

CHAPTER 7

VIDURA THE COUNSELLOR

Vidura continued his admonition of Dhritharashtra: “You have reached this advanced age; but still, without any shame or hesitation, you are leading a dog’s life. You may not be ashamed of it, but I am. Fie upon you! Your method of spending your days is worse than that of a crow.”

Dhritharashtra could not hear more. He cried, “O! enough, enough. Please stop. You are torturing me to death. These are not the words that one brother should address another. Hearing you, I feel you are not Vidura, my brother. He would not have reprimanded me so cruelly. For, is Dharmaraja, with whom I now am, a stranger? Have I taken refuge with an alien? What is this that you are saying? Why these harsh words! Dharmaraja is fostering me with great

love and care. How can you declare that I am leading a dog’s life or a crow’s? It is a sin—if you entertain such ideas. This is just my fate, and nothing else.” Dhritharashtra bent his head and moaned.

Vidura laughed in derision. He said, “Have you no sense of shame, that you should talk thus? Dharmaraja might, out of his goodness, care for you more than his own father. He might look after you with a love greater than your own sons. This is but the reflection of his character. That is but the amplification of the significance of his name. But should you not plan for *your* own future? One leg of yours is already in the grave and you are blindly filling your stomach in comfort and rolling in luxury. Reflect for a moment how you tortured Dharmaraja and his brothers, to fulfil the wicked intentions of your vile sons, how you devised stratagems for their extinction. You put them in a wax house and set fire to it. You attempted to poison them. You insulted their queen in the most humiliating manner before a vast assembly. You and your abominable brood piled grief over grief on the sons of Pandu, your own brother. Blind, senile, thick-skinned elephant, you sat on the throne, perpetually asking those beside you ‘What is happening now? What is happening now?’ How can you stay in this place enjoying Dharmaraja’s hospitality, rolling over your mind the iniquities perpetrated by you, for his destruction? When you were devising their end, did they cease to be your cousins? Or, did the cousinship emerge now, when you came to them for stay? You tell me so proudly that they are treating you well, without a shred of shame!

“Why speak so much? The disastrous game of dice took place at your initiative, isn’t it? Do you deny it? No. I was the witness of that game. I advised you against it then, did you take it to heart? What happened then to the love and sympathy which you are now freely pouring forth? Today, like a dog you are gulping the food the Pandavas are placing before you and leading this despicable life.”

Hearing these words of Vidura which pained him like hammer strokes, Dhritarashtra developed a distaste for his style of living. Vidura’s intention was to prod him into the life of a recluse and the life of *Sadhana* (spiritual discipline), so that he might realise His Self before it was too late. At last, he felt that Vidura was speaking the truth and giving him a true picture of his low nature. He said, “Brother! Yes, all that you have said is true, I admit. I have realised it now. But what am I to do? I am blind and therefore, I cannot go into the forests for Sadhana, alone. I must have a companion. What shall I do? For fear that I may suffer without food, Gandhari never leaves me even for a moment.”

Vidura saw that he had modified his attitude and had seen light. He emphasised his original advice. He said, “You have become blind due primarily to this attachment to the body. How long can you be burdened with it? It has to be dropped by the wayside some day, some place. Know that ‘you’ are not this body, this package of nauseating things. To identify yourselves with the physical frame is the sign of extreme foolishness. The body is being besieged perpetually by Death with His army of Diseases. But you are unaware

of it; you do not care for the pro and the con; you snooze your fill and snore. This drama has an end, remember. The curtain has to come down. So hie towards some holy place without delay and meditate on God and save yourself. Let death come and carry away your body there. That is the most excellent end. Do not die like a dog or fox, somewhere, somehow. Arise and go; develop detachment. Give up this delusion, escape from this house.”

Thus was planted in the heart the seeds of renunciation. Dhritarashtra pondered long, and broke into tears. His lips quivered. He moved his hands from side to side to contact Vidura. At last, he held his hands and said, “Vidura! What can I say to you who gave this most valuable advice, advice that is certain to promote my best interests? Though you are younger in age, your Jnana makes you senior to all of us. You have full authority to speak as you like. Do not consider me as someone outside your circle. Hear me with patience. I shall certainly follow your advice.” He then began to describe his condition to his brother.

“Vidura,” he began, “How can I leave from here, without informing Dharmaraja who is looking after me, with more care than even a son? It won’t be proper to do so. Then, he might insist on coming along with us; his nature is such. You must save me from this dilemma. Take me to a place where I can engage myself in Sadhana.”

When he pleaded thus, Vidura replied, “Your words sound strange. You are not going into the forest to eat

banquets, to witness carnivals, or to enjoy the beauty of the scenery. You are giving up everything with a full sense of detachment. You are taking up a life of austerity and spiritual discipline. And in the same breath, you are talking of ‘taking leave’ of kith and kin! This is odd. You resolve to lay down the body in the pursuit of the Ideal, but you are considering how to get the permission of men who are related to you through the body. These bonds cannot help Sadhana. They can never liberate you. Bundle them up and sink them deep. Move out of this place with just the clothes you wear. Do not waste a single moment of your life.”

Thus, Vidura advised him without mercy. He did not change the tune of his song. He emphasised the importance of immediate renunciation. Dhritharashtra was on his bed, listening intently and ruminating on the next step. He said, “Vidura, what you say is quite true. I need not describe to you my special difficulties. This body is decrepit; these eyes are blind. I must have someone at least to guide my steps, isn’t it? Your sister-in-law has blinded her eyes by a bandage in order that she can share my handicap, and suffer similarly. How can we two blind persons move about in the forest? We have to be dependent on others all our lives.”

Vidura saw the tears rolling down the cheeks of the old man. He pitied his plight, but he never revealed his pity. He said assuringly, “Well, I am prepared to take you to the forest. I am ready. What greater pleasure have I than releasing you from here for this sacred purpose? Come, arise. Start.” Vidura stood up. Dhritharashtra too rose from his bed and

stood on the floor. Gandhari too stood by his side, with a hand on his shoulder. She pleaded, “Lord I am also coming with you, ready for anything.”

But Dhritharashtra said, “Oh, it is very hard to guard women in the jungle. The place is infested by wild beasts and life there is bound to be full of privations.” He spoke in this strain for a long time. But she argued that she could not desert her lord, that she could stand the privations as much as he, that it was her duty to continue serving him until her death, that she was only following the tradition set up by the gems of Indian womanhood, that it is not Dharma to prevent her from observing her Dharma, that life in the zenana without him would be unbearable for her, that she would welcome instead, life in the jungle with her lord. She fell at the feet of her lord and demanded permission to accompany him.

Dhritharashtra was silent, he did not know what to say. It was Vidura who spoke. “This is not the time to discuss niceties of Dharma. How can this lady who never stayed away from you a single moment, suddenly leave your company and live apart? It is not proper. Let her also come; we shall take her. For those who march forward to do austerities, there should be no fear or delusion, no hunger or thirst, no grief or suffering. It is not Thapas (asceticism) to complain of these or anticipate these. When the body itself is being disowned, what can privations do? Come, there is no justification for delay.” Vidura moved forward, leading Dhritharashtra silently followed by Gandhari who

had her hand on his shoulder. The saintly votary of God, Vidura, took the pair, unnoticed by the guards and the citizens through the side streets and out beyond the city limits. He hurried them on so that they may reach the forest before dawn. But the Ganga had to be crossed in a boat and no boatman was there to take them across before sunrise. So, they had perforce to wait on the bank of that holy river. Vidura made them rest for a while in a bower and himself arranged for a boat to take them all to the other bank in the dark.