

Why did Bhishma cry?

Compiled by London Swaminathan

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Ratha Saptami Festival – February 6, 2014 Thursday

Bhishma Ashtami Day -- February 7, 2014 Friday

Swami Ganapathi Sachidananda Swamiji doing Ratha Saptami Puja



“As Bhishma lay dying on his bed of arrows, he was found shedding tears.sri Krishna and the Pandavas were standing by. Arjuna exclaimed, “How strange, Brother! Our grandfather Bhishma himself—so truthful and wise, the master of his self, and one amongst the Eight Vasus (a class of Vedic deities)—even he is overcome by Maya in his dying hour and shedding tears!”

When this was communicated to Bhishma, he replied, “O,Krishna!, you know full well that I am not crying for that . but when I think that even the Pandavas , whom the Lord himself is serving as charioteer, have to pass through endless trials and tribulations, I am overpowered with the thought that the ways of god cannot in the least be comprehended, and I cannot restrain my tears.”

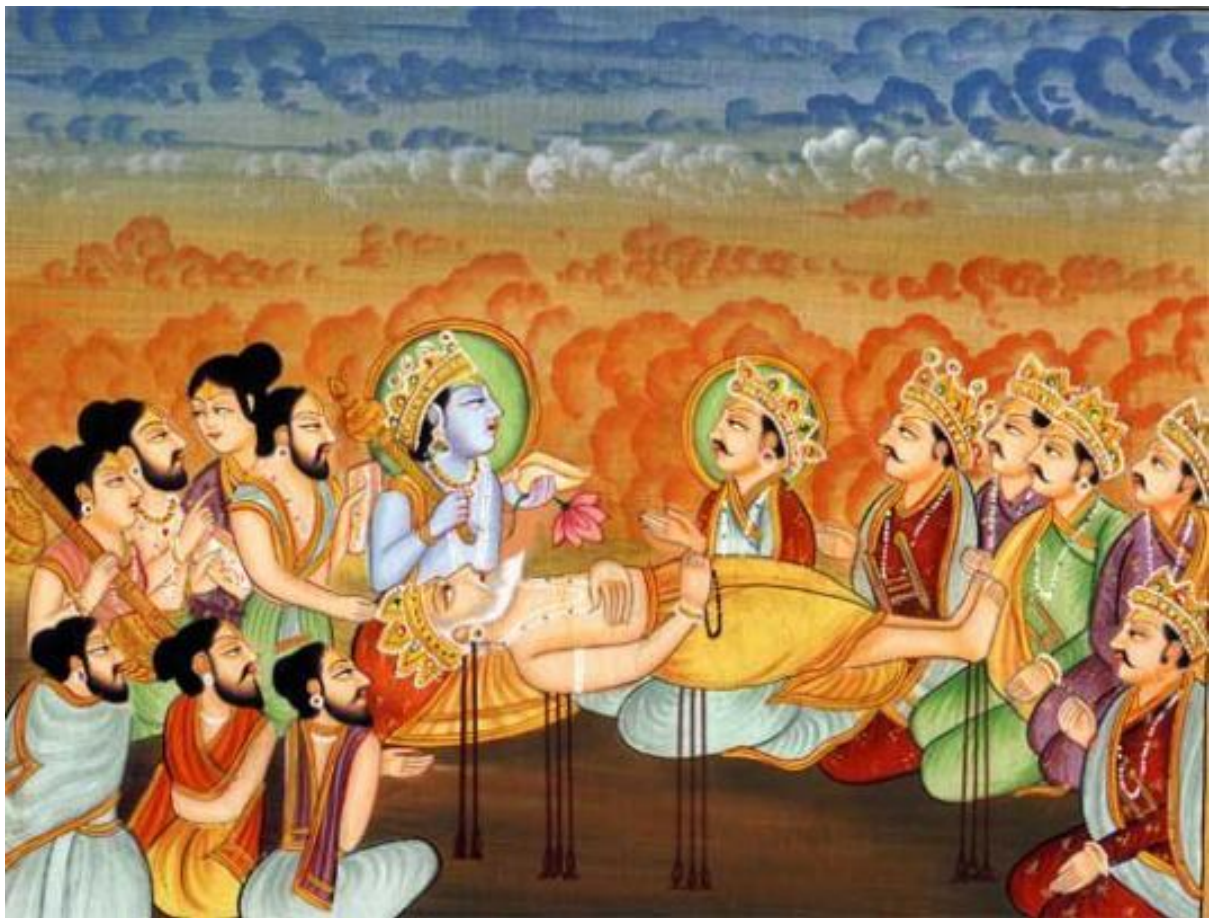
-----From Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna; item 666, page 178)



A great leader who stood by the side of the Kauravas in the Mahabharata war was Bhishma. He was great because he sacrificed his family life for the sake of his father Shantanu, who fell in love with a fisherwoman. He decided not to marry so that her son could become the king. He fought many wars even before the Great war. He was a great statesman, honest and the moral light house of the Kuru Dynasty. Born as Devavrata, he was given a boon to choose his day and time of his death. He got the title Bhishma (meaning awesome, terrible, wonderful) when he announced that he would not marry or claim kingship. After the war, he laid on the bed of arrows for 58 days before he died on an auspicious day. His bed of arrows was the first acupuncture treatment that we know of (Please read my old post on this). He had to lie on the Bed of Arrows for supporting the wrong side in the war.

Hindus pay water oblation for this grandsire on the Bhishmashtami day that follows the Ratha Saptami Day.

Ratha saptami is celebrated to propitiate Sun God. People take bath with Arka Patra (Erukku in Tamil; Calotropis procera) and rice on their heads reciting special mantras. Some people fast on this day. They light a lamp and place it on their head. Then it is left in the river to float towards the sea like Hindus do every day in the holy River Ganga. While taking the bath, they recite mantra to get rid of the sins accumulated in seven births. At home they draw Kolam/ Rangoli with the symbol of Sun and perform Puja.



Why just leaf and water?

Lord Krishna says in Bhagavad Gita:

Whosoever offers to me a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, that offering of love, of the pure of heart, I accept.

Sudama offered parched rice to Krishna from his dirty clothes

Sabari , an old tribal/hunter woman, offered berries to Lord Rama

Gajendra, king of elephants, gave Lord Vishnu a lotus flower

Ranthidevan offered just water to god

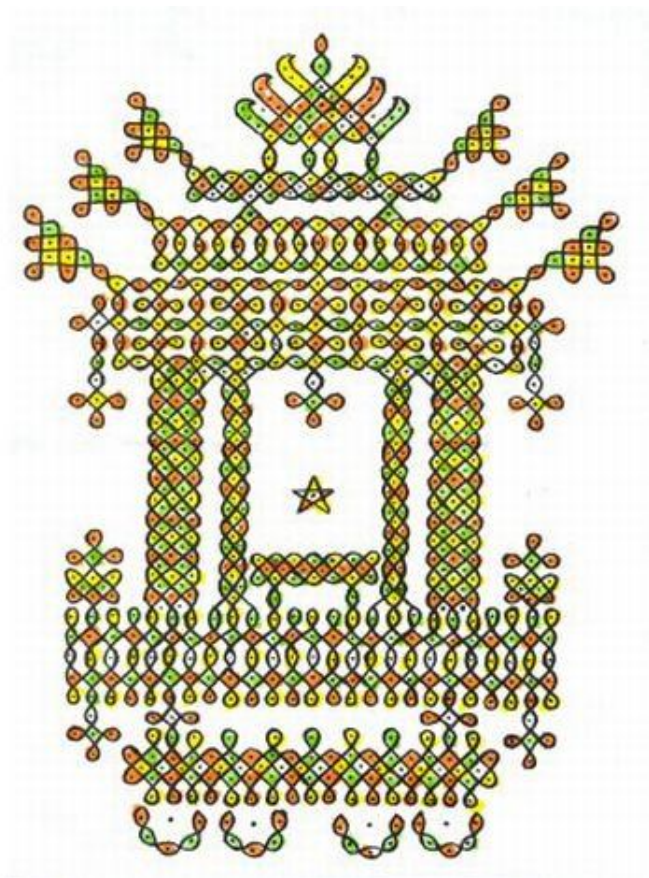
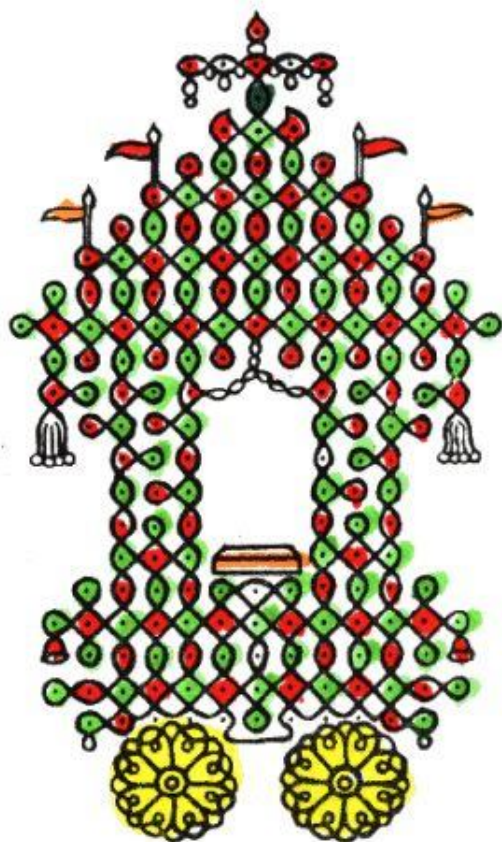
Draupadi gave spinach to Krishna

All these were accepted by God.

Dr Radhakrishnan, former President of India and world renowned philosopher, comments on the Gita sloka (9-26):

However poor the offering, if it is made with love and earnestness, it is acceptable to the Lord. The way to the highest is not by way of subtle metaphysics or complicated ritual. It is by sheer self-giving, which is symbolised by the offer of a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water. What is necessary is a devoted heart.

Images of Sun Kolam or Rangoli. Sun is supposed to have 7 horses (VIBGYOR)



Picture of Arka=Erukku=Calotropis procera



Swami Sivananda, Founder of Divine Life Society in Rishikesh, adds:

A gift however small is accepted by the Lord when it is offered with profound faith. Was he not satisfied with the little parched rice from the bundle of Sudama and the small berries offered by Sabari? You need not build a golden temple for him. Build a golden temple in your heart. Enthroned him there. He wants only your devoted heart. But how difficult to please Indra! You have to offer valuable material objects to get anything out of him.

A leaf, a flower or a fruit are mere symbols. The true means of attaining the Lord is pure, unflinching devotion.

The verb used in this sloka 'Asnami ' literally means 'eat'. The indicative meaning is 'accept'.

Read my earlier post: 1.Bhishma – First Man to Practise Acupuncture

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