

LESSON 5



YUDHISHTHIRA'S PIETY AND WISDOM

The virtues of tolerance, patience and justice are not found in every individual. Can you name some people who has one or some of these virtues ? Epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, have many stories from which we learn of such virtues.



This is a story based on an interesting episode from the Mahabharata. The Pandavas lost in the game of dice to the Kauravas, and had to stay in exile for *thirteen* long and lonely years. During this time they had to move constantly from place to place for safety and

to look for their daily needs. It was a difficult and exhausting time for them. One day, in the twelfth year, the Pandava brothers wandered deep into a forest in pursuit of a deer. Actually the deer was none other than Yama, the god of Death who had taken the form of the animal so that he might test the piety and wisdom of Yudhishtira.

The sun was hot overhead and the five brothers grew very tired and thirsty. The deer had somehow vanished. At last they came to a stop, realising it was a useless chase. Yudhishtira sat down under a tree to rest, and told Nakula to climb up a tree and see if there was any pool or river nearby. Nakula climbed up, looked around and saw water, plants and cranes a little way off. He believed that water was certainly available there. Yudhishtira sent him to fetch some water to drink. Nakula was filled with joy when he got to the place and saw a pool. He was himself very thirsty. So he thought that he would quench his own thirst before returning with water for his brothers. But no sooner did he dip his hand in the cool water than a voice rang out, "Stop, Nakula! Do not drink. That is an enchanted pool and it belongs to me. No one may drink its water without answering my questions."

Nakula looked up in surprise. He could see nobody. He felt too tired and thirsty to heed the warning. So he knelt down and began to drink the water. At once, he felt terribly drowsy, and fell down unconscious.

When Nakula didn't return for a long time Yudhishtira sent Sahadeva to see what the matter was. Sahadeva reached the pool,

though he was upset to see his brother lying on the ground, he rushed to the pool to quench his burning thirst.

Again the voice said, “O Sahadeva, answer my questions before you drink the water.” Like Nakula, Sahadeva also paid no attention to the warning. He drank the water and at once he too fell down. Yudhishtira became very worried when Sahadeva too, didn’t return. He sent Arjuna to see whether the brothers had met with any danger.

Arjuna soon arrived at the spot and found both his brothers lying unconscious near the pool. He was shocked at the sight and felt that they must have been killed by some hidden enemy. Heart-broken with grief, he wanted to avenge their deaths. However, he too was overwhelmed by an uncontrollable thirst, which drove him towards the fatal pool. Again the warning voice was heard, “Answer my questions before you drink the water Arjuna. If you disobey me, you will follow your brothers.”

Arjuna became very angry. He cried, “Who are you ? Show yourself and I will kill you.” He shot sharp arrows in the direction of the voice. The invisible being laughed scornfully, “Your arrows can’t touch me. Answer my questions, and then you can satisfy your thirst. If you drink the water without doing so, you will die.” Arjuna wanted to destroy this unseen foe, but first he had to quench his overpowering thirst. So he drank the water and also fell down dead.

After an anxious wait, Yudhishtira turned to Bhima, “Dear brother, even Arjuna, the great hero, hasn’t returned. Something

terrible must have happened to our brothers. Please find them quickly.” Bhima hurried away without another word.

His grief and rage knew no bounds when he saw his three brothers lying there dead. He thought, “This is certainly the work of the Yakshas. I will hunt them down and kill them. But oh! I am so thirsty. I shall first drink some water so that I can fight them better.” And he knelt down beside the pool.

The voice shouted, “Bhimasena, beware. You may drink the water only after answering my questions. You will die if you ignore my words.” “Who are you to dictate to me ?” cried Bhima, and drank the water eagerly, glaring around in defiance. And instantly, his great strength slipped away and he also fell dead among his brothers.

Yudhishtira became extremely worried when none of his brothers returned. Finally, he decided to go and look for them himself. Following their footsteps, he walked on until he came to that pool of clear, calm water, surrounded by a beautiful green meadow. It was really a sight for tired eyes. Then his gaze fell upon his brothers lying there, cold and still. He was unable to control his grief. Weeping bitterly for them, he cried out, “Is this to be the end of all our struggles ? Just when our exile is about to end, you have been snatched away from me. There’s no reason for me to continue living in this world.”

As he looked at the mighty limbs of his brothers, now so powerless, he wondered who could have been powerful enough to

kill them. The world has no warriors who could overcome his brothers. Besides, there were no wounds on their bodies or any traces of enemy footprints around. There was surely some magic or supernatural power behind this.

For a long time, Yudhishtira wept on the bank. Then feeling his thirst overpowering him, he was drawn to the water. At once, the invisible voice warned as before, “Your brothers died because they did not listen to me. Do not follow them. Answer my questions first and then quench your thirst.

Yudhishtira knew that it must be a Yaksha who spoke and guessed what had happened to his brothers. He saw a possible way of saving the situation. He called out, “Please ask your questions.” Then the Yaksha asked, “What makes the sun shine every day ?”

“The power of God!” Yudhishtira answered.

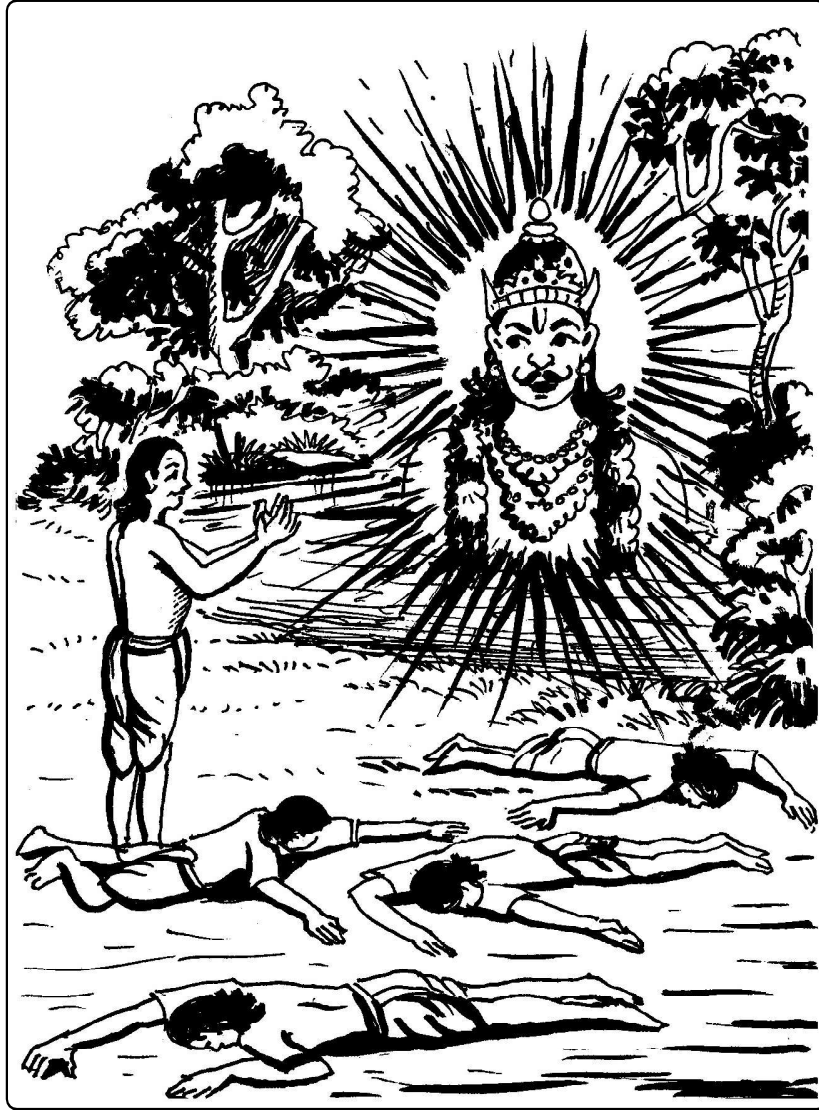
The Yaksha asked again, “What is one’s best weapon in danger?”

Yudhishtira answered quickly, “Courage”.

“What is faster than the wind ?”

“The mind,” Yudhishtira replied.

“By giving up something one becomes loved by all, What is it?”



Yudhishtira answered, "Pride, When one gives up pride, one will be loved by all."

“The loss of something can bring one joy and not sorrow, what is it ?”

“Anger, for when one gives up anger, one is full of peace,” replied Yudhishtira.

Thus, a series of questions were asked and rapidly answered. At last the Yaksha said, “Yudhishtira, I am well pleased with your answers, and now one of your dead brothers can be restored to life. Whom do you choose ?”

Yudhishtira thought for a moment and said, “Kind Yaksha, please restore the life of Nakula.”

This answer also pleased the Yaksha, and he asked, “Why did you choose Nakula over Bhima who is so strong ? And why not Arjuna ? Won’t his skill in arms protect you better ? Why didn’t you choose one of them ?

Yudhishtira answered, “Yaksha, righteousness and truth are the only protection one has. The strength of Bhima and the skill of Arjuna would not help if one acted unrighteously. Kunti and Madri were the two wives of my father. Of Kunti’s children, I survive. So, to be fair, I ask that Madri’s son, Nakula, be revived.” The Yaksha was touched by Yudhishtira’s sense of justice and granted that all his brothers be restored to life.

Now, it was Yama, the Lord of Death, who had taken the form of the deer and the Yaksha so that he might test Yudhishtira’s piety. He embraced Yudhishtira, blessed him and then disappeared.

Glossary

piety	– devotion to God, loving dutifulness to parents
episode	– incident
Pandavas	– the five sons of King Pandu in the Mahabharata
Kauravas	– the hundred sons of King Dhristarastra in the Mahabharata
exile	– banishment
exhausting	– tiresome
pursuit	– run after
vanished	– disappeared
a little way off	– at a little distance
quench	– to drink water so that one does not feel thirsty
heed	– pay attention to
drowsy	– sleepy
unconscious	– senseless, in a swoon
bounds	– limits
Yaksha	– a being who is half god and half human
defiance	– challenge
slipped	– fell suddenly
traces	– signs
supernatural	– of or by God, spirits, ghosts, etc.

righteousness – self consciously virtuous
touched – emotionally moved

Comprehension

1. Answer the following questions :

- (i) Who was the first to go to the pool ?
- (ii) Who was the Yaksha ?
- (iii) What happened to the younger Pandava brothers when they went to the pool ?
- (iv) What were the questions of the Yaksha and how did Yudhishtira answer them ?
- (v) Who were the two wives of Yudhishtira's father ?
- (vi) Each of the Pandavas reacted differently to the Yaksha's questions. State how each one responded.
- (vii) Write a note on the piety and wisdom of Yudhishtira in about 50-60 words.
- (viii) The Yaksha asked, "What is one's best weapon in danger?"
How did Yudhishtira answer the question ?

2. **EXERCISE IN LANGUAGE**

Choose the appropriate word from the pair of words given in the brackets and write it in the space provided :

- (i) The story is (interesting / interested)
- (ii) Yudhisthira had a feeling (sinking /sacking)
- (iii) Mr. Mohan is a man (learn/learned)
- (iv) This is my room (live/living)
- (v) This is a scenery (charm/charming)
- (vi) I learn English (spoken/spoke)
- (vii) Please meet the clerk..... (concerning/concerned)
- (viii) Here is a press (printed/printing)
- (ix) Where is the office (booked/booking)
- (x) Please repair the leg of the chair.(breaking/broken)

3. **DISCUSSION**

You must have read about people who have similar characteristics with Yudhisthira, in terms of justice , patience and wisdom. Discuss in groups about such people and share your thought with the whole class.