pratikamin - A servant in the sūta caste.
Pratīpa - A king and the father of Śantanu.
pratismāti - A mystical chant that gives access to the entire universe and unerring foresight.
Pratiṣṭhāna - A city.
Prativindhya - The son of Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī.
Pravarakarna - An owl that lived in the Himavat mountains.
Pravāsa - A weapon that causes the enemy to fall asleep.
pravātti - The path of action, work, and sacrifice, as opposed to the path of liberation. Action leads to heaven, but still keeps one within the repeated cycle of birth and death.
pravātti-mārga - The path of pravṛtti.
prāya - A vow of fasting until death.
Prayāga - The most sacred of all places of pilgrimage in the three worlds.
Prśata - A king of Pañcāla and the father of Drupada.
Prthā - Another name of Kuntī, the mother of the Pāṇḍavas.
Prthivi - A name for the goddess of the earth.
Prthu - An incarnation of Godhead Who ruled and protected the earth.
Pūjani - A female bird who lived in the royal palace at the city of Kampilā.
Pulaha - A great sage and one of the sapta-ṛṣis.
Pulastya - A great sage and one of the sapta-ṛṣis.
**Pulinda** - 1. A tribe. 2. A member of the Pulinda tribe.

**Pulomā** - 1. The wife of Bhṛgu. 2. A Rākṣasa who was killed by the sage Cyavana. 3. A female Rākṣasa whose children formed the nearly invincible race of Pauloma demons.

**Purāëas** - A group of eighteen ancient historical books, part of the Vedas.

**Purika** - A city.

**Purocana** - A minister of Duryodhana's who tried to kill the Pāṇḍavas by burning down their house, but was killed instead.

**Purokutsa (Yuvanāśva)** - A king in the Ikṣvāku dynasty and the father of Trasaddasyu (Māndhātā).

**Pūru** - A son of Śarmiṣṭhā and King Yayāti.

**Purūravā** - The son of Buddha and the father of Āyu.

**puruña** - A god.

**Puruṣa** - The Supreme Personality of Godhead.

**puruñārtha** - The fifth dimension of human life. (See pañcama-puruñārtha.)

**Pūṣana** - A demigod.

**Puṣkara** - 1. A lake and holy place. 2. The son of Vīrāsena and brother of King Nala. 3. The son of the demigod Varuṇa.

**Puṣkaradhārini** - The wife of the sage Satya.

**Puṣkaramālini** - The name of both the assembly house of Indra and of Varuṇa.

**puñpaka** - The name of the chariot of Kuvera.

**Puṣpodāka** - A river of nectar.

**Pūtanā** - A female demon who was killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa when He was a baby.

**putra** - A son.

**Rādhā** - The wife of Adhiratha and mother of Karṇa through adoption.

**Rāhu** - A god of a dark planet. He causes the eclipses by trying to swallow the sun and the moon.

**Raivataka** - A hill near Dvārakā city used for festivals and worship.

**Raivya** - The father of Arvavasu and Parāvasu.

**rājā-dharma** - Military science and the duties of kings.

**Rāja-Dharmān** - A prince of cranes and the son of the sage Kaśyapa. He
was also called Nadījaṅghā.
Rājagṛha - A city in the kingdom of Māgadhā.
rājan - A term for addressing a king.
rājarṣi - A king who is also respected as a ṛṣi, or sage.
rajas - The mode of passion.
rajasic - Having the qualities of the mode of passion.
Rājasūya-yajīa - A powerful fire sacrifice performed by kings which enables them to attain to the heavenly planet of Indra.
rajo-guēa - The mode of passion in the consciousness of humans, characterized by lust and anger.
Rākṣasa - A class of asuras. They are man-eating monsters with horrible shapes and mystic powers.
rākṣasa-yajīa - A fire sacrifice performed by the sage Parāśara for the purpose of destroying the race of Rākṣasas. He desisted by the persuasion of Atri Rṣi.
rākṣ asi - A female Rākṣasa.
Rāmacandra - An incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He appeared as a prince, the son of King Daśaratha.
Rāma-hrada - A holy place where Paraśurāma worshipped his ancestors.
Rāmaniyaka - Islands in the salt ocean which serve as a playground of the Gandharvas.
Rāmāyaṇa - The history of the pastimes of Lord Rāmacandra.
Rantideva - A king who was famous for giving food to all who were hungry.
Rāsakuēa - A nectar that gives one immeasurable strength. Bhīma was given this nectar by the Nāga king Vāsuki.
Rasātala - The abode of Surabhi, the mother of cows.
ratha - A chariot warrior.
Raudra - A weapon of Lord Śiva's.
Rāvaṇa - A king of the Rākṣasas who was killed by Lord Rāmacandra.
Reṇukā - The wife of Jamadagni and the mother of Lord Paraśurāma.
Revatī - The wife of Lord Balarāma.
Ricika - The son of Arurva in the Bṛgu dynasty. He was the father of Jamadagni.
Āg Veda - One of the four sections of the Vedas.
\textbf{Rkšavat} - A mountain.
\textbf{Ršabha} - 1. A hill also known as Hemakūṭa. 2. A sage who lived on the Ršabha hill. 3. A musical note.
\textbf{Ršabha} - A Rākṣasa slain by King Brhadratha.
\textbf{årī} - One who lives the life of an ascetic or sage. By performing austerities and sacrifices they attain great power and are thus considered the equals and betters of the demigods.
\textbf{Ṛṣyamūka} - An area of hills once visited by Lord Rāmacandra.
\textbf{Ṛṣyaśṛṅga} - The son of the sage Vibhāndaka.
\textbf{Ṛtūparṇa} - A king of Ayodhyā.
\textbf{Rohinī} - 1. A daughter of Dakṣa who married the moon god Soma. 2. A wife of Vasudeva and the mother of Lord Balarāma.
\textbf{Romaharśana} - The father of Sūta Gosvāmī.
\textbf{Romapāda} - A king of the kingdom of Aṅga.
\textbf{Ruci} - The wife of the sage Devaśarmā.
\textbf{Rudra} - Another name of Lord Śiva.
\textbf{Rudras} - A class of the residents of the heavenly planets. The Rudras are eleven in number.
\textbf{Rukmaratha} - A son of Śalya who was killed by Abhimanyu during the battle of Kurukṣetra.
\textbf{Rukmī} - The son of King Bhīṣmaka and the brother of Rukmīṇī.
\textbf{Rukmīṇī} - The daughter of King Bhīṣmaka. She was married to Lord Kṛṣṇa, and her son was Pradyumna.
\textbf{Ruru} - The son of Pramati and the father of Śunaka.
\textbf{rurur} - A species of wild animals.
\textbf{Śabda-veda} - A weapon that neutralizes the enemy's invisibility.
\textbf{sabhā} - An assembly house for a king.
\textbf{Śacī} - The wife of Indra.
\textbf{sādhu} - A saint.
\textbf{Śādhyas} - A class of heavenly beings.
\textbf{Sagara} - A king in the line of Ikṣvākū.
\textbf{Sahadeva} - 1. The fifth Pāṇḍava, and a son of Mādrī by the Aśvinī-kumāra demigods. His twin brother was Nakula, and they were taken care of by Kuntī when Mādrī entered her husband's funeral pyre. 2. The
son of Jarāsandha who ruled Māgadha after his father was killed by Bhīma. He was killed by Drona during the battle of Kurukṣetra.

Sahasrapāt - A sage who was cursed to become a serpent.

Saikhavatya - A sage.

Śaila - A weapon which calms the atmosphere.

Saindhavas - The warriors of King Jayadratha.

sairindhré - A maidservant in the female apartments of a royal palace.

sairindhré - The title for a royal maidservant. Draupadī used this as her name during the Pāṇḍavas' year of hiding, while she was a maidservant to Queen Sudeśa.

Śaivya - 1. The name of one of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s horses. 2. The wife of Dyumatsena and mother of Satyavān. 3. A king, and the son of Vṛṣādarbha.

Śāka - An uncivilized warrior tribe.

çakaōa - A battle formation.

Sakradeva - A prince killed by Bhīma during the battle of Kurukṣetra.

Śakti - The son of the sage Vasiṣṭha and the father of Parāśara.

saktu - A food preparation made of barley.

Sākula - A species of fish.

Śakuni - The son of King Subala and the brother of Gāndhārī. He was a close friend of Duryodhana. He used his skill at dice to cheat the Pāṇḍavas out of their kingdom and send them into exile for thirteen years. In the war at Kurukṣetra he was killed by Sahadeva.

Śala - 1. A son of King Parīkṣit in the Ikṣvāku dynasty. 2. A warrior who fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra.

Salwakas - Warriors who fought at Kurukṣetra.

çālmali - A kind of tree.

Śālva - 1. A kingdom. 2. One of the kings of the kingdom of Śālva. He owned a flying city created by Maya Dānava which he used to attack Dwārakā. He was killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa. 3. The king of the Mlecchas. He fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Śātyaki.

Śālavas - The citizen of the kingdom of Śālva.

Śalya - The king of Madras. His sister Mādrī married Pāṇḍu. Duryodhana convinced him to fight for him at Kurukṣetra, but Śalya also promised Yudhiṣṭhira that he would speak in such a way as to discourage Karna
while he drove his chariot. Śalya was one of the commanders of Duryodhana's army, and he was killed by Yudhiṣṭhira.

**Sama Veda** - One of the sections of the Vedas.

**samādhi** - A deep trance of meditation.

**Samanātha** - A sage who lived at Brahmaśara.

Śamaṅga - 1. A river. 2. A cowherd.

**Samanta-paṅcaka** - A series of lakes near the battlefield of Kurukṣetra where Bhīma and Duryodhana had their final battle.


Śambhala - A village where the incarnation of God, Kalki, will appear.

**Sanāhlāda** - The younger brother of Prahlāda.

**çamé** - A species of tree.

Śamīka - A sage and the father of Śṛṅgi.

**samit** - A species of grass.

**Samsaptakas** - Warriors who have sworn to either conquer or die. One akṣauhinī of these soldiers were given by Kṛṣṇa to Duryodhana. They were killed by Arjuna.

Śaṁvaraṇa - A king in the Kuru dynasty.

**Samvarta** - A son of the sage Aṅgirāś and the brother of Bṛhaspati.

**sāà vartaka** - The fire which consumes the universe at the end of creation.

**Samvodhana** - A weapon also called Pravāsa, that puts the enemy to sleep.

**Samvuka** - A śūdra.

**Sanat-kumāra** - A great sage and a foremost authority on transcendental knowledge. A portion of Sanat-kumāra appeared as Pradyumna.

Śāṇḍili - A brāhmaṇa lady who blessed Garuḍa.

**Saṅgrāmajit** - A younger brother of Karna who was killed by Arjuna.

**Saṅjayana** - 1. The son of Gavalgaṇa and the secretary and confidant of Dhrītarāṣṭra. He was given divine vision by Vyāsadeva and thus was able to relate everything that happened at Kurukṣetra to Dhrītarāṣṭra without being there. 2. A kṣatriya and the son of Vidula.

**sāi jévané** - A mystical art by which a dead person can be brought back to life.
Śaṅkacūḍa - A demon killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Śaṅkhā - 1. One of two brāhmaṇa brothers living on the banks of the river Vahuda. 2. The eldest son of King Virāṭa.
Śaṅkhya - A system of philosophy.
sai kértana - The congregational chanting of the holy names of the Lord.
Sanmohana - A weapon Arjuna had obtained from Indra that makes the enemy warriors unconscious.
sannyāsa - The fourth stage of life, renunciation, which comes after married life and retired life.
sannyāsa - One who has taken the renounced order of life, sannyāsa.
Śaṅtanu - The son of King Pratīpa. Śaṅtanu was King Mahābhīṣa in his previous life, and had been cursed while he was residing in heaven to be reborn on earth. Since Gaṅgā was cursed in the same way at the same time, she married him on earth as Śaṅtanu. Their son was Bhīṣma. Śaṅtanu later married Satyavatī and their children were Citrāṅgadā and Vicitravīrya.
Saṁyamanī - The abode of Yamarāja in the south.
Sapta-āři - A group of seven great sages, having different members at different times.
Sapta-Sarasvatī - A holy place of pilgrimage where the seven branches of the river Sarasvatī become one.
çarabha - A beast with eight legs and eyes upon its forehead which preys upon lions.
Śarabha - The son of Śiśupāla.
Saradandayānā - A kṣatriya.
Śaradvān - The son of Gautama Rṣi. He was adept at military science, and his children were Kṛpa and Kṛpī. Śaradvān himself trained Kṛpa in the military science.
Saramā - An evil spirit and the mother of dogs.
Sārasvatā - A sage and the son of Dadhīci and the river Sarasvatī. After a twelve year drought, Sārasvatā taught the knowledge of the Vedas back to the brāhmaṇas, who had forgotten it during the time of strife.
Sārasvatā - A tribe.
Sarasvatī - 1. The goddess of learning. 2. A holy river, and the goddess personification of that river.
säré- A dress made of one length of cloth.
Sariśrikka - A bird who was actually a great sage and the son of Mandapāla and Jarita.
Śarmiṣṭhā - The daughter of King Vṛṣaparvaṇ. When she insulted Devayānī, the daughter of Śukrācārya, her father ordered her to become Devayānī's servant to appease Śukrācārya's anger. Śarmiṣṭhā had three children through King Yayāti, Devayānī's husband; Drahuyu, Anu, and Pürū.
Śāṅga - The name of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s powerful bow.
Śāṅgakā - A species of bird.
Śaryāti - A king and the father of Sukanyā.
Śaśabindu - A legendary king who performed the aśvamedha-yajña.
Śatadrū - A river also called Haimavatī.
Śatānika - 1. The son of Nakula and Draupadi. He was killed by Aśvatthāmā. 2. A brother of King Virāṭa.
Satayupa - A saintly, retired Kekaya king with whom Dhātavrāṇa, Gändhārī, and Kuntī stayed during their last days.
sattvic - Having the quality of goodness.
Satya - A brāhmaṇa.
Satyabhāmā - One of the wives of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Satyajit - A son of Drupada and the commander-in-chief of the Pañcāla army. He was killed by Droṇa during the battle of Kurukṣetra.
Śātyaki - A member of the Yadu dynasty and the grandson of Śini. He was a friend of the Pāṇḍavas and a disciple of Arjuna. He fought as one of the commanders of Yudhiṣṭhira's army during the battle of Kurukṣetra. Śātyaki was also called Yuyudhana.
Satyasena - 1. A warrior who fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Arjuna. 2. A son of Karna who was killed by Nakula.
Satyavān - 1. The son of King Dyumatsena. 2. A warrior who fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra.
Satyavatī - The daughter of King Vasu who was adopted by a fisherman. She gave birth to Vyāsadeva out of wedlock through the sage Parāśara, and was later married to Śantana. Their children were Citrāṅgadā and Vicitravīrya.
Satya-yuga - The first and most prosperous of the four ages. The
duration of Satya-yuga is 4,000 celestial years (a celestial year equals 360 solar years). It is also called Kritayuga.

**Saubha** - A magical airplane created by Maśya Dānava for Śālva. It was destroyed by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Saugandhika** - The name of a forest owned by Kuvera. A lake within that forest and the lotus flowers growing in that lake also had the same name. The Pāṇḍavas stayed there for a while.

**Śaunaka** - 1. A sage who heard the recitation of the *Mahābhārata* from Śūta Gosvāmī at Naimiśāraṇya. 2. An elderly *brāhmaṇa* who advised Yudhiṣṭhira.

**Sauvīra** - A city.

**Savitā** - Another name for the sun god, Śūrya.

**Sāvitrī** - 1. A daughter of the sun god, Śūrya. 2. The wife of Lord Brahmā, also known as the goddess Gāyatrī. 3. The daughter of King Aśvapati of Madras. She married Satyavrata, and even though he died one year later, she was able to trick Yamarāja into giving his life back. 4. A male demigod.

**Savyasācin** - One of the names of Arjuna, given to him because of his ability to draw the Gāṇḍīva bow equally well with both hands.

**Senajit** - A king.

**Śeṣa** - The first born son of Kadru and Kaśyapa. He has the task of steadying the earth upon his head and is an incarnation of Balarāma. Lord Viṣṇu rests upon his coils. He is also called Śeṣa-nāga.

**Śakti** - The powerful weapon of Skanda.

**Śakuntalā** - The adopted daughter of the sage Kanva. She married King Duṣmanta and their son was Bhārata.

**Śaṅkara** - Another name for Lord Śiva.

**Śāntā** - The daughter of King Romapāda. She was married to the sage Rṣyaśṛṅga.

**çāstra** - Holy scriptures, such as the *Vedas*, that set the guidelines for human behavior.

**çāstric** - Referring to, or drawn from, the *śāstras*, the holy scriptures.

**Śibi** - A legendary king and the son of Uṣīnara. He was sometimes called Uṣīnara also.

**Śiśupāla** - The ruler of Cedi and the son of King Damaghoṣa. He was
killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa during the Rājasūya sacrifice.
Śiva - 1. One of the highest demigods, and the son of Lord Brahmā. Śiva is the destroyer of the universe at the end of creation. His wife is the goddess Pārvatī, and he is the father of Skanda and Gaṇeṣa. Śiva helped Arjuna by giving him his weapon, the pāśupata. 2. The wife of the sage Aṅgirāś.

çraddhā - A ceremony performed for the benefit of departed souls, usually relatives and ancestors.
Śrutakarmā - The son of Arjuna and Draupadī. He was killed by Aśvatthāmā.
Śrutarvan - 1. A king. 2. One of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He was killed by Bhīma.
Śrutasesa - 1. A younger brother of King Janamejaya, and the son of Parikṣit. 2. One of the names of Kārttikeya. 3. The son of Sahadeva and Draupadī. He was killed by Aśvatthāmā.
Śrutaśravā - A sage and the father of Somaśravā.
Śrutāyudha - The son of the god Varuṇa and the river Parnasa. He had been given a celestial mace which was not supposed to be used against someone not engaged in battle. Because Śrutāyudha used it against Kṛṣṇa, who was acting as a charioteer, the mace rebounded and killed Śrutāyudha.
Śrutāyu - A warrior who fought on the side of Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Arjuna.
Sruvavāti – A daughter of Bhāradvāja who became a wife of Indra.
Śyāmasundara - The human-like two-armed form of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Siddhas - A class of heavenly beings.
čikhā - A tuft of hair on the back of a shaved head representing renunciation on the Vaiṣṇava path.
Śikhaṇḍī - A son of King Drupada, who was actually born as a girl and was later transformed into a man. Śikhaṇḍī was Ambā in his last life, reborn for the destruction of Bhīma. He was one of the commanders of Yudhiṣṭhir'a's army at Kurukṣetra. Śikhaṇḍī was able to get close enough to kill Bhīma because Bhīma had sworn never to fight with a woman. He was later killed by Aśvatthāmā.
Sind - A country in northwest India.
Sindhi - A citizen of the country of Sind.
Sindhu - Another way of saying the name of the country of Sind, and the origin of the word Hindu.
Śini - The son of Sura in the Yadu dynasty, and the grandfather of Sātyaki.
Śitā - The eternal consort of Lord Rāmacandra.
Skanda - The son of Lord Śiva and the commander-in-chief of the army of the demigods. He is also called Kārttikeya.
Skandapasmara - A fiery evil spirit created by Skanda.
čōka - A verse.
Soma - 1. The demigod of the moon, born from the sage Atri. 2. A dynasty of kings descended from Soma, the god of the moon.
soma - A plant which is used to make the soma-rasa nectar.
Somadatta - The son of Vahlika. Somadatta fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra and was killed by Sātyaki. His son was Bhūriśravas.
Somaka - A king who performed a sacrifice to receive 100 sons.
Somakas - Warriors who fought for Yudhiṣṭhira during the battle of Kurukṣetra.
soma-rasa - Nectar offered to the demigods during a sacrifice.
Somaśravā - The son of the sage Śrutasravā.
Soma-yajī a - A fire sacrifice.
Çataghnē - A weapon employed by Ghaṭotkaca during the battle of Kurukṣetra.
Stamvamitra - A bird who was actually a great sage and the son of Mandapāla and Jarita.
Sthūlakeṣa - A sage who adopted the child Pramadvara.
Sthūnapārṇa - A Yakṣa who traded his masculinity with the girl Śikhaṇḍī. Because of a curse by Kuvera, this temporary arrangement became permanent until Śikhaṇḍī's death.
Subala - The king of Gāndhāra, and the father of Gāndhāri and Śakuni.
Subhadrā - The younger sister of Lord Kṛṣṇa. She married Arjuna and their son was Abhimanyu.
Śuci - A leader of a caravan.
Śucīmukha - A battle formation used by Yudhiṣṭhira during the battle of Kurukṣetra.
Sudakṣiṇa - The king of the Kāmbhojas. He fought for Duryodhana as one of his commanders. He was killed by Arjuna.
Sudāmā - A king of Daśāma.
Sudarśana - 1. One of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was killed by Bhīma.
2. The daughter of King Duryodhana of Māhiṣmatī. She was married to Agni, the god of fire, and their son was also called Sudarśana. 3. The son of Agni and Sudarśana.
Sudarśana-cakra - A discus belonging to Lord Kṛṣṇa, and His favorite weapon.
çuddha-sattva - A state of pure consciousness, beyond the tinge of material influence.
Sudeśna - 1. The wife of King Vali. 2. The wife of King Virāṭa and the daughter of the king of Kekaya. Draupadī acted as her maidservant during the Pāṇḍava's year in hiding.
Sudeva - A brāhmaṇa and a family friend of King Bhīma of Vidarbha.
Sudhanva - A brāhmaṇa and the son of the sage Aṅgirā.
Sudharmā - 1. The royal assembly house in Dvārakā city. 2. The wife of Mātali.
Sudharman - The priest of the Kauravas.
çūdra - The lowest class of people, who live in the mode of ignorance.
çūdrāēe - A female śūdra.
Sudyumna - A pious king.
Sugrīva - The name of one of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s four white horses.
Suhotra - A king in the Kuru dynasty.
Sujāta - The wife of the sage Kahoda and the mother of Aṣṭāvakra.
Śuka - 1. The son of Vyāsadeva. He was also called Śukadeva. 2. A parrot in a story told to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīma.
Śukadeva - Another name of Śuka, the son of Vyāsadeva.
Śukanyā - The daughter of King Śaryāti. She married the sage Cyavana.
Śukrācārya - The spiritual master of the Dānavas, also called Uśanās. His daughter was Devayānī.
Śuktimā - A city within the kingdom of Cedi.
Śuktimāti - A river and the demigoddess personification of that river.
Sukumāri - The daughter of King Śṛṇjaya. She was married to Nārada Muni.
Sulabhā - A holy woman and mendicant.
Sumantu - A disciple of Vyāsadeva.
Sumitra - A king of the Haihayas.
Sumukha - A Nāga and the son of Cikura. He married Guṇākesi, the daughter of Mātali.
Sunābha - One of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He was killed by Bhīma.
Śunahsakhā - A great sage.
Śunaka - The son of the sage Ruru.
Sunandā - A princess of Cedi.
Sunda - An asura and a son of Nikumbha. He and his brother Upasunda killed each other over a woman, Tilottamā.
Sunita - A consort of Mṛtyu, the lord of death.
suparēā - 1. Another name of Garuḍa. 2. A weapon that creates innumerable gigantic birds.
Suprabhā - The daughter of the sage Vadānya.
Supritika - The younger brother of the sage Vibhāvasu. He was cursed to become an elephant, and in this form he was devoured by Garuḍa.
Surabhi - The daughter of Dakṣa and the wife of Kaśyapa. She became the mother of all cows.
Śūrasenā - The son of Yadu and the father of Vasudeva, Śini, and Pṛthā.
Suratha - 1. A Trigarta warrior killed by Nakula. 2. A son of Drupada who was killed by Aśvatthāmā. 3. The son of Jayadratha.
Surdurjaya - The son of King Suvīra in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku.
Śūrpāraka - A special island created by the god of the ocean as a residence for Paraśurāma.
Sūrya - 1. The god of the sun. He gave the Pāṇḍavas a celestial copper pot that provided them with all the food they needed during their years in exile. Karṇa was the son of Sūrya through Kuntī. 2. A weapon which dispels darkness when invoked.
Suryavarman - The king of the Trigartas who ruled after Suṣarmā.
Suṣarmā - A Trigarta king and friend of Duryodhana. He fought with his army for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra, but he was killed by Arjuna.
Sušeṇa - 1. A son of Karṇa, killed by Uttamaujā. 2. Another son of Karṇa with the same name, who was killed by Nakula.
Suśobhana - The daughter of Āyu, the king of frogs. Because of her cruel nature, she cheated many kings after making them fall in love with her. She was finally ordered by her father to marry King Parīkṣit in the Ikṣvāku dynasty.

sūta - A lower caste in society, made from the mix of brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas. They are the servants of the kṣatriyas.

Sūta Gosvāmī - A great sage and the son of Romaharṣaṇa. Sūta Gosvāmī was also known as Ugraśravā. He narrated the Mahābhārata to the sages at Naimiśāraṇya.

Sutasoma - The son of Bhīma and Draupadī. He was killed by Aśvatthāmā.

Suvahu - 1. A ruler of the Cedis. 2. A king of the Pulindas who helped the Pāṇḍavas during their exile.

Suvargas - A sage.

Suvarnaṣṭhīvin - The son of King Sṛṇjaya.

Suvarnavarman - The ruler of Kāśī. His daughter, Vapuñöama, married King Janamejaya.

Suvīra - The son of King Dyutimān in the Ikṣvāku dynasty.

Svāhā - One of the daughters of Dakṣa. She was in love with Agni, and took the forms of other women in order to be with him. She discarded his semen in a lake and thus Skanda was born. Svāhā got the benediction from Skanda that her name would always be chanted with Agni's when offerings are made into the fire.

svāṣa - A personal expansion or incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu.

Svarga - The name of heaven, or of the demigod personification of heaven.

svastika - An auspicious symbol adulterated by the Nazis.

svasti-vācana - A religious rite performed by King Vasumanaś for the purpose of obtaining a celestial chariot made of flowers.

Svāyambhuva Manu - The creator of the human race at the beginning of the Svāyambhuva manvantara. He wrote a treatise which explained the limits of human behavior.

Svāyambhuva manvantara - The manvantara in which Svāyambhuva Manu was responsible for creating the human race.

svayañ vara - A gathering of kings and princes, out of which a princess'
future husband would be chosen.
Śveta - 1. A mountain. 2. A son of King Virāṭa. He was killed by Bhīma.
Śvetadvīpa - The island in the milk-ocean which is the residence of Lord Nārāyaṇa.
Śvetaketu - The son of the sage Udālaka.
Śvetaki - A king famed for his performances of sacrifices.
Śvetavāhana - A name of Arjuna, given to him because his chariot is drawn by white horses.
Śvitya - A king and the father of Śrījaya.
Tanu - The name of a disguise worn by Dharma to appear as a sage.
tapasya - The performance of austerities, which generates power. Lord Brahmā created the entire universe with the power gained from his austerities.
Tapatī - A daughter of Śūrya. She married Saṃvaraṇa, an ancestor of the Pāṇḍavas.
Tapatya - A name Arjuna was called by Citraratha, because he was a descendant of Tapatī.
Tāraka - An asura. His three sons were Tārakākṣa, Kamalākṣa, and Vidyunmālin. Tāraka himself was killed by Kārttikeya.
Tārakākṣa - A son of the demon Tāraka. He and his two brothers were killed by Lord Śiva.
Tat - The Supreme Lord of the universe is referred to in the scriptures as 'Tat' (that).
Tilottamā - The most beautiful woman in the universe, created by Viśvakarmā for the destruction of the demons Sunda and Upasunda, who killed each other for her.
Timingila - A species of fish living in the Garbhadaka ocean that is so large it can swallow whales in a single gulp.
tertha - A holy place of pilgrimage, which purifies all those who visit or bathe there.
tertha-yātṛā - A pilgrimage to many different terthas.
Trasaddasyu - A king and the son of Purokutsa in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku.
Tretā-yuga - The second of the four yugas. It has a duration of 3,000 celestial years (a celestial year equals 360 solar years).
tridaëòa - A staff carried by a holy person.
Trigarta - A kingdom in India.
Trigartas - The citizens or warriors of the kingdom of Trigarta.
Trṇāvarta - A demon killed by Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Tripura - The triple city of the demons Tārakākṣa, Kamalākṣa, and Vidyunmālin. It was created by Maya Dānava and destroyed by Lord Śiva.
Triratra - A vow of fasting three days.
tārēā - Greed, the root of all sin.
Trita - 1. A son of the sage Gautama. 2. A son of Lord Brahmā.
Tulādhāra - A very religious merchant who once lived in the city of Benaras.
Tumburu - A resident of the heavenly planets whom Arjuna met while visiting there.
Turvasu - A son of King Yayāti and Devayānī.
Tvāṣṭra - A weapon which causes confusion among the enemy.
Tvāṣṭā - 1. A celestial craftsman who fashioned Dadhīci's bones into weapons for the demigods. 2. A sage who created the demon Vṛtrāsura. 3. A powerful weapon.
Uccaiḥśravā - A magnificent steed which had been produced from the churning of the ocean of milk and was worshipped by the demigods as a representative of Lord Kṛṣṇa's beauty and opulence.
Udapāna - A holy place visited by Lord Balarāma.
Udavāsa - A method of performing austerities. (fasting from water)
Udayā - The mountain in the east where the sun rises.
Udālaka - A sage and the father of Śvetaketu and Sujāta.
Uddalaki - A sage and the father of Nāciketā.
Uddhava - A hero in the Yadu dynasty. He knew of the imminent destruction of his dynasty.
Ulūpī - When Arjuna was accidentally killed by Babhruvāhana, she used a magic gem to bring him back to life.
Umā - The goddess wife of Lord Śiva and the mother of Gaṇeśa. She is also called Pārvatī.
uī ca - A type of austerity, during which one only lives off what grain can be gathered from an already harvested field.

Upaniñads - Philosophical treaties which are part of the Vedas.

Upaplavya - A town in the kingdom of matsya where the Pāṇḍavas stayed after their exile and prepared for the war.

Uparicara - Another name of King Vasu, a ruler of the earth, given to him because of his ability to fly in the air.

Upasunda - An asura and a son of Nikumbha. He and his brother Sunda killed each other over a woman, Tilottamā.

Upayaja - The two brothers, Upayaja and Yaja, were sages who helped King Drupada by performing the fire sacrifice that created Draupadī and Dhrṣṭadyumna.

Urvasi - One of the foremost Apsarās in the heavenly planets. Because she was spurned by Arjuna, she angrily cursed him that he would turn into a eunuch for an entire year. Arjuna used this to his advantage during the Pāṇḍavas' year in hiding.

Uśanā - A holy place where Śukrācārya had once performed great austerities. It is also called Kapālamocana.

Uśanā - Another name of the sage Śukrācārya.

Uṣīnara - 1. A king of the Bhojas and the father of Śibi. 2. Śibi was also called Uṣīnara, after his father.

Utaṇka - A disciple of the guru Veda. Because Takṣaka was his enemy, Utaṇka incited Janamejaya to perform a snake-sacrifice that would destroy all snakes. Utaṇka later became a great sage.

Utathya - A sage and the father of Dīrghatama.

Utkocaka - A town where the Pāṇḍavas received Dhaumya as their priest.

Uttamaujā - A Pañcāla hero and the brother of Yudhāmanyu. He was killed by Aśvatthāmā in his sleep.

Uttara - The son of king Virāṭa, also called Bhuminjaya. He was killed by Satya during the battle of Kuruksetra.

Uttarā - The daughter of King Virāṭa. She married Abhimanyu and became the mother of Parīksit.

Uttarā-Kurus - Residents of the heavenly planets.

Vadānya - A sage and the father of Suprabhā.
Vadarapacana - A great place of pilgrimage.
Vadhūṣāra - A river created by the tears of Pularna, the wife of Bhṛgu.
Bāhlīka - A son of King Pratīpa and a warrior in the Kuru dynasty. He fought for Duryodhana at Kurukṣetra as one of his commanders and was killed by Bhīma.
Vahuda - A river.
Vahudaëtakā - Indra's summarized version of the daṇḍanīti (the science of chastisement).
Vahuka - A name used by King Nala to hide his identity after he lost his kingdom.
Vaijanta - An effulgent golden mountain.
vaïjayanté - A garland of victory.
Vaikuṇṭha - The eternal realm of Lord Viṣṇu.
vaïcālakāça - Śiva's summarized version of the daṇḍanīti (the science of chastisement).
Vaiśampāyana - A disciple of Vyāsadeva. He recited the Mahābhārata for the first time at the snake-sacrifice of King Janamejaya.
Vaiṣṇava - 1. A powerful weapon given by Lord Viṣṇu to Naraka, who later gave it to Bhagadatta. Lord Kṛṣṇa neutralized it so that it would not kill Arjuna. 2. Devotees of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu are called Vaiṣṇavas.
Vaiṣṇava-yajī a - A fire sacrifice performed by Duryodhana that had once been performed by Lord Viṣṇu.
Vaiśrāvana - Another name for Kuvera, the god of wealth.
Vaiṣvānara - Another name of Agni, the god of fire.
vaïcya - A caste in society of workers and merchants. It is they who develop the kingdom, agriculture, trade and cow-population. They possess the qualities of both passion and ignorance.
Vaitaraṇī - A river within the hellish planets.
Vaivasvata Manu - A son of Śūrya. When the world was destroyed by the great flood, Lord Viṣṇu saved him and then empowered him to re-create all the kinds of life.
vaïjapeya - A fire sacrifice.
vaïra - A battle formation.
Vajra - A great grandson of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and a surviving member of the
Yadu dynasty who was installed in Mathurā as its king.

**Vajradatta** - The son of Bhagadatta.

**Baka** - 1. A fierce Rākṣasa that was killed by Bhīma. 2. A sage who once lived near the eastern ocean.

**Vala** - A son of Parīkṣit and Suśobhana.

**Vāladhī** - A sage who performed austerities in the hopes of achieving an immortal son.

**Balāhaka** - The name of one of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s four white horses.

**Vālakhilyas** - 60,00 great sages who blessed Garuḍa.

**Vali** - 1. A king. 2. A king of the monkeys who was killed by Lord Rāmacandra.

**Vallabha** - The name used by Bhīma to hide his identity during the Pāṇḍavas' year in hiding. He pretended to be a cook and wrestler in the court of King Virāṭa.

**Vālmiki** - A great sage.

**Vāmadeva** - A sage.

**Vāmana** - An incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead as the younger son of Indra. He is also called Vāmanadeva.

**Vami** - Horses belonging to the sage Vāmadeva that can run as fast as the wind.

**vānaprastha** - Renunciation of worldly matters and retirement to the forest, the third stage of life. Renunciation is taken after having completed one's duties as a householder.

**Vandin** - A court paṇḍita of King Janaka who was really a son of Varuṇa.

**Vapuṣṭama** - The daughter of Suvarnavarman, the ruler of Kāśī. She was married to King Janamejaya.

**Varāha** - The boar incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, which He assumed in order to save the earth from sinking into the Garbhodaka Ocean.

**Vāraṇāvata** - A village that Duryodhana invited the Pāṇḍavas to visit, and then tried to assassinate them by burning down the palace they were staying in. Also one of the five villages requested by the Pāṇḍavas as a compromise in an attempt to avoid the Kurukṣetra war.

**Varcas** - The son of Soma, the moon god. Abhimanyu was an incarnation of Varcas.
Vardhamāna - One of the gates of the city of Hastināpura.

Varga - An Apsarā.

varēā - A class of society, or a social division. The four classes are; brāhmaṇa (sages), kṣatriya (warrior rulers), vaiśya (businessmen), and śūdra (common laborers).

varēāçrama - The system of social divisions. The Vedas instruct one how to execute duties properly according to the social system of varṇāśrama. The four social divisions are; brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, and śūdra.

varṇa - An island or region in Jambudvīpa, the earth.

Vārṣṇeya - A trusted charioteer of King Nala.

Varuṇa - The demigod of the waters. His abode is within the ocean. When the Khāṇḍava forest was being burned, Varuṇa gave Arjuna the Gāṇḍiva bow and two inexhaustible quivers at the request of Agni.

Vāskala - An asura who empowered Bhagadatta as an incarnation of himself.

Vasiṣṭha - A sapt-ṛṣi and one of the greatest of sages. His wife was Arundhatī and his son was Śakti.

Vasiṣṭhapavaha - A holy place on the banks of the river Sarasvatī.

Vasu - A king in the Paurava dynasty. Because of his devotional service, he became favored by Lord Nārāyaṇa. Vasu was also called Uparicara because of his ability to fly in the sky. His children were Matsya and Satyavatī.

Vasudeva - The son of Śūrasenā in the Yadu dynasty and the father of Kṛṣṇa and Subhadrā.

Vasudevā - A name of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Vāsuki - A king of the serpents, and the son of Kaśyapa and Kadru.

Vasumanaś - The son of King Haryaśva and Mādhavī.

Vasus - A group of eight celestial beings who were cursed by Vasiṣṭha to be born on earth. They petitioned Gaṅgā to appear as their mother so that they would not be born of an ordinary mortal, and she agreed. She drowned seven of them so that they would be immediately released from their curse, but the eighth was destined to live a long life as Bhīṣma.

Vasusena - A name of Karṇa in his youth. It was given to him by his adopted parents, Adhiratha and Rādhā.

Vātāpi - A Daitya and the brother of Ilvala.
Vatsabhūmi - A holy place.
Vāyavya - A celestial weapon which creates strong winds when invoked.
Vāyu - The god of wind and the father of Bhīma and Hanumān.
Veda - A guru. He was once a disciple of Ayoda-Dhaumya.
Vedas - Books of transcendental knowledge which came from Lord Kṛṣṇa. It is divided into four sections; Atharva, Ṛg, Sāma, and Yajur.
Vedic - Referring to topics drawn from the Vedas.
Vena - The sinful son of Ananga who was killed by brāhmaṇas.
Vibhandaka - A son of Kaśyapa and the father of Rṣyaśṛṅga
Vibhatsu - A name of Arjuna, given to him because he had never performed an abominable act on the battlefield.
Vibhāvasu - A very wrathful sage and the brother of Supritika He was cursed by his brother to turn into a tortoise, and while in that form he was devoured by Garuḍa.

vibhinnā ca - A separated part and parcel of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, such as the demigods.
Vibhiṣaṇa - The king of the Rākṣasas.
vibhitaka - A species of trees.
Vicitravīrya - The second son of King Śantanu and Satyavatī. He married Ambikā and Ambālikā, and died early in his life.
Vidarbha - A province in ancient India.
Vidarbhās - The citizens of the province of Vidarbha.
Vidyunmālin - A son of the demon Tāraka. He and his two brothers were killed by Lord Śiva.
Vijaya - 1. One of the names used by the Pāṇḍavas to call upon each other for help during their year in hiding. 2. A name of Arjuna, given to him because he always comes out victorious after approaching his enemies in battle. 3. A celestial bow given to Rukmi by Indra. 2. The name of Karṇa's bow.
Vikarna - One of the one hundred sons of Duryodhana. He was the only one who spoke up for Draupadi during the gambling match. He was killed by Bhīma during the battle of Kurukṣetra.
Vikrīta - An incarnation of the demigod of Wrath.
vīṇā - A musical instrument that has seven strings.
Vinatā - A daughter of Dakṣa who was married to the sage Kaśyapa. Her
children were Aruna and Garuḍa.

**Vinda** - A king of the Avantī province. He was killed by Arjuna during the battle at Kurukṣetra.

**Vindhya** - A mountain.

**Bindu** - A lake.

**Viprichitti** - A Dānava who was reborn as King Jarāsandha.

**Vipula** - A disciple of the sage Devasārmā. He protected Devasārmā's wife from Indra.

**Virāḍyumna** - A king who was advised by Dharma in the disguise of the sage Tanu.

**Virajas** - A son of Lord Viṣṇu, created from the Lord's will to be a ruler of the earth.

Virajas never assumed that post, being more inclined to a life of austerities.

**Virasena** - The father of King Nala.

**Virāta** - The ruler of the Matsyas. He had three sons named Śaṅkha, Śveta, and Bhuminjaya, and a daughter named Uttarā. The Pāṇḍavas lived out their year in hiding as his servants, and Draupadī lived as his queen Sudeśṇa's maidservant. When their exile was over, Virāta married Uttarā to Arjuna's son Abhimanyu. Virāta was killed by Droṇa while fighting as a commander of Yudhiṣṭhira's army.

**Viravahu** - A king of the Cedis.

**Virocanā** - A Dānava. He was the son of Prahlāda and the father of Bali Mahārāja.

**Virūpa** - An incarnation of the demigod of Desire.

**Virūpākṣa** - A king of the Rākṣasas.

**Viśākha** - A terrible creature born from a wound on Skanda's right side.

**Viśākhayūpa** - A forest where the Pāṇḍavas stayed for a while.

**Viśāla** - A province in India.

**Viṣṇu** - The four-armed form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

**Viṣṇu-māyā** - The energy of Lord Viṣṇu.

**Viṣṇu-tattva** - A personal expansion, or incarnation, of Lord Viṣṇu.

**Viśoka** - The charioteer of Bhīma.

**Viśvadevas** - A class of heavenly beings.

**Viśvakarmā** - A demigod architect.
Viśvāmitra - The son of King Gādhi. Although he was a warrior, he was able to elevate himself to the status of a great sage. His son was Aśṭaka.

Viśvarūpa - A three-headed demon who was the son of the sage Tvaṣṭā. He was killed by Indra.

Viśvāvasu - A king of the Gandarvas and the father of Citrasena.

Vitastā - A river.

Vivāsvān - Another name of Sūrya, the sun god.

Vivimśati - One of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra who were killed by Bhīma.

Vṛadhanasva - A king.

Vṛaja - Another way of saying the name of the town of Vṛndāvana.

Vṛddhakṣattra - A king of Sindhu and the father of Jayadrathatha. When Jayadratha was born, Vṛddhakṣattra heard a prophecy that his son's head would be cut off in battle. He then announced that the head of whoever caused Jayadratha's head to fall to the ground would immediately burst into 100 pieces. When Arjuna killed Jayadratha, he employed celestial arrows that carried the head to where Vṛddhakṣattra was performing austerities. When he stood up, his son's head fell off his lap and thus he was killed by his own curse.

Vṛihatsena - A trusted maidservant of Queen Damayantī.

Vṛkasthala - One of the five villages requested by the Pāṇḍavas as a compromise in an attempt to avoid the Kurukṣetra war.

Vṛndāvana - A town in India in which Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Balarāma exhibited their childhood pastimes.

Vṛṣā - The principal die in a gambling match.

Vṛṣādarbha - The father of Śaivyā.

Vṛṣaka - A son of King Subala and the brother of Śakuni. He was killed by Arjuna.

Vṛṣaparvā - 1. A king of the Dānavas. 2. A sage who helped the Pāṇḍavas. 3. A king and the father of Śarmiṣṭhā.

Vṛṣasena - 1. The son of Kṛtavarmā. 2. A son of Karṇa. He was killed by Arjuna during the battle at Kurukṣetra.

Vṛṣnis - A clan of the Yadu dynasty, along with the Andhakas and Bhojas.

Vṛtra - A leader of the demons who was killed by Indra, who used the
bones of Dadhīci as his weapons. Vṛtra was created by Tvaṣṭā, and was also called Vṛtrāsura.

**Vyāsadeva** - A great sage and the son of Parāśara and Satyavatī. He became the father of Pāṇḍu, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and Vidura, and guided the Pāṇḍavas through difficult times. He gave spiritual vision to Sañjaya so that he could relate what happened at the battlefield of Kurukṣetra to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Later on he compiled the *Mahābhārata*, and he was also the father of Śuka.

**Vyāsāsana** - A special seat given to a holy person or sage.

**Vyūṣitaśva** - A king in the Pūru dynasty.

**Yādavas** - The members of the Yadu dynasty.

**Yadu** - 1. A son of King Yayāti. He became the founder of the Yadu dynasty. 2. The dynasty of the descendants of King Yadu. Lord Kṛṣṇa was born in that dynasty.

**Yaja** - The two brothers, Upayaja and Yaja, were sages who helped King Drupada by performing the fire sacrifice that created Draupadī and Dhṛṣṭadyumna.

**yajña** - A fire sacrifice.

**Yajñasena** - A name of King Drupada.

**Yājñavalkya** - A sage.

**Yajur Veda** - One of the four sections of the *Vedas*.

**Yakṣas** - A class of demigods and the subjects of Kuvera, the god of wealth.

**Yamadūtas** - The servants and agents of Yamarāja.

**Yamarāja** - The god of death and justice. He judges people after they die and gives them the destination that they deserve. He is also called Dharmarāja. Vidura was an incarnation of him and Yudhiṣṭhira was his son. He is also known as the lord of the *pitṛs*.

**Yamunā** - A holy river in India.

**Yātudhānī** - A female demon created from the fire sacrifice of King Śaivya. She was killed by a *brāhmaṇa*.

**Yavakri** - The son of the sage Bhāradvāja. He performed austerities in order to gain great knowledge of the *Vedas*.

**Yavanas** - An uncivilized tribe.

**Yayāti** - The son of King Nāhuṣa. His sons through Devayānī were Yadu
and Turvasu, and his sons through Śarmiṣṭhā were Drahuyu, Anu, and Pūru.

Yāyāvara - I. A sage. 2. A descendant of the sage Yāyāvara.
yoga - The practice of purifying one's consciousness through meditation. In a trance of mystic yoga, one meditates in samādhi upon the transcendental form of the Supreme Lord, Viṣṇu, as He is situated within the region of the heart. In this way, when one becomes completely purified by such detachment and meditation, he becomes eligible to return to the spiritual world.

Yogamāyā - A name of the goddess Durgā, who had been born as the younger sister of Lord Kṛṣṇa and then had ascended into the sky when the evil king Kaśā had tried to dash her upon the stone floor. 2. The illusory potency of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
yoga-nidrā - The mystic slumber of Garbhodāśyī Viṣṇu Who lies upon the waters of the Garbhodaka ocean.
yoga-siddhi - Mystic perfection.

Yogeśvara - One of the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa meaning the Lord of all mystic powers.
yogi - A practitioner of yoga.
yogic - Referring to characteristics of yoga.
yojana - A measure of length eight miles long.

Yojanagandha - A name of Satyavatī, given to her because her sweet scent could be perceived even eight miles away.

Yudhāmanyu - A Pañcāla hero and the brother of Uttamaujā. He was killed by Aśvatthāma in his sleep.

Yudhiṣṭhira - The eldest of the Pāṇḍavas. He was the son of Kuntī and Yamarāja.
yuga - An age. There are four ages, each differing in length; Satya-yuga, Tretā-yuga, Dwāpara-yuga, and Kali-yuga. These ages form a cycle which repeats itself.

Yuvaṇāśva - A king in the line of Ikṣvāku and the father of Mandhātā, who was born from his left side.

Yuvaraja - The title for the heir-apparent to the throne.

Yuyudhāna - Another name of Sātyaki.

uyutsu - The son of Dhrītarāṣṭra and a vaiśya servant. He took the side of
the Pāṇḍavas during the Kurukṣetra war and was one of the few survivors.