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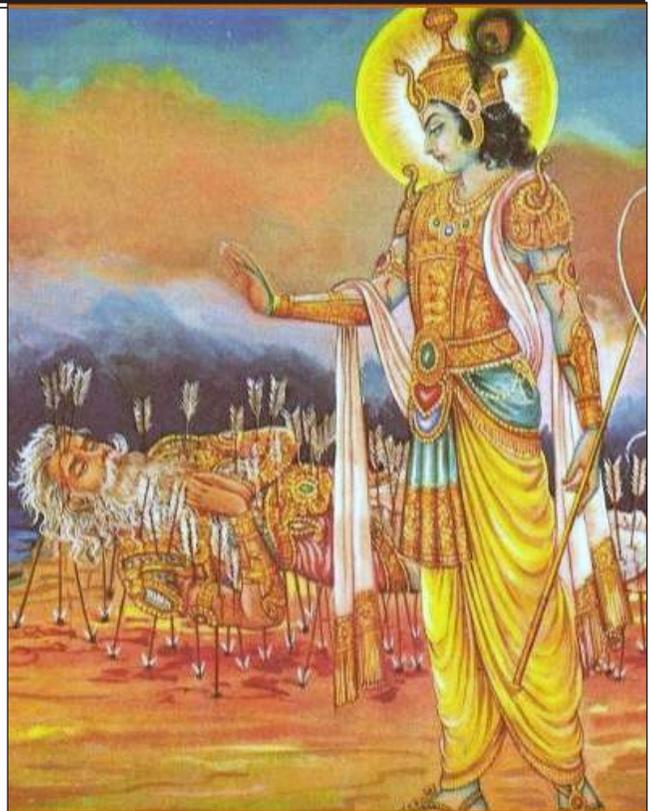
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LORD KRISHNA AND BHISHMADEVA

His Divine Grace

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

The dealings of Lord Krishna and Bhishmadeva on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra are interesting because the activities of Lord Sri Krishna appeared to be partial to Arjuna and at enmity with Bhishmadeva; but factually all this was especially meant to show special favor to Bhishmadeva, a great devotee of the Lord. The astounding feature of such dealings is that a devotee can please the Lord by playing the part of an enemy. The Lord, being absolute, can accept service from His pure devotee even in the garb of an enemy. The Supreme Lord cannot have any enemy, nor can a so-called enemy harm Him because He is *ajita*, or unconquerable. But still He takes pleasure when His pure devotee beats Him like an enemy or rebukes Him from a superior position, although no one can be superior to the Lord. These are some of the transcendental reciprocatory dealings of the devotee with the Lord. And those who have no information of pure devotional service cannot penetrate into the

mystery of such dealings. Bhishmadeva played the part of a valiant warrior, and he purposely pierced the body of the Lord so that to the common eyes it appeared that the Lord was wounded, but factually all this was to bewilder the nondevotees. The all-spiritual body cannot be wounded, and a devotee cannot become the enemy of the Lord. Had it been so, Bhishmadeva would not have desired to have the very same Lord as the ultimate destination of his life. Had Bhishmadeva been an enemy of the Lord, Lord Krishna could have annihilated him without even moving. There was no need to come before Bhishmadeva with blood and wounds. But He did so because the warrior devotee wanted to see the transcendental beauty of the Lord decorated with wounds created by a pure devotee. This is the way of exchanging transcendental *rasa*, or relations between the Lord and the servitor. By such dealings both the Lord and the devotee become glorified in their respective positions.

The Lord was so angry that Arjuna checked Him when He was moving towards Bhishmadeva, but in spite of Arjuna's checking, He proceeded towards Bhishmadeva as a lover goes to a lover, without caring for hindrances. Apparently His

determination was to kill Bhishmadeva, but factually it was to please him as a great devotee of the Lord. The Lord is undoubtedly the deliverer of all conditioned souls. The impersonalists desire salvation from Him, and He always awards them according to their aspiration, but here Bhishmadeva aspires to see the Lord in His personal feature. All pure devotees aspire for this.

— *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāna) » Canto 1: Creation » Chapter 9: The Passing Away of Bhishmadeva in the Presence of Lord Kṛṣṇa » Verse: 38 » Purport* ❧

AN EXCHANGE OF TRANSCENDENTAL PLEASURE

Srila Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakur

The wounds created on the body of the Lord by the sharpened arrows of Bhishmadeva were as pleasing to the Lord as the biting of a fiancee who bites the body of the Lord directed by a strong sense of sex desire. Such biting by the opposite sex is never taken as a sign of enmity, even if there is a wound on the body. Therefore, the fighting as an exchange of transcendental pleasure between the Lord and His pure devotee, Sri Bhishmadeva, was not at all mundane. Besides that, since the Lord's body and the Lord are identical, there was no possibility of wounds in the absolute body. The apparent wounds caused by the sharpened arrows are misleading to the common man, but one who has a little absolute knowledge can understand the transcendental exchange in the chivalrous relation. The Lord was perfectly happy with the wounds caused by the sharpened arrows of Bhishmadeva. The Lord's skin is not different from the Lord. Because our skin is different from our soul, in our case being bruised and cut, would have been quite suitable. Transcendental bliss is of different varieties, and the variety of activities in the mundane world is but a perverted reflection of transcendental bliss. Because everything in the mundane world is qualitatively mundane, it is full of inebrieties, whereas in the absolute realm, because everything is of the same absolute nature, there are varieties of enjoyment without inebriety. The Lord enjoyed the wounds created by His great devotee Bhishmadeva, and because Bhishmadeva is a devotee in the chivalrous relation, he fixes up his mind on Krishna in that wounded condition.

— *From 'Sārārtha darshini, Srila Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakur's commentary on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* ❧

YUDHISTHIRA'S SORROW

Sri Krishna-dvaipayana

Yudhisthira did not like to disobey Vyasadeva or the other *ṛṣi*s, but he still had no heart for the ruler's role. Folding his palms, he said to Vyasadeva, "My lord, the thought of sovereignty, with all its objects of enjoyment, does not give me joy. I am still grieving. Hearing the lamentations of all the women who have lost their men, I cannot feel peace."

The immortal sage smiled. "Do not be concerned with happiness or distress, for both are ephemeral. By the influence of time one meets with joy and suffering one after the other. Pleasure begets misery and from misery pleasure is again born. In this world there are only two kinds of permanently happy men: the complete fools and those who have mastered the mind and senses. Those between these two must suffer. Therefore, a wise man abandons attachment and aversion and simply does his duty to please the Supreme. Your duty is to rule this earth, O Bharata! By performing that duty you will gain undying fame and virtue, rising up in the end to the highest regions hereafter."

Yudhisthira was torn. It was against his nature to deny the sages' advice, but his doubts persisted. How could he take the throne after causing so much destruction? With tears running down his face he looked up at Vyasadeva and said, "I am the most sinful man! Just see my heart, so full of ignorance! This body, which is meant for serving others, has killed many, many phalanxes of men. I have directly or indirectly killed boys, brahmins, well-wishers, friends, parents, preceptors and brothers. Even if I live for millions of years, I will not be relieved from the hell that awaits me for these sins. Although there is no sin for a king who kills to maintain his citizens or some other righteous cause, this injunction does not apply to me in this case."

Yudhisthira knew that for a king to kill while executing his duties was not sinful, but he was not a king when the war had been fought. All the killing had come about simply to make him the king instead of Duryodhana. Such selfishness was surely sinful. "The path of sacrifice will not save me from the hell which now awaits me. As it is not possible to filter muddy water through mud or purify a wine-stained pot with wine, it is not possible to counteract the killing of men by sacrificing animals."

Seeing Yudhisthira sunk in remorse, Krishna moved closer to him. He took his hand, covered with



Maharaja Yudhishthira taking instructions from Srila Vyasadeva & Narada Muni

sandal-paste and resembling marble, and smiled. “Do not grieve so, O best of men, for you will become ill. Those who have lost their lives cannot be brought back by grieving. All of them are like objects obtained in a dream that disappear when one awakens. Purified by the striking of weapons, they have thrown down their bodies and ascended to heaven. Who will lament for them? Their women should also rejoice that they have attained such exalted destinations. And now you should take your rightful position as king.”

Both Narada and Vyasadeva spoke next. They tried at length to convince the Pandava to shake off his grief and to assume the throne. But after everything was said, Yudhishthira still could not agree. He took up a handful of earth and let it run through his fingers. He wanted to please Krishna and to satisfy the *ṛṣi*s, but he felt stained by sin. He was not convinced that performing his duty would purify him.

He looked up at Vyasadeva. “O great sage, surely it is true that one who performs his duties in accordance with scriptural injunctions does not accrue sin. This I understand, but it is the sins I have already

committed that burn and consume me. How will I be freed from them? Having committed genocide, I will doubtlessly fall into hell. I think it best that I atone by abstaining from food and drink, and reduce my body until my life airs depart. Surely I can be released by no other means.”

Vyasadeva said that there were many factors which had brought about the *kṣatriyas*’ death. Principally, their previous acts were the ultimate cause, but it had also been the influence of all-powerful time moving under God’s will which had decreed they must die. The Pandavas had been nothing more than instruments of Providence. “Men like you do not go to hell. You have followed the path of the gods and will attain an exalted destination. Sometimes virtue appears like sin while at other times sin resembles virtue. Only the learned know the difference. In your case, you should not fear, dear child. Even if there were some irregularities on the battlefield, you should not fear. Only he who deliberately sins without compunction or regret is bound by the fetters of sin and falls into hell. This was not your mood. Only with reluctance did you fight, and now you are repentant. That repentance will purify you. Still, you may perform, if you desire, acts of atonement. Although your belief that you have been sinful is delusion, you may perform the expiatory rites meant for kings.”

Yudhishthira questioned Vyasadeva about the rites of atonement and the sage described them. When he was finished, Yudhishthira said, “You have pleased me with your instructions, O sage. I understand that there are methods of atonement which will help me. I still have doubts about becoming king, however. How can I ensure that I am not touched by further sin? Please tell me in detail about a king’s duties. I need to be instructed how such duties can always be consistent with virtue. It seems to me that the acts a king must perform are often vicious and dangerous.” After looking at Krishna, who seemed to light up the night with His radiance, Vyasadeva replied, “If, O King, you wish to hear of morality and the duties of kings at length, you should approach Bhishma. I do not think there is anyone who exceeds his knowledge in this regard. He has been instructed by Brihaspati in the heavens as well as by Vashistha and Chyavana here on earth. He has also heard from Sanat Kumara, Markandeya, Parashurama, and even Indra. Surely he will clear your doubts. Go to him where he lies on the battlefield, for his time of death has not yet come.”

Hearing Bhishma’s name, Yudhishthira only felt more aggrieved. Tears again sprang from his eyes. “How will I approach the grandsire after I have killed

him so deceitfully?"

Krishna placed His hand on Yudhisthira's shoulder. "Do not indulge in grief. O best of kings, you should do what the holy *ṛṣi* has said. Go to Bhishma and hear from him about your duties. With your doubts cleared by that great man, you should then satisfy the Brahmins and your brothers and become king."

The discussions had gone all night. As the first light of dawn appeared on the horizon, Yudhisthira decided to accept Vyasadeva's advice and to go and see Bhishma. Rising up for the good of the world, he said, "So be it. After getting myself duly consecrated by the Brahmins, I will approach the wise Kuru grandfather."

Yudhisthira was still reluctant, but he would not go against Krishna's desire. He was prepared to be coronated as emperor, but he would need to hear further instructions from Bhishma before he could give his heart to the task.

— From the book "The Greatest Spiritual Epic Of All Time Mahabharata" retold by Krishna Dharma Das ❧

VARIOUS RISHIS ASSEMBLED TO WITNESS THE PASSING OF BHISHMADEV

Srila Suta Goswami

Being afraid for having killed so many subjects on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra, Maharaja Yudhisthira went to the scene of the massacre. There, Bhishmadeva was lying on a bed of arrows, about to pass away. At that time all his brothers followed him on beautiful chariots drawn by first-class horses decorated with gold ornaments. With them were Vyasa and *ṛṣis* like Dhaumya [the learned priest of the Pandavas] and others. Lord Sri Krishna, the Personality of Godhead, also followed, seated on a chariot with Arjuna. Thus King Yudhisthira appeared very aristocratic, like Kuvera surrounded by his companions [the Guhyakas].

Seeing him [Bhishma] lying on the ground, like a demigod fallen from the sky, the Pandava King Yudhisthira, along with his younger brothers and Lord Krishna, bowed down before him. Just to see the chief of the descendants of King Bharata [Bhishma], all the great souls in the universe, namely the *ṛṣis* amongst the demigods, brahmanas and kings, all situated in the quality of goodness, were assembled there.

All the sages like Parvata Muni, Narada,

Dhaumya, Vyasa the incarnation of God, Brihadashva, Bharadvaja and Parashurama and disciples, Vasistha, Indrapramada, Trita, Gritsamada, Asita, Kakshivan, Gautama, Atri, Kaushika and Sudarshana were present. And many others like Sukadeva Goswami and other purified souls, Kashyapa and Angirasa and others, all accompanied by their respective disciples, arrived there.

Bhishmadeva, who was the best amongst the eight Vasus, received and welcomed all the great and powerful *ṛṣis* who were assembled there, for he knew perfectly all the religious principles according to time and place. Lord Sri Krishna is situated in everyone's heart, yet He manifests His transcendental form by His internal potency. This very Lord was sitting before Bhishmadeva, and since Bhishmadeva knew of His glories, he worshiped Him duly.

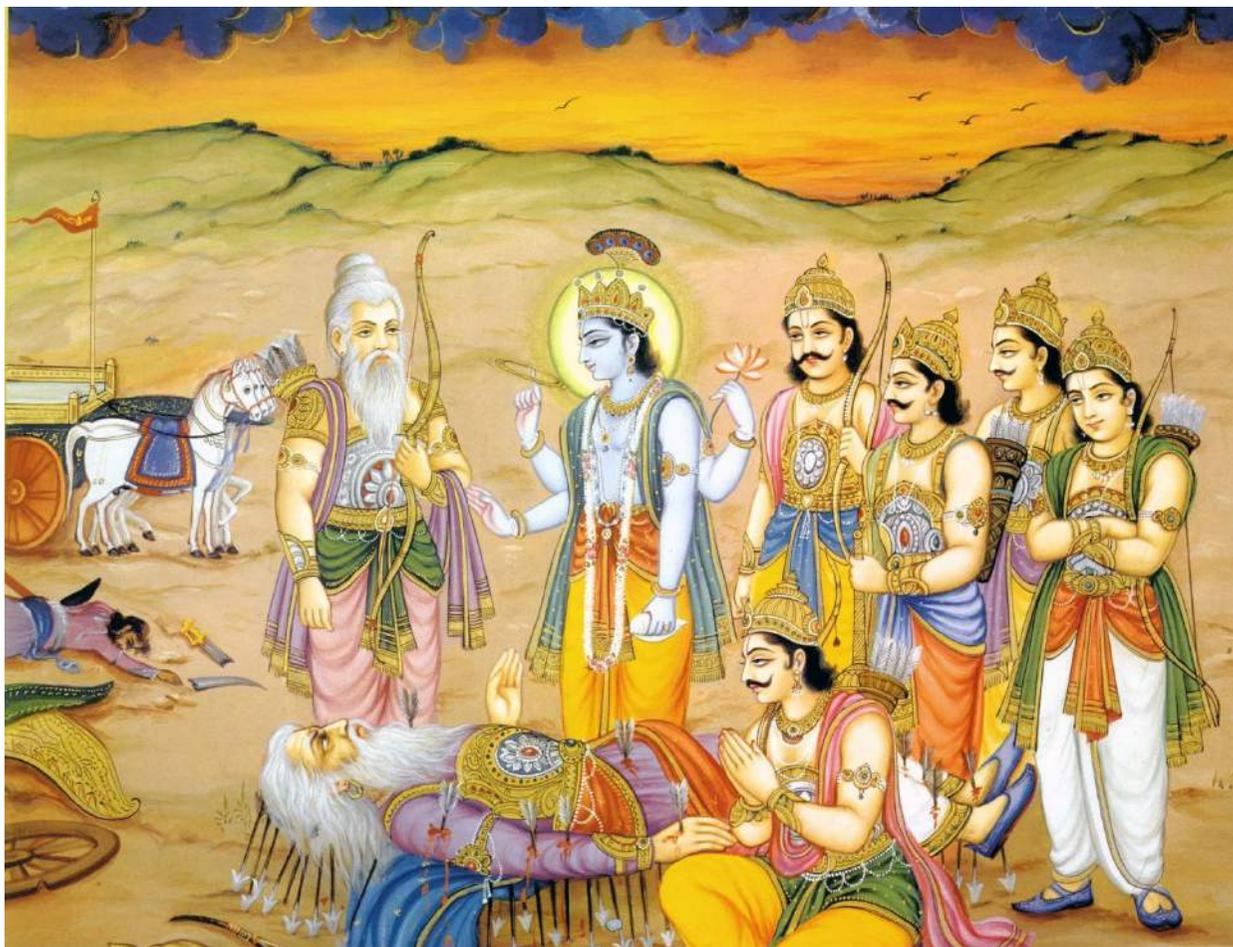
— *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāṇa) » Canto 1: Creation » Chapter 9: The Passing Away of Bhīṣmadeva in the Presence of Lord Kṛṣṇa » Verses: 1-10 ❧*

BHISHMADEV'S PRAYER TO LORD KRISHNA

Sri Suta Goswami

Speaking on different subjects with thousands of meanings and who fought on thousands of battlefields and protected thousands of men, stopped speaking and, being completely freed from all bondage, withdrew his mind from everything else and fixed his wide-open eyes upon the original Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna, who stood before him, four-handed, dressed in yellow garments that glittered and shined. By pure meditation, looking at Lord Sri Krishna, he at once was freed from all material inauspiciousness and was relieved of all bodily pains caused by the arrow wounds. Thus all the external activities of his senses at once stopped, and he prayed transcendently to the controller of all living beings while quitting his material body.

Bhishmadeva said: Let me now invest my thinking, feeling and willing, which were so long engaged in different subjects and occupational duties, in the all-powerful Lord Sri Krishna. He is always self-satisfied, but sometimes, being the leader of the devotees, He enjoys transcendental pleasure by descending on the material world, although from Him only the material world is created. Sri Krishna is the intimate friend of Arjuna. He has appeared on this earth in His transcendental body, which resembles the bluish color of the



tamala tree. His body attracts everyone in the three planetary systems [upper, middle and lower]. May His glittering yellow dress and His lotus face, covered with paintings of sandalwood pulp, be the object of my attraction, and may I not desire fruitive results.

On the battlefield [where Sri Krishna attended Arjuna out of friendship], the flowing hair of Lord Krishna turned ashen due to the dust raised by the hoofs of the horses. And because of His labor, beads of sweat wetted His face. All these decorations, intensified by the wounds dealt by my sharp arrows, were enjoyed by Him. Let my mind thus go unto Sri Krishna. In obedience to the command of His friend, Lord Sri Krishna entered the arena of the Battlefield of Kurukshetra between the soldiers of Arjuna and Duryodhana, and while there He shortened the life spans of the opposite party by His merciful glance. This was done simply by His looking at the enemy. Let my mind be fixed upon that Krishna.

When Arjuna was seemingly polluted by ignorance upon observing the soldiers and commanders before him on the battlefield, the Lord eradicated his ignorance by delivering

transcendental knowledge. May His lotus feet always remain the object of my attraction. Fulfilling my desire and sacrificing His own promise, He got down from the chariot, took up its wheel, and ran towards me hurriedly, just as a lion goes to kill an elephant. He even dropped His outer garment on the way. May He, Lord Sri Krishna, the Personality of Godhead, who awards salvation, be my ultimate destination. On the battlefield He charged me, as if angry because of the wounds dealt by my sharp arrows. His shield was scattered, and His body was smeared with blood due to the wounds.

At the moment of death, let my ultimate attraction be to Sri Krishna, the Personality of Godhead. I concentrate my mind upon the chariot driver of Arjuna who stood with a whip in His right hand and a bridle rope in His left, who was very careful to give protection to Arjuna's chariot by all means. Those who saw Him on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra attained their original forms after death. Let my mind be fixed upon Lord Sri Krishna, whose motions and smiles of love attracted the damsels of Vrajadhama [the gopis]. The damsels imitated the characteristic

movements of the Lord [after His disappearance from the rasa dance].

At the *rājasūya-yajña* [sacrifice] performed by Maharaja Yudhisthira, there was the greatest assembly of all the elite men of the world, the royal and learned orders, and in that great assembly Lord Sri Krishna was worshiped by one and all as the most exalted Personality of Godhead. This happened during my presence, and I remembered the incident in order to keep my mind upon the Lord. Now I can meditate with full concentration upon that one Lord, Sri Krishna, now present before me because now I have transcended the misconceptions of duality in regard to His presence in everyone's heart, even in the hearts of the mental speculators. He is in everyone's heart. The sun may be perceived differently, but the sun is one.

Suta Gosvami said: Thus Bhishmadeva merged himself in the Supersoul, Lord Sri Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, with his mind, speech, sight and actions, and thus he became silent, and his breathing stopped.

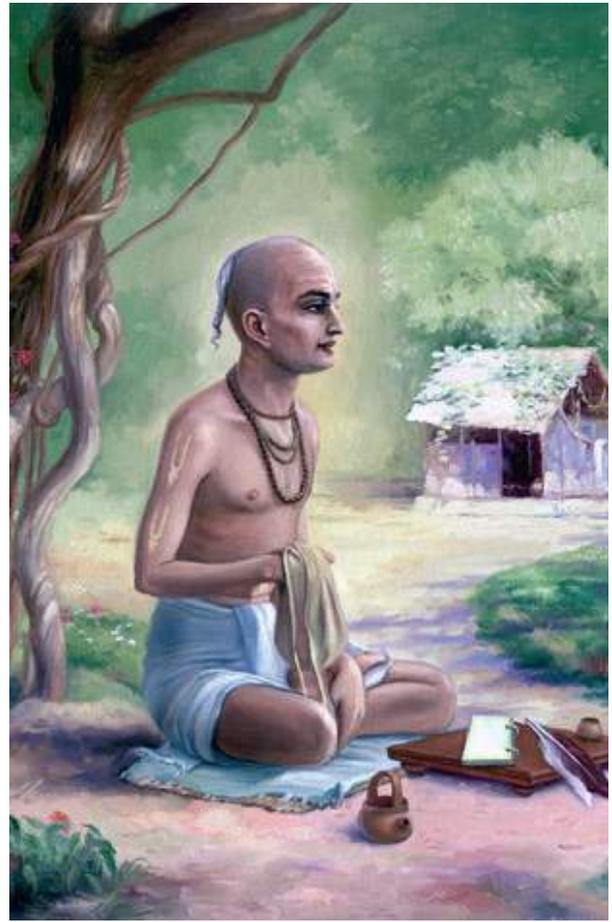
— *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāṇa) » Canto 1: Creation » Chapter 9: The Passing Away of Bhīṣmadeva in the Presence of Lord Kṛṣṇa » Verses: 30-43* ❧

WHY WAS BHISHMA SO DEAR TO KRISHNA?

Srila Sanatana Goswami

Sri Krishna appeared partial to both Vidura and Bhishma. Even though Vidura was the son of a lowborn shudrani, Krishna happily shared Vidura's humble food, praising it as very tasty. And Krishna graced Bhishma with His presence as Bhishma was passing away on the battlefield. *Niryāna* means "the soul's exit from the body," but as applied to a perfect transcendentalist like Bhishma it also means "merging into the existence of God." For devotees of the Lord, merging into His existence can only mean attaining a spiritual body and entering the eternal kingdom of *Vaikuṇṭha*. Because Grandfather Bhishma saw Krishna before his eyes at the moment of death, Bhishma certainly achieved the *Vaikuṇṭha* liberation deserved only by pure devotees.

It appears, then, that Krishna highly favored Vidura and Bhishma, even more than He favored the Paṇḍavas. But Srila Narada corrects that popular misunderstanding. Why indeed were Vidura and Bhishma so dear to



Krishna? Krishna was pleased with them not only because of their own devotional service, but mainly because they served the Pandavas, protecting them from Duryodhana and other enemies. Vidura and Bhishma earned high esteem in the opinion of the Lord by giving shelter and affection to sons of Pritha when they were helpless.

— *From Sri Bṛhad Bhāgavatāmṛta of Srila Sanatana Goswami, 1.5.40, Translated by Gopiparamadhana Dasa* ❧



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