



inspiring anecdotes



CHITRABHANU



Muni Shree Chitrabhanu needs no introduction to the English reading public. Many of his works have already appeared in their English version. The present publication, *Inspiring Anecdotes*, reveals once again the characteristics that have endeared Muni Shree to his readers—profundity of thought, loftiness of vision, simplicity of expression, catholicity of ideas. He is truly “*Type of the wise who soar but never roam, True to the kindred points of heaven and home.*”

And where is his home? Not in the narrow confines of a house, nor even a temple. Born in Rajasthan, bred in Mysore, living in Maharashtra, Muni Shree oversteps all parochial boundaries.

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INSPIRING ANECDOTES

CHITRABHANU

(Munishree Chandraprabhsagarji)

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY
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© AUTHOR

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By the same Author

FOUNTAIN OF INSPIRATION
TO THE CITIZENS OF TO-MORROW
LOTUS BLOOM
THE BEACON

Soon to follow

BONDAGE AND FREEDOM

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To

My Father

Pujya Munishree Chandrakant Sagarji

The true ocean of inspiring anecdotes

this little stream

making everything green and fresh

is

affectionately redirected

The Immortal Song

- (1) *May the sacred stream of amity flow forever in my heart,
May the universe prosper, such is my cherished desire.*
- (2) *May my heart sing with ecstasy at the sight of the virtuous,
And may my life be an offering at their feet.*
- (3) *May my heart bleed at the sight of the wretched, the cruel,
the irreligious,
And may tears of compassion flow from my eyes.*
- (4) *May I always be there to show the path to the pathless
wanderers of life;
Yet if they should not hearken to me, may I bide in patience.*
- (5) *May the spirit of goodwill enter all our hearts,
May we all sing in chorus the immortal song of human
concord.*

—Chitrabhanu

INSPIRING ANECDOTES

THIS little book is an English translation of "Bindu Ma Sindhu", written in Gujarati by Muni Shree Chitrabhanu several years ago. It also includes some brief but telling anecdotes which Muni Shree has been contributing more recently, to a Gujarati monthly.

The writer has at the back of his mind certain principles. He wishes to convey a message through these anecdotes in a way that would make these principles more palatable to the reader.

This translation has been undertaken for the benefit of many of Muni Shree's Indian readers whose mother-tongue is not Gujarati, as well as for the ever-widening circle of his foreign readers.

A translation, however faithful and well-written, may fail to give the exact impression of the original, it may fail to convey its subtlety of thought or grace of expression. On the other hand, too much rigidity in adhering to the original may lead to clumsiness of structure and idiom in English. An untiring effort has been made to infuse into this English version, something of the spirit and originality of the Gujarati text, without impairing the felicity of diction in English. How far it has succeeded is left to the judgment of the discriminating reader.

A. J. Mistri

INSPIRING ANECDOTES

“COME IN—COME IN”

THE earth looked fresh and green after the rains. The sky was still covered with banks of dark clouds, but the setting sun touched their fringes with its mellow beams, painting the sky with many splashes of gold and red and purple. To enhance the beauty of this picture, a rainbow appeared spanning the sky with its seven-coloured bridge. It was truly a picture of unsurpassing beauty.

One of the devotees of Mahatma Anandghanji was so deeply moved by the grandeur of this sight that he ran in to awaken his master from his deep meditation.

“*Gurudeva*,” he exclaimed excitedly, “Come out, come out! Behold this sight of ecstatic beauty in the sky. It is something you may never again see on earth; it is something celestial in its grandeur!”

Mahatma Anandghanji’s lips quivered in a faint smile, which seemed to fill the world with its delicate fragrance. As white buds spring on a delicate creeper, so gentle words sprang to his lips. “Come in, my son, Come in! Come unto the source of all light and colour from which alone springs this magnificent sight that has so enthralled you. Here you will have the vision of the soul shimmering in a translucent blaze of light and colour. Come in, my son, Come in! You may not get another chance to behold a sight so exceedingly beautiful. Come IN!”

THE INNER LIGHT

WISHING to test the wisdom of his two sons, Ajata and Abhaya, their father gave each of them a rupee saying, "Buy something with this that would fill the entire house."

The thoughtless one bought a cart-load of hay and scattered it all over the room. The thoughtful one bought a candle and lit it, and its light filled every nook and corner of the room !

Both of them filled the house, but one with trash, the other with light.

THE WORLD IS A REFLEX OF YOURSELF

EACH of us views the world according to his own vision. If a man wears dark glasses, the whole world appears dark to him; even the silvery moon seems dim to him. To view the world as it is you need a clear vision.

When it was decided to find out who was vicious in the court at Hastinapura, Dharmaraja could not find a single vicious man, for he could find some virtue in every single man, and to him they were all virtuous.

When Duryodhana was told to undertake the same investigation, he could trace some vice even in the most virtuous, and to him the whole court seemed to be overflowing with the vicious!

THE PATH OF RENUNCIATION

A MAN of the world died and his soul winged its way to heaven; a hermit died and his soul went down to purgatory.

Even the eyes of the gods were misty with tears at this apparent injustice: Someone, curious to know the reason for this, asked a sage for an explanation.

The wise man said, "The man of the world, though he lived in the midst of materialistic surroundings, sought the company of those who had renounced the world, whereas the hermit, though he had apparently adopted the life of renunciation, was longing at heart to be with the worldly. Thus, at heart, the man of the world was a hermit, while the hermit was a man of the world. Only the path of heartfelt renunciation leads to heaven."

AN EVEN EXCHANGE

A ROGUE, filling the lower half of his earthen jar with water and the upper half with *ghee*, was trying to palm it off on some unsuspecting customer.

On the way, he came across another rogue trying to sell a brass bangle gilded with gold, as genuine gold. The first one asked, "Would you like to buy this jar of pure *ghee*?"

"I might," replied the other, "but would you be interested in this gold bangle?"

"Come, let's exchange the articles," suggested the first.

"I don't mind," replied the other.

So they exchanged their fake wares and each went his way congratulating himself on how he had duped the other.

Is not the world full of such bargains?

NOT A GRAVEYARD

WHEN Bernard Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize, there was a gathering to celebrate the event. The fact that Shaw was a vegetarian was not known to the organizers.

The hall was filled with many celebrities. The guests started helping themselves to the refreshments. It was soon observed that only Shaw refrained from touching them. Somebody told Shaw, "You are the guest of honour and you don't seem at all interested in the food!" Shaw made a reply that would be forever carved in the memory of those who heard it:

"Because I am a human being and not a graveyard for the burial of the dead!"

THE BRUTE IN MAN

A LION'S CUB, stealing out of its den, caught sight of a large army marching by. The sight of so many men carrying rifles and bayonets scared him so that he slunk back into the cave, trembling with fear. His mother was resting. The frightened cub sought the warm shelter of his mother's side. Feeling him quake all over, she was quite concerned. "What's wrong, my pet? You are a lion's cub; you'll be the lord of the jungle. Nothing on earth should scare you so!" "But mother dear, look out," quavered the cub.

Glancing out of the cave, the lioness saw the army marching past. "Oh, that!" she said disdainfully. "That's an army marching to slaughter its own kind! Man is the only savage being on earth who kills his own kind in the name of religion, country, state or even language!"

THE BEST AND THE WORST

A WISE MAN'S speech is replete with thought. He does not blurt out worthless words; his character is reflected even in his speech.

Someone keen on acquiring knowledge once asked a wise man, "Which would you consider the best organs in the body?"

"The heart and the tongue," was the prompt reply. "The heart that is filled with compassion, the tongue that always speaks the truth—these two are the best."

"And which would you consider the worst organs?" persisted the seeker of knowledge.

The wise man replied with the same ease as before. "The heart and the tongue."

"But how could that be!" exclaimed the mystified man.

"Why not?" queried the philosopher. "The heart that is filled with cruelty and the tongue that utters falsehood—these are the worst parts of the body. Cruelty and falsehood can convert even good into evil," explained the philosopher.

ENDEAVOUR OR PRAYER

SINCE time immemorial it has been debated, "Which is superior—Endeavour or Prayer?" Learned debators argue vehemently in favour of one or the other, each according to his own convictions. To my mind, it is a humble boatman who has found a perfectly satisfying answer to this highly-debated abstract question.

The boatman has named his two oars 'Endeavour' and 'Prayer'. If anyone questions him about these strange names, he gives no reply, but immediately plies only one oar, 'Endeavour'. The boat begins to spin. He stops. Next he plies the other oar, 'Prayer'. The result is the same; only this time the boat spins in the opposite direction.

Presently, with a smile, he plies both his oars. 'Endeavour' and 'Prayer' now work simultaneously and in unison and forthwith the little boat goes skimming over the water's surface, sailing swiftly and serenely, in the intended direction.

If Endeavour and Prayer work in unison, is there a port in the Seven Seas which the Boat of Life cannot reach?

INSURANCE

I MET this youth nearly three years ago. He was then studying for his senior B.A. I happened to meet him again yesterday. He had just taken out a Life Insurance Policy.

"You are so young; why were you in such a hurry to get yourself insured?" I asked casually.

He replied, "Life is so uncertain; who knows how long I have to live? In case of my premature death my wife will have something to fall back on."

"Life is uncertain—as fragile as glass," I agreed. "Since you realise this, I hope you have not neglected to spend some time in meditation and in doing charitable deeds."

He was visibly irritated by my question and replied rather sharply, "But am I so old that I must think of all such grave matters now? There's plenty of time for all that!"

THE WEIGHT OF A FLOWER

THE Prince's friends and admirers decided to weigh him against ornaments of gold as a token of their loyalty and devotion. He was ceremoniously seated in one pan of the scales while heavy ornaments of gold were piled in the other. But the scales would not balance.

Then there came the Prince's betrothed, fragrant in body and mind with the freshness of chastity. She was quick to notice the helpless bewilderment of the group surrounding the Prince. Impulsively, she tossed into the pan a blooming rose she was holding in her hand and instantly the scales turned!

All marvelled at this inexplicable phenomenon. How could a delicate flower weigh down the pan that their heavy gold ornaments had failed to bring down? The selfless devotion and purity that fill a woman's heart lend weight to things light as a flower making them heavier than gold.

VISION

ONE day it so happened that four men who were blind from birth met at an eye clinic where they had come for treatment. While waiting for their turn they got into a heated argument about the colour of the window panes. One of them touched it accidentally and remarked categorically "I can tell that the colour of the panes is green." The second contradicted him immediately, "Certainly not; it is red. My guide said so." The third now exclaimed, "But my father told me it was yellow, and yellow it must be." "You are all wrong," burst in the fourth. "The panes are blue; my son who is studying science said so and he must know better than the others!"

As this storm in the tea cup was raging, the doctor arrived. He intervened and restored peace. "None of you can see and yet you are squabbling over what somebody else told you. My cabin has eight glass panes, each of a different colour."

Isn't it foolish to argue dogmatically over any subject, ignoring the likelihood of its having several aspects?

THE BREAD OF LOVE

HE was three score and ten. He had spent all his life earning a mere pittance and now in his old age he was turned out of his job. What next? His wife had died twenty years ago. His only son, the apple of his eye, had been snatched away in an accident. He had to resort to begging; but begging is an art; how could he acquire it? He would stand at the street corner with his wrinkled hand held out for alms. The few coins would provide a meal. Today, too, he was standing as usual, when a gentleman passed by. Moved by his hoary head bent over his chest, he put his hand in his pocket, but realised that he had forgotten his purse. He caught hold of the old man's hand in both of his and said feelingly, "My friend, I wish to give you something, but I am sorry I can give you nothing; I've forgotten my purse."

The old man's eyes were moist. "You say you can give me nothing," he said in a tremulous voice. "But you've given me more than anyone else ever did. Man does not hunger for bread alone; he hungers for fellow-feeling and compassion, too. So far they gave me money, but today you've given me the bread of love."

TRUST BEGETS TRUST

CHARLES JAMES FOX was a representative of the middle class in the House of Commons in England. He was a great orator. He had made it a point to pay his creditors as soon as he received his salary on the first of every month. Once a tradesman asked him for payment against a promissory note on the first of the month, as he had to deposit the money in the bank. Fox replied, "I am sorry I can't pay you this month, as I have to repay a loan to Sheridan. He has loaned me money without taking a promissory note from me, because he trusts me implicitly. Supposing I die suddenly, the poor man would get nothing."

The tradesman was highly impressed by Fox's high sense of integrity. Tearing the promissory note in bits he said, "I don't need this either; you may return the loan at your convenience."

Fox was deeply moved. Holding out the money he said to his creditor, "In that case I must pay you before I pay to Sheridan. In the first place, your loan is older; secondly, you need to put it in the bank urgently; thirdly, you've torn up the promissory note, trusting me. I'll pay Sheridan next month; he'll understand."

Trust begets trust.

THE MIND OF MAN

THIS sounds impossible, but so it is said to have happened. A snake and a mouse struck up friendship. They wondered what it was that man called poison, and took upon themselves to investigate into it. They hid themselves in a manger. The farmer put in his hand to take out some hay and instantly the snake bit him. The mouse thrust its little head out to see what would happen. The farmer sighted him and muttered indifferently, "Ah, it's just a wee mouse!" The next day, the mouse bit the farmer's hand, while the snake peered out. Catching sight of the snake, the farmer screamed, "My God, the snake bit me!" and fainted with sheer terror.

Poison lies, not in the mouse, not in the snake, but in the mind. It is the mind that makes a man virtuous or vicious. He who conquers his mind, conquers the world.

DUST ON DUST

To this man and his wife, leading a life of labour and content, the world was not a fair for fun and self-indulgence but a garden of renunciation.

The man had explained to his wife the significance of the principles and practice of religion; the wife had demonstrated to her husband the lesson of service and devotion, so that the two led a life of utmost piety.

Once, the two of them were journeying on foot. The husband was walking a little ahead of his wife. Suddenly, he caught sight of a necklace of gold at his feet. Evidently, someone had dropped it. "Perhaps the sight of gold will tempt her," thought he, and hurriedly covered it with dust. The wife who was only a few steps behind, had not failed to notice what had happened. By and by, as they both were resting, she asked him, "Why were you bending by the wayside?"

"I saw a gold necklace on the ground and was covering it with dust lest someone be tempted at its sight," he answered sheepishly.

"Gold?" she rejoined, "Does somebody else's wealth still appear gold to you? Why don't you say you were throwing dust on dust?"

INSATIABLE

It was the Raja's custom to fill with gold coins the bowl of the *Bhikshu* who was the first in the morning to knock at his door for alms. Thus many a bowl had been filled. Once a new *Bhikshu* came knocking at his door. The Raja dropped handfuls of gold coins in it, but failed to fill it. His whole treasury was emptied into the bowl, but still it was not filled. The Raja marvelled at this strange phenomenon and asked, "What is this bowl made of? What metal has gone into its making?"

"This bowl is made of a human heart," replied the *Bhikshu*. The human heart is so hungry, so greedy, so discontented that it will not be satisfied even with the gold of Croesus."

The Raja said, "You are the first to explain to me the meaning of contentment. Man's heart will never be satisfied till there is contentment in life."

CHARITY

THIS happened when the torrential rains had brought about floods. The villagers who were collecting funds for the relief of the flood victims approached a wealthy gentleman, asking him to contribute one hundred rupees. He agreed to contribute fifty-one. All their pleadings failed to persuade him to give any more. They were vexed and when they all got together at the end of the day, there was severe criticism of his niggardliness. "How mean of him to refuse when he could very well afford to!" they grumbled.

An old man intervened, "Friends, you should not indulge in such irresponsible criticism. This gentleman had no desire to buy himself name and fame with a handsome donation. You must have all read in the morning papers about the anonymous donation of thirty-one thousand rupees. That generous donor was no other than this man whom you call mean."

True charity springs from the warmth of the heart; it does not hanker after name or fame. Charity loses its very essence if it is extended with an eye on prestige.

Milk turns sour when blended with anything acid; so does charity when tainted with a bargaining motive.

PURSUIT OF MIRAGE

HE was very wealthy and yet very devout. Every morning he devoted two whole hours to worshipping God.

A young man came to him. "Sir, I am in urgent need of money. This watch is all I own. I wish to sell it; will you please buy it?"

The gentleman was annoyed. "Don't you see how busy I am?" he cried out impatiently. "Come next month."

"But Sir," persisted the man in a beseeching voice, "It's urgent; I need the money right now; my mother is ill."

"Didn't you hear what I said? Get out at once or I'll have you thrown out," yelled the gentleman.

"You needn't do that, I am leaving. But just one question: Have you no love for God?"

"That's a foolish question! I love God with all my heart. What has that got to do with it?"

"No, you don't," expostulated the desperate man. "You don't even believe in God. If you did, you wouldn't have threatened to throw me out. Man is the visible image of God. If you don't believe in what is visible, how can you believe in something invisible!" With that, he left the room.

DIALOGUE

THE Body and the Soul of man were engaged in a heated dialogue on Sin. The Body, hot and flushed with righteous indignation, argued, "I am no more than a clump of clay—just a compound of the five elements. I cannot even imagine things that create cravings. How can I be held responsible for committing sin?"

The Soul countered with the same subtlety. "I don't even possess the physical organs to commit sin! Do I have senses? Cravings are from the senses; they gratify the senses—hence the word sensual! I have neither form nor matter—how can I commit sin?"

In the uneasy silence that followed this heated argument, was heard the awe-inspiring Voice of the Supreme Being:

"Sin is born of the dualism of the two, the Body and the Soul. You are equal partners in the creation of Sin. Only when the Soul enters the Body, the Body becomes animate. The Body without the Soul is mere matter. The Soul without the Body is the Supreme Being. The world is nothing but the dualism of the Body and the Soul."

THE TOUCHSTONE OF FRIENDSHIP

THERE were two boys studying together in a school. They were very closely attached to each other; their friendship was very intimate. But, as years rolled by, their careers led them in different directions. One became a philosopher, the other, a minister. Each progressed in his own sphere with the passing of time.

Once the minister's wife called on the philosopher. During the course of conversation, she asked, "Why don't you ever come to see your old friend?"

The philosopher replied, "There are throngs of people who come to see my old friend. So, if I don't, it won't make much difference. But I assure you, I'll come to see him when he loses his seat in the elections. Those who bow low to him now will not take the trouble even to look him up then. When my friend's heart is pierced with disappointment and heavy with distress, I will be there to dress his wound with the balsam of encouragement and comfort."

Friendship lies, not in swelling the crowd of merry-makers, but in giving comfort to the lonely heart.

CURIOSITY

HE was a *Sadhu*—an ascetic—he had forsaken his royal throne to be a *Sadhu*. Now he lived a carefree life; he stood in fear of none and none stood in fear of him. He was contented and cheerful.

One day he was walking along the 'King's Way', looking at everything in a very detached manner, when suddenly he caught sight of a dazzling red ruby. On the edge of the 'King's Way', lay this blood-red ruby, gleaming in the rays of the sun.

As a king, he had seen numerous diamonds and emeralds; he had worn priceless rubies and pearls, but the ruby that lay sparkling in the dust was somehow different; he had never seen the like of it before. Curiosity had the better of his detachment towards worldly objects. "I'd like to examine it closely; how is it different?" he muttered to himself, and bending low, he stretched out his hand to pick it up. Instantly he withdrew it with repugnance, for it was not a ruby. It was a blob of sputum, blood-red with the betel-leaf that somebody had been chewing!

The *Sadhu* said to himself, "Do have a good look at it; your asceticism has not conquered curiosity; now you have satisfied your curiosity to your chagrin!"

CONSTRUCTION—NOT DESTRUCTION

FIRE has two aspects—Flame and Light. Thought has two aspects—destructive and constructive. The former has its roots in Envy, the latter in Hope. The flame of Envy will consume the inner strength. The light of Hope will illumine darkness.

Once, Emperor Akbar drew a line and said to the courtiers around him, "Who can make this line shorter without rubbing or even touching it?"

The Court was mystified. How could the line be made shorter without being partially rubbed out? Men who are trained and accustomed to think in terms of destruction cannot think of rising to greater heights without lowering others.

Birbal stood up. Akbar reminded him of the condition—the line must be made shorter without being touched.

"Yes, Your Majesty," replied Birbal, bowing with reverence. Then he stepped out, coolly drew a line parallel to the original, but much longer. The Emperor's line was obviously much shorter in comparison with Birbal's! The spectators gasped with admiration.

Success lies in a constructive effort to rise above others; not in destroying those who are higher than you.

NOT IN THE EYE—IN THE HEART

It was early morning; I was walking through a garden breathing deeply the fresh, fragrant air, when I noticed a couple just ahead of me. There was something discordant about them. They were like 36, not 63, that is to say, they walked with their faces averted from one another like 3 and 6 in 36, not with their faces turned to one another, like 6 and 3 in 63. Or rather, now they were like 33, following one another.

Then I heard the man's gruff voice, "I just can't understand what beauty people see in you. You have a fair complexion but surely that isn't beauty! They flatter you when they say you are beautiful."

"And I fail to understand why they tell you, you are a great singer!" she flashed, "Yelling at the top of your voice is not singing! Your voice lacks sweetness. Why do you lap up their fulsome flattery?"

So that was it; the discord between them made them see only the flaw in each other. As I turned in another direction, I heard a bulbul trilling in ecstasy to a flower, "O, the exquisite beauty of your fragrance!"

The flower replied fondly, "Beauty pours out in golden notes from your throat!"

'The eye of love looks for only what is good.

And then I stumbled upon the truth about Beauty. Beauty lies, not in the object itself, but in the love with which it is viewed. Beauty lies not in the eye, but in the heart.

MERE SHOW

ONCE a *fakir* had the occasion to be a Raja's guest at dinner. Kneeling and bending long and low, he said a lengthy *Namaz* which impressed the Raja very favourably. He made his guest sit by his side and they dined together. The Raja ate sparingly and the *fakir* had perforce to follow suit. His host admired him all the more for his temperate habits.

The *fakir* took his leave with due respect from the Raja. The moment he reached home, he shouted to his wife, "Serve my food immediately. I feel famished after the long and strenuous *Namaz* I had to say in the Raja's presence."

"But didn't you dine with him?" asked his wife in surprise. "Of course, I did!" he replied. "But I didn't wish to appear a glutton in his eyes, so I said a lengthy *Namaz* and ate a sketchy meal."

"I'll serve your meal presently, but you'll have to say your *Namaz* over again. Just as the seeming meal hasn't satisfied you, so, too, the seeming *Namaz* could not have satisfied Allah!" she quipped.

NOT GLASS—GOLD

THE name of the Rani of Jhansi—Lāxmibai—is carved in letters of gold in the annals of Indian history. In spite of being a young widow she administered her kingdom with wisdom and ability.

Once a learned Pandit came to the capital to give recitals of the ancient epics. The Rani was present at the recitals. Her delicate wrists were adorned with bracelets of gold. The orthodox reciter could not refrain from passing a disparaging remark: "It seems women show scant respect for religious customs these days. A woman wears glass bangles so long as her husband is alive; but even after the husband's death, some women adorn themselves with gold bangles because they may not wear glass bangles!"

The Rani retorted, "Panditji, a woman wears glass bangles so long as her husband is alive because they remind her that the body is frail and transient. But when that body has gone the way of all flesh, the soul mingles with the gold of the eternal soul of God. These gold bangles are only a symbol of the fact that my husband's soul has now united with the eternal, golden soul of the Supreme Being under whose benign shelter I now live."

The learned scholar, impressed with the Rani's enlightening reply, bowed his head in admiration.

LOVE—NOT DIVISION

THIS happened only a few years ago. Ram Mani and Raghu Mani, the two brothers were famed as deeply learned scholars in Navadweep. They were rich in knowledge as in wealth. They were much devoted to each other, inseparable like flower from fragrance. One day the elder brother Ram said to the younger, "Raghu, it's time we thought of dividing our property." "Brother, you astonish me!" exclaimed Raghu. "One knows of fools dividing their property, but surely we, with all our learning know better!"

"But I am not suggesting that we separate," explained Ram patiently. "None can part us. I was only suggesting that we divide our property among our sons, so that they may not fall out over such a trivial matter as wealth when we are gone."

Ram had three sons; Raghu, only one. He divided their wealth in two equal parts, one for his three sons, the other for Raghu's one son. Instead of feeling happy over this equitable division, Raghu cried out, "But this isn't fair. If we two were separating, we would have divided our wealth in two equal parts; but we are distributing it among our sons, so the only fair division would be to divide it in four equal parts and give one to each. Only that would make me happy."

PRIDE

A CANDLE and a joss-stick were burning side by side in the two niches of a wall. Each was conveying a message to the world in the process of burning. The candle with its mild light and the joss-stick with its sweet perfume beautified and cheered the night.

One day they fell out over a trivial matter. The elegant white candle cried out saucily to the thin, black joss-stick, "You are so dark and thin and ugly, nobody would ever think of looking at you twice!"

The joss-stick held its peace. Its silence provoked the candle to words of greater insolence. "You don't seem to possess even the wit to answer me. I see that ugliness isn't your only drawback."

The joss-stick was still unperturbed. "Look at me," screamed the candle. "I am so fair and luminous and I utilise my gifts to brighten the room; what do you. . ."

There came a gust of wind and puffed out the candle even as its boastful words were uttered, leaving behind only an unpleasant smell.

The joss-stick glowed on, content to spread its fragrance. Its Supreme Virtue was Contentment.

BEYOND MEASURE

SHE was a strapping young shepherdess who carried her foaming cans of fresh milk for sale in the town. On the way she passed her sweetheart's field. She would always stop there, and the two of them would sit under a spreading banyan tree talking fondly for a while. While leaving, she would fill his mug to the brim with the fresh, creamy milk. After selling the rest of the milk in town, she would return home.

Once a friend met her on the way home. "How much did you make out of your milk today?" she asked casually.

"Seven rupees," she replied.

"And how much for what you gave to your sweetheart?" asked the friend.

"You don't expect me to count its value, do you? What's given out of love cannot be measured in terms of money!" the young maiden replied with a tinkling laugh.

A sage who heard of this, remarked, "Then how can anyone ever measure the worth of God's love? It's beyond all weights and measures."

ELEGANCE OF SPEECH

THIS is the story of the youth of Siddharaj Jaisinh. His father Karnadev had died when Siddharaj was a child of three. The Queen Mother Minaldevi held the reins of administration in her capable hands.

Siddharaj was yet a youth when the fame of his personality had spread as far as the metropolis and the *Badshah* sent an imperial command to Minaldevi from Delhi: "Your son is old enough to attend our *Darbar*. We command his presence forthwith at Delhi." Minaldevi was worried; she gave her son minute instructions on how to behave at Delhi. Finally, Siddharaj remarked casually, "Mother, should a contingency arise about which you have not already instructed me, tell me how I should contact you." His mother was gratified to hear this significant remark.

At the Imperial Court, Siddharaj won all hearts by his charming manners. As he approached the *Badshah* to offer his greetings, the latter seized both his hands firmly in his own and asked, "Come, young man, how are you going to free yourself now?"

Without making the least effort to release his hands, the lad replied with a smile: "In this ancient land of ours, when a groom takes his bride by one hand, he pledges himself to bear the responsibility of her welfare to the end of her life; but Your Majesty has grasped me by both my hands, so now I am secure for ever!"

The *Badshah* was so impressed with this elegance of speech that he rewarded Siddharaj handsomely and gave him permission to depart at will.

VOICE AND VISION

THE two brothers were returning home after twelve years of intensive and extensive study of the scriptures under a renowned scholar. The stamp of scholarship and contemplation was evident on their enlightened faces. Their home town was all agog to welcome them. The very air was permeated with gaiety and excitement. Only their father was silent and thoughtful.

In the evening he sent for his elder son and asked, "My son, you have drunk deep at the spring of knowledge but did you catch a glimpse of the Supreme inner self? Did your soul catch a spark of the Divine Fire?" His son poured out verses from the scriptures fast and free. "That's enough my son; but this is mere repetition of what others have said. What spiritual experience did you have by your personal effort? You may go and send your brother."

When the younger son was asked the same question, he replied, "Father, I know not how to answer. How can I circumscribe within the boundary of words something that is infinite by its very nature? Something that is essentially formless, cannot be given the form of mere words, neither can its serenity be expressed through turbulent words; it's something one can only visualise, not something one can voice."

A smile of serenity, born of silent understanding lit up the father's face.

CHARACTER—BEST ORNAMENT

DURING the administration of Madhav Rao Peshwa, the learned Ramshastri adorned three of the highest positions in the State. He was minister, judge and head priest. His counsel and judgment were irrefutable.

On New Year's Day, Ramshastri's wife went to the palace to offer her respectful greetings to the Queen Mother. The ladies of the royal household were amazed to see her clad in such plain garments. They dressed her in costly apparel, decked her with gold ornaments and sent her home in a state palanquin.

The bearers lowered the palanquin at Ramshastri's house and knocked at the door. The great man answered the knock personally but seeing the grand palanquin and his richly-dressed wife inside it, he said to the bearers, "There seems to be some mistake, this cannot be the house you are seeking. How can a grand dame like this live in a humble house like mine?"—and with that he shut the door. His wife was sharp enough to catch the veiled reproach. Returning to the palace, she once again changed into her modest attire and walked back home.

Opening the door, her husband greeted her most affectionately. "Do you know what happened during your absence?" he asked with seeming innocence. "Some grand lady wanted to sneak into our house! How can an avowed monogamist like me allow such an intrusion?"

THE MAGNETISM OF LOVE

DISGUISED as a common traveller, Raja Prajapal was riding a horse to a neighbouring town. On the way, a lame man signalled to him to stop and pleaded, "I am lame, I have come a long way and am very tired. I'll be very grateful if you allow me to ride behind you as far as the next town."

Feeling sorry for him, the Raja helped him to mount. On their arrival at the town, he was helping him to dismount when the man raised a hue and cry. "I am lame; this man is trying to make away with my horse!" Soon a sympathising crowd gathered around them and led them to the judge.

The judge ordered the traveller to lead his horse some distance and tether him to a nail in a wall. Next he ordered the impostor to untether him and lead him back. Within seconds, he cried out to the traveller, "This horse belongs to you, you can take it."

The Raja was amazed at this novel procedure of giving judgment. Revealing his identity, he asked the judge, "But how could you decide so quickly that I was the rightful owner of the horse?"

"Sire, as you led the horse to be tethered, he followed you unhesitatingly, affectionately; but as that impostor tried to lead him back, the horse shied and started dragging his feet. Wasn't that a conclusive proof?"

Love attracts, fear repels.

THE SMILE OF GOODWILL

A THOUSAND rose petals were being boiled in a seething, bubbling cauldron in the process of being distilled into rose water or rose oil. A million more rose petals lay plucked and scattered to be turned into rose condiment. A witness to this painful sight could not help exclaiming, "You are the beauty of the earth at its best. In the delicate fragrance of your colourful petals one can see the very smile of the earth. It grieves my heart to see your plight."

Even in their agony, the flowers burst out laughing: "True, we are in a sorry plight, but we are not alone in this. It is the common lot of all men of goodwill. People cannot bear to see those who flourish, those who rise to the top and in their own happiness have a ready smile of goodwill for all. People have sympathy for those who weep in sorrow or in pain and will promptly hold out a helping hand to them. But they strive to sink with their envy those who are afloat on the tide of prosperity and out of the overflow of their own happiness, beam on all around them.

"Man does not realise that whether he boils or plucks us, we do not die. We live on through our fragrance, our tender delicacy. The smile of goodwill that we give to the world as flowers will persist through our fragrance in a new form."

BENEVOLENCE

WHEN he had completed his education, Padmalochan set out in search of a living. He tried very hard, but failed to get a job. He did not lose heart by his initial failure and finally succeeded in getting the menial job of an office boy. But he was not ashamed of the menial work of sweeping and dusting the office. He did his duties conscientiously. A firm believer in the dignity of labour, he executed even the most trivial of his duties with skill and perfection. This brought him to his master's notice, who, pleased with his work, promoted him and now Padmalochan earned a good salary. He was always sympathetic towards those who worked under him.

His master gave him an increment of fifty rupees at Diwali. Padmalochan acknowledged this appreciation with gratitude but said with humility, "What I earn at present is enough for my needs; but my subordinate finds it extremely difficult to maintain his family. If you will consent to give him a raise of fifty instead of to me, I will be very grateful to you."

Impressed with his benevolent nature, his master made him the head of his concern and readily granted the raise in salary to his subordinate.

FIRE AND WATER

KSHATIMOHANBABU and his wife were poles apart in temperament. He was serene as the full moon; she was hot as a seething volcano. One evening, Babuji returned home long after time for supper. His wife who was out of temper because the supper was already cold, greeted him in a strident voice the moment he had crossed the threshold.

"You are so obsessed with these silly notions of service that you forget all about your meals," she screamed, her rage mounting with her words. "You lose all count of time; you never give a thought to the inconvenience you cause me by your irregular habits. Well, here's your plate of rice—cold as ice—eat it if you are hungry!"

Her husband smiled good-naturedly, picked up the plate of rice and held it on her head. "Never mind if the rice has got cold," he said sweetly. "There's such a fire roaring in your head, your eyes have turned red and the whole atmosphere is hot as if the house were on fire! I am sure the rice will be warmed up in no time if I hold it on your head and then I can have a nice, warm supper without bothering you!"

His wife, whose sense of humour was better than her temper, burst into laughter. She apologised for her outburst and promised to curb her temper and her tongue, in future.

उवसमेण हणे कोहं ।

If rage is like fire, is not forgiveness like a jet of cool water putting out the flame?

BEHAVIOUR

It was early morning. People had begun going up and down the main street of the town in increasing numbers. An old man was walking slowly, supporting himself on a stick. From the opposite direction came a young man, walking with swift, easy strides. Evidently he was in a hurry and did not see where he was going. He ran into the old man and, losing his temper, slapped him.

As if nothing had happened, the old man spoke in a calm voice, "I beg your pardon, Sir; I am afraid, you didn't realise that I am blind. I hope you are not hurt."

These words had an unexpected effect on the youth. He was ashamed of his rude behaviour, and humbly begged the old man's pardon for his unseemly behaviour. "It is for me to apologize, Sir; forgive me. I have heard much about being gentle in one's behaviour. I have seen many who assume gentleness, but I have never known gentleness such as yours."

Could there be a better lesson in good behaviour than this?

THE FRUIT OF RENUNCIATION

It was early morning as a *Mahamuni* wended his way through the still, deserted lanes of the town, meditating on such abstract matters as acquisition and renunciation. The savage barking of dogs disturbed him in his thoughts. Looking up, he saw a dog with a bone in his mouth pursued by nearly a dozen dogs. Soon they caught up with him and mauled him cruelly. Bleeding from the wounds, the dog dropped the bone and the onslaught ceased immediately.

But now a second race was on; the dog who had succeeded in picking up the abandoned bone was the new quarry, till he, too, bleeding from the wounds, dropped the bone of contention and was left alone.

This went on for some time; one dog after another pouncing on the bone, abandoning it only when he could not hold on to it out of sheer agony, and being left in peace the moment he had given it up.

Contemplating on this ugly incident, the *Mahamuni* realised in a flash that his reflections on the abstract subject of acquisition and renunciation were concretely demonstrated before his very eyes. So long as the dog clung to the bone, he had to bleed for it; the moment he gave it up, he was left in peace.

If for a dry bone there was so much to lose, how

much more would it be for man's much-coveted possessions! Did not man bleed mentally and spiritually to gratify his lust for acquisition and would he not attain serenity if he renounced it?

Truly, sweet are the fruits of renunciation!

THE BETTER-HALF !

THE sun was moving sadly towards the west, grieved at the many sorrowful sights he had witnessed during his long day's journey, when suddenly his face brightened at a pleasing scene of love and patience.

Tukaram, the composer and singer of devotional music was on his way home, loaded with ten long stalks of sugar-cane. His eyes shone with child-like innocence, his face beamed with love and peace.

Children loved him and flocked in his wake. They held out their hands and he doled out to them the juicy canes till only one was left by the time he reached home.

His wife, who was watching with dismay Tukaram's generous distribution, could ill-conceal her vexation. When he offered her the solitary cane, she cried out scornfully, "Why did you keep this one? Why didn't you hand it out with the rest to show the children how large-hearted you are?" She snatched the stalk from his hand, and beside herself with rage, she brought it crashing down on his back. The cane snapped in two. But Tukaram smiled placidly and said:

"I knew you wouldn't eat it alone. You are truly my better-half, always ready to share whatever you have." So saying he started munching the juicy cane, as cheerful as a child. His wife could not resist

this utter simplicity of Tukaram and melted into tears of regret and affection.

Clothes stained with blood cannot be cleansed by blood but by water; similarly, rage cannot be removed by rage but by love.

The shield for the sword, water for fire, love for rage.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

ONCE a man dreamt a very strange dream. He was plunged in wonder.

A *Sadhu* and a prostitute living in the same town had died within a week of each other. The prostitute went to heaven, the *Sadhu* to hell. The prostitute had risen high, the *Sadhu* had tumbled down!

The man related this dream to a seer. The seer said, "Well, there is nothing strange about your dream. The prostitute was ashamed of her immoral life and was striving to give it up. She thought highly of the *Sadhu* and praised him sincerely. On the other hand, the *Sadhu* was conceited and boasted of his noble living like a Pharisee, scorning the woman and condemning her way of life day in and day out.

"The prostitute, despite her immoral occupation, had the virtue of condemning herself and appreciating someone she thought holy; the *Sadhu*, despite his holy vocation, was guilty of praising himself and condemning others. That is why the prostitute found light, but the *Sadhu* was lost in darkness."

SACRED DUTY

A SCREAM of terror startled the young writer trudging along the path. A Harijan girl—an outcaste—was bitten on the foot by a cobra. He rushed to her, looked around for something to tie round her foot to check the venom from circulating through the bloodstream.

Failing to find anything, he ripped open his penknife and quickly snapped the holy thread he wore as a *Brahmin*, and tied it tightly round her foot. Next he lanced the wound letting the poisoned blood flow out freely. The girl was saved from an untimely death.

The incident was soon rumoured through the town and the orthodox were shocked. A cry of sacrilege rang through their meeting. Could anything be more irreverent than the holy thread being tied around the foot of an untouchable? The writer was summoned to their meeting.

“Your name?” thundered the headman.

“Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi,” replied the youth with the greatest composure.

“And now, may I ask you a couple of questions?” he continued. “Is this thread holy or unholy?”

“Of course it’s holy,” was the prompt rejoinder.

“And the saving of a human life—is it a good deed or an evil one?”

“How can that be anything but good?” answered his opponent in a subdued tone.

“Then what sin have I committed if I used the holy thread to do a good deed?” he demanded.

None could answer the challenge; even the orthodox among them seemed to be stirred from their age-old slumber of superstition and inwardly bowed to the logic of the youth.

THE CHARM OF SPEECH

ONCE a Raja had a very terrifying dream. He dreamt that he had lost his entire set of teeth. He was very much worried. It would be such a misfortune for a young man to lose all his teeth at once. It would make him look so ugly; how would he show his face in public?

Early in the morning, he summoned an assembly of astrologers, and asked them to interpret his strange dream. There were two veterans, learned in the lore of astrology who volunteered to interpret the dream.

The first one said, "Your dream is truly ominous. It signifies the death of your entire family. You will see every single member of your family fall a victim to death."

Hearing this appalling interpretation, the whole assembly was filled with apprehension.

The other astrologer, a firm believer in the subtle charm of speech, said, "Sir, permit me to ponder over this and give my interpretation tomorrow."

The next day the dreamer of this strange dream again held the assembly. His heart was heavy, and his face despondent. All sat silent, eagerly awaiting the words of the second astrologer.

This apostle of the charm of words spoke with calm gravity: "Sir, your dream is not as terrible as

you fear. This dream only suggests your longevity. You are blessed with such a long life that none in your family will have the unfortunate occasion to witness your death. Be happy that you will live to a ripe old age."

The astrologer was given a handsome reward by his patron and a thundering ovation by the assembly for his delicacy of expression. He had presented the same fact as his brother astrologer, but couched in different words.

What charm abides in human speech! It transforms poison to nectar and nectar to poison! It can create an atmosphere of gloom even in gay surroundings, or an atmosphere of cheerfulness in the midst of despondency. If men were to realise this tremendous power of words, the world would be a more congenial place to live in.

THE WAY TO KNOWLEDGE IS PAVED WITH HUMILITY

BAHUBALI became an ascetic on the battlefield, but there was still a tinge of pride in him. He thought that he could be omniscient and then go to see his father, Adinatha, so that he would not have to kneel before his brothers who, though younger in years, had donned the ascetic's garb before him.

To attain omniscience, he undertook the most arduous penance. He sat unperturbed in the scorching heat and the biting cold and the pouring rain as if he were made of stone. Even creepers twined round his body and birds built their nests in his ears. He felt nothing, knew nothing; so lost was he in his meditation.

But he failed to acquire what he had so ardently longed for—the spark of divine knowledge—for his penance was marred by his overweening pride.

Bhagwan Adinatha, however, out of his boundless compassion, took pity on this erring but steadfast devotee, and he sent Bahubali's two saintly sisters to point out to their vain brother, the futility of his penance and meditation. They set out on their mission and called out to him, "Brother, Brother! Climb down from the elephant if you wish to acquire omniscience of divine knowledge. The winds of pride that blow at the height where you are seated, snuff out the flickering flame of Enlighten-

ment. When the light of Knowledge is concealed by the screen of vanity, man turns blind despite his sight."

Bahubali started in his meditation; he realised in a flash why he had striven in vain so far. He subdued his pride and was ready to kneel before his younger brothers. The moment his heart was flooded with humility, his soul was kindled with light. The winds of Pride ceased to blow and the flame of Knowledge burnt bright and steady. Truly, the way to knowledge is paved with humility.

THE INVISIBLE WRAPPING

THIS is what happened; his *guru* had a tiny box of iron which he seemed to value very highly. This was a matter of great wonder to the disciple. How could his *guru*, who was so wise and who had renounced everything, attach so much value to a mere tiny box of iron and guard it so jealously! But he was obedient, and without his *guru's* permission, he considered it to be sinful to pry into the box stealthily. All the same, his curiosity grew day by day.

His enlightened *guru*, was not unaware of what was agitating his disciple. He was pleased with his disciple's honesty and faithful devotion, and said one day, "My son, bring that tiny box of iron containing the philosopher's stone."

Now the young man's astonishment equalled his curiosity. How could a philosopher's stone be kept in a box of iron! Would not the iron turn into gold as soon as it came in contact with the stone? He picked up the box and brought it to his *guru*.

The *guru* carefully lifted the lid. He unwrapped the stone; it seemed to radiate beams of light. He removed the wrapping and allowed the stone to touch the box and forthwith the iron box turned into gold!

"Look, my son! All these years the philosopher's stone and the iron box were in close proximity, and yet the one did not affect the other because they were

separated by the wrapping. The wrapping was a barrier between the two.

“The same principle applies to our attainment of oneness with God—the Soul of souls. Between your soul and God’s Soul, there is only the thin wrapping of worldly attachments separating the one from the other; cast off that wrapping and your soul will be transmuted by His soul—even as this iron box is transmuted to gold. Your soul will then be one with the Soul of souls.”

A LABOUR OF LOVE

ONCE the Maharaja of Bhavnagar was on a visit to a saint. As he sat talking to him, the Maharaja noticed the shirt that the saint wore. It was stitched very skilfully; its pleats and tucks were arranged very neatly and precisely.

The tailor who had stitched it, happened to be present there. As they left the saint's presence, the Maharaja could not refrain from asking the tailor if he had made that shirt. The tailor replied with justifiable pride that he had.

"Then I would like exactly a shirt like that to be made for me. You may charge whatever you like, but mind you, arrange the pleats and tucks with the same precision and skill."

The tailor assured him that his handiwork would be flawless. After some weeks, he presented to the Maharaja the shirt which he had stitched with the utmost care.

The Maharaja was delighted and amazed at his skill, but examining the shirt more critically, he noticed that the pleats and tucks were not arranged with the same precision as on the saint's shirt.

He praised the tailor, but remarked, "Somehow it lacks the perfection of the saint's shirt."

The tailor replied, "Sire, I have put all my abilities in the making of this garment. My fingers and my

eyes did their work as best they could, but in the saint's shirt, my love and devotion for him were also at work along with my fingers and eyes. That is why that shirt seems more perfect. I cannot produce the same result, however hard I try, for how can I make my heart produce the same feelings all over again?

“Those were the pleats and tucks of love and devotion.”

GOOD FOR EVIL

THE King of Magadha was resting himself on a hot afternoon in the cool shade of a mango grove. A weary traveller was trudging along the road that burnt the soles of his feet. Lifting up his head, he sighted the juicy mangoes dangling from the branches of the mango trees. He could not resist the temptation of sucking a juicy mango to slake his thirst. He threw a stone at the mellowing fruit, but unknowingly, he hit the king sitting under the tree.

"Who dares to hit me with a stone?" roared the king. His bodyguards ran out and within moments, ushered in the trembling wayfarer. The king was surprised to see this wretch of a man who had dared to hurl a stone at him.

Falling on his knees before the king, the man pleaded in a quaking voice, "Pardon me, My Lord. I did not see you sitting behind the hedge. I aimed a stone at the mango, but most unfortunately, it hit Your Majesty. Forgive me, Lord of the helpless, spare me my life!"

The king was always sympathetic towards the erring. He had acquired a compassionate attitude towards life from Bhagwan Mahavira and even his smallest deeds were coloured with that attitude.

He thought, "What a wonderful thing a tree is! It offers its shade to those that lop its boughs with the axe; it offers its fruit to those that hit it with stones.

Surely, a man should be at least as magnanimous as a tree! He, too, should be able to extend charity to one who hurts him." He called his treasurer and ordered him to see that the man was given food and drink and a hundred pieces of gold, before he left.

A man of vision would always find something instructive in everything. To him, nothing is meaningless; he reads a moral in every incident; for to him the whole world is like a school of moral instructions.

HAIL TO THEE, SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT!

THE boughs of the mango tree were swaying in the gentle spring breeze, and hiding in its rich foliage, the *koel* filled the air with its sweet notes. A sage whose fame had spread to the four corners of the kingdom, sat deep in meditation under the cool shade of an *asopalav* tree.

The ruler of the kingdom, celebrated for his military conquests and his regal pomp, came to offer his respects to the sage. He bowed courteously, but his greeting was not untinged with kingly hauteur.

The sage could read the conflict between arrogance and reverence in the king's mind. He gave him his blessings and then said, "May I ask you a question, Your Majesty? You are the mighty ruler of a great kingdom, but suppose during one of your campaigns you were crossing a hot, sandy desert, thirsting for a drop of water. If someone offered you a glass of water in return for half your kingdom, would you accept the bargain?"

The king answered promptly, "Certainly, under the circumstances I would not hesitate to part with half my kingdom."

The sage went on, "And after drinking this draught, you suddenly found yourself stricken with some fell disease, and someone offered you a cure

in return for the remaining half of your kingdom, would you accept it?"

The king exclaimed, "Of course, I would be very happy to surrender the remaining half; can anything be dearer than life?"

In a voice penetrating in its austerity, the sage asked, "Have you not then wasted your precious life in acquiring and maintaining a kingdom that is worth no more than a cup of water? And instead of feeling penitent for what you have done, you seem to be filled with arrogance at your achievement!"

These forthright words of the sage woke up the proud king from his slumber. He appreciated the holy man's sermon, and with downcast eyes he bowed low at the sage's feet in extreme humiliation.

The *koel*, hiding in the foliage of the mango tree, cooed joyfully, "Hail to Thee, Spiritual Enlightenment!"

THE TRIUMPHAL FLAG

THERE was great excitement in the Congress of Scholars at Varanasi; for a great Pandit, renowned for his scholarship, was coming to hold discourse with them. He had vanquished all his opponents in debate; five hundred standard-bearers walked in the vanguard of the procession, proclaiming the supremacy of knowledge he had established over all.

Thus he arrived at the Congress of Scholars and many intellectual debates were held for days together. Finally, on the day of the full moon of *Kartik*, he once again bore the palm away and the scholars of Varanasi, noted for their learning, had to hang their heads.

"Is there anyone left who would wish to match his wits with mine?" Proudly the victor thundered out his challenge. "If I lose, I am prepared to bow before him and surrender everyone of these banners that proclaim my victory."

A youth stood up to take up the challenge. All eyes were turned to his face, glowing with intellect. It seemed as if *Saraswati*, the Goddess of Wisdom had showered all her blessings on him.

He poured out infallible arguments; his eloquence was brilliant, his logic irrefutable. He vanquished the hitherto invincible debator. Only then it was discovered that this brilliant young man was no other than Upadhyaya Yashovijayji of Gujarat.

The great Congress conferred upon him the highest scholarly award in recognition of his vast knowledge. After this astounding triumph, he returned to his home State of Gujarat, feeling proud of his achievement. He held his head high, curled up his lip in disdain. The five hundred flag-bearers walked in front, and Pandits surrounded him on all sides, loud in their compliments. Truly he was like a luminous star, surrounded by hundreds of satellites.

The news of this triumphal return reached the ears of *Yogi Anandghanji*. His eyes were moist with the mingled emotions of joy and sorrow. True, the young man's triumph was great, but it ill became a *Sadhu* to be so vain about his knowledge. Knowledge should always be accompanied with humility.

One evening, the *Yogiraj* called on the young scholar, and after many intellectual discussions, asked him with seeming simplicity, "Whose knowledge would you consider deeper, ours, or that of the fourteen *Purvadhara*s?"*

The young scholar exclaimed in utter amazement, "Maharaj, what a strange question! The *Purvadhara* is a veritable Ocean of Knowledge! In comparison with him, ours is only a drop in the ocean."

The *Yogiraj* smiled pleasantly and remarked almost casually, "Then in that case, he must be preceded by a million flag-bearers proclaiming his triumph?"

* One who knows fourteen Jain Scriptures.

The young scholar blushed; his pride dissolved into tears of humility and as he fell on his knees before the *Yogiraj*, he heard the Divine Voice vibrating within him:

सा विद्या या विमुक्तये

“True Knowledge is that which liberates one from bondage, which delivers one from the burden of pride.”

FAITH INSPIRES COURAGE

FAITH is a mighty force. Even in the darkest hour of despair, faith kindles a gleam of light in the despondent heart. Nothing is impossible to the man of inviolable faith.

Kumarpal, the ruler of Gujarat, was once forced by circumstances to declare war against Raja Puranrai of Shakambhari for having grossly insulted the nascent culture of his kingdom.

To Kumarpal, this was no ordinary warfare; it was a crusade to vindicate the culture of his motherland. He fought with unprecedented valour, for a defeat in this encounter would be nothing less than the complete annihilation of the culture of his beloved country.

The battle raged furiously; swords flashed, spears gleamed; the clash of arms was heard on all sides; heads rolled on the field and the river ran red with blood.

The foe was momentarily paralysed by this fierce onslaught, but they changed their strategy and successfully broke through Kumarpal's ranks. His soldiers were overwhelmed and began to give in.

By now it was near sunset—the hour for Kumarpal's evening prayers. The Raja glanced at the *Mahavat* who drove his elephant in the battlefield.

The old *Mahavat* comprehended the Raja's

meaningful glance, and said humbly, "Sire, this is a desperate moment; our soldiers are deserting. One doesn't know from where the blows will rain on us, we dare not stop for prayer. Prayers can be offered only in the security of the palace or the sanctity of the temple; on the battlefield we have to concentrate only on fighting."

Kumarpal's eyes lit up with the light of faith. "*Mahavat*," he said gravely, "this is no ordinary battle; this is a crusade. You know well that I have always considered it my duty to protect every living thing—even the meanest—and yet I have unsheathed my sword against my fellow human beings on this occasion, because it is the duty of a *Kshatriya* prince to punish the evil-doer. He who gives up his duty or his religion out of fear is a base coward. The prospect of defeat or victory does not disturb me—they are just two aspects of life. I will resume fighting only after I have prayed to God Almighty."

Seated on the elephant the Raja was lost in prayer and meditation, even as the battle raged all around him. For a while he forgot everything. When he opened his eyes and resumed the fight, an unusual strength seemed to flow through his veins. All afire, he fought like a lion, slashing his foe left and right, which instilled courage in the hearts of his wavering soldiers. Emulating the noble example of their leader, they fought with faith and courage and routed their foe.

Puranrai offered apology for his gratuitous insult to the culture of Gujarat. He surrendered to Kumarpal who treated his foe with his characteristic magnanimity. The people rejoiced in the victory that had vindicated the honour of their land and culture.

They were fortunate in having a Raja who had not only the valour of a lion, but also the faith of a devotee, in Almighty God; who was not only a warrior, but a crusader for truth and religion.

DISCRETION IS THE BETTER PART OF SPEECH

A DEW drop has hardly any beauty of its own; but when seen against the background of the lotus leaf, a dew drop derives a new beauty—it looks like a glistening pearl. So it is with speech and action; a word or a deed touched with discretion increases in worth.

You may have made the most painstaking preparations for receiving a guest, you may have thought of all possible ways to promote his comfort, but one indiscreet word can easily bring to nought all your pains. Most people are aware of the value of discretion, and yet we come across many a man who feels disappointed at his failure to please others, just because of the lack of discretion.

Religious festivals, social activities, national revolution, even spiritual contemplation—all these demand discretion. All these activities become like a lake drained of water, when they lack discretion. A man of discretion can mould his speech or deed to suit any occasion. An indiscreet deed is like a flower without fragrance.

That is why men of discretion give more weight to significant deeds than to blustering words. Every deed that they accomplish breathes out a fragrance of its own, and this fragrance speaks for itself, putting to shame man's foolish words.

But men lacking in discretion give too much importance to mere words. They seem to believe that the chariot of life is moved unceasingly by the force of words. They never seem to realise what a series of misunderstanding is created by foolish, indiscreet chatter.

Since we have taken up this subject of indiscreet speech, I might tell you of an incident that comes to my mind.

It was about nine in the evening. Ramanlal had closed his shop and was on his way home. His servant Harilal was carrying the heavy ledgers for him. His house was round the corner of the lane. Turning the corner he came upon his rival Rasiklal who had been nursing a grievance against him for quite some time and biding his time to pay him back. He thought this was a favourable chance that Fortune had given him to get his own back, so taking advantage of the darkness of the hour and the deserted lane, he dealt Ramanlal a hard blow on his head, knocking down his turban to the ground. The next moment he had disappeared.

Ramanlal was a shrewd and sensible man. When he saw that there was no chance of catching his assailant, he quietly picked up his turban, brushed it, put it on his head, and continued homeward without much ado.

But Harilal, his faithful, though somewhat foolish servant, could not let this pass so placidly. He gave

a hot chase shouting at the top of his voice, "You cad, you coward, you've insulted my master!" However, he had to give up the chase.

The moment Harilal stepped into the house, he told each servant of the household first severally and then altogether, "Our good master was shamed by that cad Rasiklal. He gave him a blow on the head and knocked down his turban." And all this at the top of his voice, loud enough for the neighbours to hear. He firmly believed he was giving a demonstration of his loyalty, and this added zest to his vociferousness. He hardly realised he was only making a laughing stock of his master.

Ramanlal drew the foolish servant into a corner and hissed, "You fool, that cad did not shame me; it's you who have put me to shame by your indiscreet words. But for you, none would have been the wiser for it. It is people like you who do more harm than good by their indiscretion. It's a peculiar thing that fools like you demonstrate to the world not only their own foolishness, but unfortunately the embarrassing incidents that humiliate people like me!"

Is not discretion the better part of speech?

LET NOT YOUR HEART SWELL WITH RAGE

WHEN dawn peeped out of her window, Acharya Drona began his lesson for the day.

As swans sit in a row round the Man Sarovara, so the pupils sat in a ring round their *Guru*. Beginning the lesson Acharya Drona said, "The text for today's study is

क्रोधं मा कुरु, क्षमां कुरु ।

'Let not your heart swell with rage;
Rather, let it swell with forgiveness.'

The pupils started learning this text by heart. Within a few minutes Arjuna stood up. Bowing to the master he said, "*Gurudeva*, I have learnt the lesson, I know it by heart. Shall I recite it?" After that Duryodhana, Bhima and all the other pupils recited the verse—all but Yudhishtira who was the most intelligent of all. What had come over him? Why could he not commit to memory such a simple verse?

Dawn had left the sky and her place was taken by the rising Sun, who watched Yudhishtira at his task.

The master called out, "Yudhishtira, have you learnt the lesson?"

"No, *Gurudeva*, I have not," the pupil replied with a smile.

"It's such a short verse; I wonder why you take so long over it," the master chided him gently.

The Sun climbed higher and higher; now it was in the zenith and yet Yudhishtira had not finished his lesson.

"Well, Yudhishtira, how much longer will you be at it?"

Bowing very humbly, the pupil replied, "*Guruji*, I have not yet learnt it."

Guruji was vexed at hearing this. How could such an intelligent boy like Yudhishtira be so slow! Why could he not concentrate today? It was now afternoon, and the master had lost all patience. Tweaking his pupil's ear, and slapping him not too hard, he asked, "What, haven't you yet learnt it?" That very instant, Yudhishtira replied with his usual humility, "Yes, *Gurudeva*, I have learnt the lesson; the experiment is over."

Duryodhana muttered to himself with a sarcastic smile, "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

The evening Sun dyed *Gurudeva's* white beard pink and lit up Yudhishtira's eyes with the light of forgiveness.

Caressing his pupil's head, the *guru* asked gently, "But you told me a minute ago you did not know your lesson. Then how is it that you suddenly managed to learn it when I chastised you?"

Yudhishtira replied, "*Gurudeva*, you had asked me to learn 'Let not your heart swell with rage but with forgiveness'. But unless I had an occasion to be angry, how was I to know that I did not allow anger to enter my heart but filled it with forgiveness? It was only when you slapped me that I realised that forgiveness and not anger filled my heart and it was through this experiment that I learnt my lesson."

As Drona affectionately patted his pupil for this moral lesson, the Sun hastened down the western horizon to tell Dawn about this new method of learning that he had witnessed.

THE FUSSY AGENT

WE were in the holy company of Acharya Shree Anandsagar-surishwarji, who had taken up his abode at Kapadvanj, a town noted for its faith and devotion.

Acharya Shree was slightly indisposed and he had been advised by doctors to be only on liquid diet, so he used to take nothing more than a cup of tea at noon. I went to the gentleman next door to ask for a cup of tea. The people in the house were evidently very much in a hurry, getting ready to attend some wedding. But the lady of the house handed me a cup of tea for Acharya Shree with the greatest pleasure. Acharya Shree drank the tea without a word.

Within ten minutes, the lady hastened to our abode, looking very contrite and begging humbly to be pardoned for her error. I could not comprehend her agitation and asked her what was amiss.

“Why, Sir, don’t you know what’s amiss? Didn’t Acharya Shree tell you that instead of sugar I had put salt in the tea? I don’t know how to apologize for my mistake. You see, we were in such a hurry to attend a relative’s wedding that through oversight I reached down the jar of salt instead of sugar! It was only when we drank our tea that I realized what a foolish mistake I had made! How can I atone for my mistake?”

As I stood listening to her, I was thinking of how Acharya Shree had conquered his sense of taste and

how he could control his expression when he had placidly sipped a cup of tea with salt in it!

I tried my best to console the lady, and going to Acharya Shree, I asked him, "*Gurudeva*, there was salt in your tea instead of sugar and yet you never said a word about it; even your face did not betray any sign that something was amiss!"

With a pleasant smile, Acharya Shree replied, "Well, if I drink tea everyday with sugar in it, some day I might have it with salt for a change! It would only cleanse the intestines; it won't do me any harm."

Pointing to the tip of his tongue, he carried on, "After all, it's the tongue that distinguishes between salt and sugar. Once it goes down the gullet, it is just the same. The stomach is like the dealer who buys goods, the tongue is like the agent who is only a go-between. But isn't it common experience that the agent makes a lot more fuss about the bargain than the dealer? Temperance lies in not allowing this agent to hold sway over us; in keeping him well under control."

Hearing these words of wisdom, I humbly bowed to Acharya Shree.

THE ARCHITECT OF CULTURE

It was a bright day during the spring festival when expert archers of Gujarat were demonstrating their skill with the bow and arrow in the august presence of Bhimdeva, the ruler of Gujarat. Citizens of Patan had gathered to watch the contest and their excitement rose to its climax when, for the final item, a target was fixed at a long distance. This was to be the final test of the archers' skill, and one who hit it would be declared the champion archer and awarded a prize. Archer after archer took his aim, but failed to hit the target which seemed to be beyond his reach.

Just as the spectators were wondering how this would end, they saw a youth of magnificent stature approaching the scene of the contest. He was plainly dressed and had slung his bow and sheaf of arrows over his shoulder. He bowed politely to the king. For a brief moment Bhimdeva fixed his eyes on this unusually handsome, young man with a bearded, smiling face. Then he graciously said to the archer, "Young man, since you are an archer, you may also join the contest and try for the championship."

The youth advanced a few steps, straightened his graceful figure, bent his bow. Then, drawing the string as far back as his ear, he shot the arrow. With a twang of the bow, the arrow whizzed through the target and disappeared in the sky.

The king was amazed; it was extraordinary that a youth from the merchant class, as he evidently was, should possess such exquisite skill in archery.

Bhimdeva ordered a soldier to go in search of the arrow. The archer said with a shy smile, "My Lord, it would be better to send him on horseback; else he will not be back even by evening."

It was after some time that they heard the galloping hoofs of the horse, and the cavalier presented the arrow to the king. He said he had found it at a distance of six miles!

The king asked the champion what his name was. Bowing gracefully, he replied, "Sire, I am called Vimal."

Vimal was declared champion of archery and awarded the prize to the accompaniment of thundering applause. But that was not all; within a few days, people heard that Bhimdeva had appointed him as his minister.

Those who have seen the magnificent temples of Abu with their lace-like carvings in marble, declare that Vimal was much more than a merchant, an archer, or a minister; he was the great architect of Gujarat's culture.

DEDICATION

IN the year 1720, Bubonic plague broke out suddenly in the French town of Marseilles. Men died like flies. There were heaps of decaying corpses waiting for burial; there were hardly any left alive to burn or bury them. The whole city was in the grip of mortal fear. Physicians found themselves helpless; often in their courageous attempt to heal the stricken, they fell victim to this fatal disease. The epidemic raged fiercely and death swept away thousands relentlessly.

The physicians held a conference to exchange their ideas and experiences. They unanimously came to the decision that to treat this disease effectively, they must dissect the body of one of its victims. Only that might put them on the right course of treatment.

But who would undertake to dissect the corpse of a man who had died of this fatal disease? To dissect the body of a victim of the plague was tantamount to extending an invitation to death. In this hour of imminent danger, when every one instinctively clung to life with extreme fear, where was the man who would volunteer to risk certain death?

As the conference was about to disperse, a handsome young man stood up. His eyes glowed with compassion, his lips were pursed in determination. This young man was Henry Guyon. All eyes turned in his direction. Was he going to announce some astounding discovery?

He stepped forward and said modestly, "Gentlemen, you all know that unless a man is prepared to sacrifice his life, he cannot hope to save the lives of others in a critical situation like this. If a single man's life can lead to a great discovery that might save the lives of thousands, I am ready to risk my life. I will dissect the corpse of a victim of the plague. There is no one to weep for me if I die. Whatever wealth I leave behind, should be used for patients of the plague."

Older doctors looked down with something of shame in their eyes. They had lived their lives and were much nearer the end than this youth, and yet they were not prepared to risk losing the few years that were left to them.

The young surgeon was as good as his word. He straightway went to the dissection chamber and started dissecting the corpse of a victim of the bubonic plague. He steadfastly continued the nauseating job, making observations and recording the results of his research. He tried to locate the spot where the germs had attacked and the reason for it.

When his research was complete, he put the invaluable results into some chemicals to disinfect them and thus make them safe for handling by other doctors. He knew he himself would never be able to put to use the fruit of his labour, for he had already started to pay the price of his research. He stood up,

burning with fever, and tottered to a bed from which he never got up. Even though he suffered the agonies of this deadly disease, his face was serene in death.

Henry Guyon died like the thousands who had been swept away in the epidemic, but his was a unique death; it had given a chance of life to those who were stricken with the plague. Men like him are honoured more in death than in life, for they leave a priceless legacy to all mankind.

SELF-INFLICTED UNHAPPINESS

It was a wet, dark night in the month of *Shravan*. The rain came down in torrents, turning the narrow lanes of the town into rivulets, all heading towards the main river.

King Bimbisara of Magadha and his consort sat on the balcony of the palace, listening to the rumbling of the thunder and watching the fury of the rains as the flashes of lightning momentarily rent the curtain of darkness.

Suddenly, as one of the flashes revealed the surroundings, Queen Chelna caught sight of a man wading through the knee-deep waters, gathering sticks of wood.

She told the king what she had seen, adding reproachfully, "My Lord, is this our Welfare State? Here's a man who has to toil even on such a night as this, in the cold, swirling waters, just to gather a few bits of wood, while some roll in riches." As if to justify her reproach, a fresh flash revealed to the king the brief sight of an old man, desperately clutching at the pieces of wood that went floating down the swift torrent.

Calling his attendant, King Bimbisara ordered him to bring the man into his presence. Within minutes, an old man was ushered in. His thin, bony body was almost bare, covered with only a dripping loin-

cloth, his sunken eyes gleamed from a lined, cadaverous face.

The king said, "Old man, why do you have to work in such stormy weather? Are you so poor that you would starve if you did not go out to work on a stormy night like this?"

The old man bowed politely and replied, "My name is Mamman. I am well provided with food. Besides, I have two beautiful bulls. They are very nearly complete. Only half a horn is yet left to be made, for which I was gathering pieces of sandalwood that are washed down the river. If I had waited till morning, others might have sighted them and taken them away, so I hastened to gather them at night, even in the storm. This weather, so foul for others, gives me a chance to carry on my work."

The king could not make head or tail of what the old man was driving at, so he said, "I will give you a hearing tomorrow morning and command my treasurer to provide you with whatever you need for the horn of the bulls. The night is far advanced, you must be cold and weary. Sleep peacefully; you need worry about nothing."

Mamman was amused at the king's ignorance of his name and position and was amazed that the king expected him to sleep peacefully. He could not recollect when he had last enjoyed sound slumber, for his mind was ever restless about his wealth. He thanked the king and retired.

Next morning, on being presented to the king, Mamman humbly begged the king to visit his house and see the bulls. He led the king to his house and, passing through many underground passages, they finally arrived at a secret cellar. It was here that he had kept the two bulls of gold hidden behind a curtain. Drawing aside the curtain, he pointed to the horns. "As Your Majesty will notice, three of the four horns are complete. They are studded with gems. Only the fourth one is still incomplete and I need sandalwood for it."

The king was plunged in utter amazement. The bulls of gold were as large as young elephants; rare stones gleamed from the sockets of the eyes; the horns were so thickly studded with sparkling gems that even the dark cellar seemed to be lit up by their glitter. He could hardly believe his eyes. He was confounded. Why should a man who was wealthy enough to own these fabulous gems that surpassed even his royal treasure, labour on a chilly, rainy night to collect a few bits of sandalwood?

From somewhere deep down inside of him, the king seemed to hear once again the pregnant words of Bhagwan Mahavira:

इच्छाओ आगासं.

"Your desires and yearnings are boundless as the sky. Pierce your instincts for acquisition with the spear of contentment; else it will pierce your very heart."

PUNIYO

PUNIYO, nourished on the pure fare of the wisdom of saintly men, was well known through the length and breadth of Magadha. He was without a peer in his simplicity, contentment, civility and equanimity of temperament. So intensely did he believe in the scriptural injunctions about the duty of the host towards the guest that to him it had become undistinguishable from religion. It was a custom with him, and his equally saintly wife, to eat on alternate days and feed the hungry wayfarer on the days they fasted.

It was the day of the full moon and Puniyo was fasting. Seeking shelter at his humble home, there came a very learned and religious man on his way to the holy city of Kashi. Puniyo extended him his usual hospitality with a special fervour.

The guest, while eating his frugal meal, observed the room. It was clean, but absolutely bare. But for the plate and bowl he was using for his meal, there was nothing in the room. "What a generous man he is, despite his poverty!" thought he. "He does not hesitate to deny himself food so that he may feed the hungry."

The holy man made up his mind to requite Puniyo for his hospitality; he had a secret means to do so.

Night fell and the household was hushed in sleep.

The holy man got up and, taking out a philosopher's stone from his satchel, he stole into the kitchen. There were hardly any pots and pans, but he caught sight of the spatula used for turning bread. He touched this with his stone and lo and behold, the spatula gleamed in the darkness of the kitchen, for it had been converted into gold!

Next morning, he left, thanking his host for his kindness. Later, when Puniyo entered the kitchen, he saw a gleaming object in a corner and instantly realised that his unusual guest had worked this miracle.

He sighed as the words fell unchecked from his lips, "Now, why should he have done this to me? I didn't deserve this unkindness! How shall I get me another spatula? Of what use is this spatula of gold to me? Surely a learned man like him should know what is said by Bhagwan Mahavira: 'What you obtain without toiling is worse than the dust under your feet.' "

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Time passed and after visiting many holy places, the pilgrim once again came to Puniyo's house on his way back home. After lunch, he gave an interesting account of his journey to Puniyo.

Then Puniyo got up and drew out the spatula of gold from under a pile of faggots and, returning it to his host, said rather gruffly, "You are on a pilgrim-

age; why, then, did you have to put me to the needless expense of buying a new spatula? Perhaps your intention was good; you wished to help someone who had been your host, but if a man accepts gold that he has not earned with the sweat of his brow, then does not his good sense, sound as gold, turn to dross?"

With a brief pause, he continued more softly, "Would my heart continue to feel the joy of serving a guest who seeks hospitality at my humble home, once I began to accept rewards for doing what I consider to be my religious duty? A man who accepts gifts, gets into the habit of expecting them for whatever he does to serve his fellow-men; he thinks of what he would be given rather than what he should give. No, Sir, I cannot accept your gift, however well-intentioned it may be."

The holy pilgrim was filled with respect for this simple man. "I have been to many shrines and I have bathed in many sacred rivers," he said, "but it is from *you* that I have learnt the path of true salvation. I only pray I may attain the perfect contentment that your heart knows."

I BOW BEFORE ASCETICISM

MAHARAJA PRIYADARSHI was as devout and humble as he was regal. He bowed before every ascetic he came across on the way. His minister, Yasha, did not approve of this. Very respectfully he said to the Raja, "My Lord, in this throng of religious mendicants, there are many castes; it does not become your kingly position to bow before any and every mendicant indiscriminately. A man in your elevated position need bow only before a monk of the highest caste."

The Raja held his peace, as if he had not heard him. He waited for a suitable opportunity. One day, a man was beheaded in the city. The Raja sent for the dead man's head. Next he sent for the heads of the sheep and goats that had been slaughtered that day. Then he commanded Yasha to lay out these heads at the main gate of the city and sell them to the passers-by.

Yasha detested this strange and unpleasant task assigned to him, but he dared not disobey his lord and master.

The heads of animals were soon sold out, for there were many flesh-eaters in the land, but the human head remained unsold; nay, men were disgusted at the very sight of it.

When he returned, the Raja asked, "Well, have you sold all the heads?" Bowing humbly, Yasha

replied, "Yes, My Lord all but the human head; none would take it even free."

"Why so?" enquired the Raja with seeming innocence.

"Because they are filled with revulsion at the very sight of a human head," replied Yasha.

"Are they revolted at the sight of this particular human head, or would they be filled with aversion at seeing any human head?"

"My Lord, people would shudder at any human head. A man's head, whoever he may be, is bound to give rise to disgust," Yasha kept on replying mechanically. He vaguely suspected what this interrogation was leading to.

"Supposing my head was put out for sale, would people still turn away in disgust from it? Would they shudder even at my head?" persisted the Raja.

Hearing these words, Yasha was struck dumb with fear. What could he say? Drops of sweat gathered on his brow, betraying his agitation.

Priyadarshi pledged his kingly word that no harm would come to Yasha; he enjoined him to tell the truth frankly and fearlessly. He repeated, "Would people find the sight of even my kingly head repulsive?"

"Yes, My Lord," replied Yasha in a hardly audible

voice. "Yes, My Lord, the sight of even your head would be revolting. None would touch it."

"If that is so, what was unbecoming in bowing my head before an ascetic? In what way does it impair my royal dignity? What does the caste matter? Caste makes no difference to me; I bow not before the man of caste, but the man of asceticism; I salute asceticism," said the Raja in an impressive voice.

TRIUMPH OVER VIOLENCE

It was a blistering hot day in the mid-summer month of *Jeth*, when a man with the unmistakable stamp of divinity on his face, was trudging along a path covered with sharp stones and thorns. His eyes shone with infinite kindness, his face was radiant as the moon, his lips were parted in a smile as soft as the dawn, his body glowed with the vigour of chastity.

A herdsman coming from the opposite direction, accosted him respectfully, "Master, why do you go this way? It is a lonely way where even beasts are afraid to go. There is a terrible King Cobra that waylays the wayfarers."

However, the great man went his way despite the warning. Passers-by remarked, "Could he be deaf? Is he possessed? Could he be out of his mind? Why doesn't he heed what we say?"

Some distance away there was an ant-hill. The land around it looked lonely and deserted; the very atmosphere of the place was charged with terror. The man halted and looked around.

The scent of a human being drew the terrible snake out of the ant-hill. Even as he darted out at lightning speed, he was amazed at the dauntlessness of the man who dared to stand at the very mouth of his dwelling!

Mad with rage, the cobra bit the man's foot,

emptying his fangs of their deadly poison, and raising his head, watched his victim. To his astonishment, he saw milk trickling out of the wound where he had bitten the man. Has anyone ever seen milk instead of blood, oozing out of a living being? Ah, yes! Does not the blood in a woman's breasts change into milk when she becomes a mother? Even as her heart overflows with love for her new-born babe, her breasts overflow with milk for it! How could the cobra comprehend the fact that every nerve and tissue in this unusual man's body was filled with an all-pervading love for every living being on earth and the blood in his body was transformed into milk by this miracle of love!

"O Cobra, awake!" a sweet voice calls out. "Think! Who were you, and what are you now? You were a *Sadhu*, a holy man, in your previous life, but your ungovernable rage has transformed you into a deadly snake in this life. This is the consequence of rage, so even now beware!"

The hooded cobra seemed to be petrified! His beady eyes were fixed on this inspired man whose speech sounded sweet as a tinkling bell, whose face was lit up as if with the flush of a thousand dawns, whose eyes beamed with the purest of love. Gazing at him, the cobra saw in a flash who he was during his previous birth. He laid his head at Bhagwan Mahavira's feet and in his wordless speech, he vowed to himself, "Henceforth, I will keep my head within the ant-hill,

my body without, and bear all the torture that befalls me with equanimity and fortitude.”

People flocked to this spot; they even worshipped the cobra as a deity, with offerings of milk and *ghee*. Ants swarmed over his body, pricking him all over, but the cobra bore this agony without writhing, reminding himself how he had bitten many a man and beast with his deadly fangs. Now it was his turn to bear these pangs and he was courageously resigned to it. And so, this much dreaded snake at last died and because of his penitence and penance, he was absolved of his sins and he entered the eighth heaven.

After long years, once again people frequented this once-deserted path. Citizens and cowherds stopped at the ant-hill and exclaimed, “Blessed is Bhagwan Mahavira! Blessed is the King of Snakes! Blessed is nonviolence that triumphs over violence!”

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

THE tree of Bharat's ancient culture has spread its green foliage and continued to blossom luxuriantly in spite of the storms of numerous invasions and subjugations over the centuries. I have often wondered what could have fostered its roots that it has thus withstood the ravages of time and violence. I believe it was the spirit of self-sacrifice that sustained Bharat's culture.

Over three hundred years ago, Akbar's son, Salim, invaded Mevad and, according to the usual custom, his army pillaged its food supply from the country under attack. Salim's General commanded one of his subordinates to obtain grams, for the horses, from the fields.

The officer led a small contingent in search of fields of gram. It was a hilly region; far away, there were a few patches of green, but there was no human being in sight who could guide them. He was about to change his direction when he spied a lonely hut. In answer to his peremptory knock, a sturdy old man opened the door. The officer ordered him to lead them to a gram field. The ancient's swarthy face became darker on hearing this. He dared not disobey the command; he must conduct them to a gram field—but whose? For a few seconds his heart was torn with conflict. Then, in a calm voice, he said: "Follow me, Sir."

Soon they came upon a gram field, green with the

standing crop. The officer cried halt and ordered his men to cut the stalks. But their guide hastily intervened, "No, no. Not this field; a little further I will show you a better one. This is nothing compared to that."

The officer eyed him suspiciously. Could the old one be fooling them, making them trudge unnecessarily in the noon-day sun? "Look here, old man," he cried in a stern voice, "don't try any of your tricks on me. This field is good enough for us; why need we go any further?"

In reply, the old man stroked his venerable beard and said, "Do you think at my age I should be telling you any fibs? Trust me to show you something better." And sure enough, they soon saw a much larger, greener field, its beaded stalks glistening in the sun.

"Here you are," said the man. "You may help yourself to as much as you fancy."

The soldiers fell upon the standing crop, pulling the stalks roughly, slashing them on all sides. As the pile of stalks rose higher, the erstwhile green field turned into a stretch of dug-up, untidy earth, bare and brown.

The officer, as he was departing with heavy loads of his plunder, looked curiously at his guide and said, "This is indeed more than I had bargained for, but it

puzzles me why you did not let us cut the crop from the first field! Had you some motive behind it?"

"Ah, yes! Are we not all actuated by some motive, some self-interest? If not of this world, of the other; if not material gain, spiritual gain? The first field was my neighbour's," he muttered softly.

"Your neighbour's!" exclaimed the man. "Then, whose is this? Your enemy's?"

The old man smiled, "No, it is mine; my very own," he replied. "How could I forget my duty to my neighbour, stand by and watch you destroy his field? Would it not be better to let you pillage mine, so that I would not have to blush with shame at the thought that I had betrayed my neighbour, whom I am morally bound to help in his difficulties? It is better so—as it is," he nodded thoughtfully. "If I were to die this moment, I could die with a clear conscience; with the joy that I had fulfilled my moral obligations to my neighbour, as our religion, our culture enjoins us to do," he concluded.

The officer left, wondering if a land that could produce such high-minded, self-sacrificing men even among the humblest of rustics, could ever be really subjugated?

The perennial tree of Bharat's ancient culture did not yield to the storms of violence from outside. But will it survive much longer if her own people cease to foster it with the life-giving waters of

selflessness and neighbourly love? Are we not destroying now, with our self-centred interests, our cut-throat rivalry, what centuries of aggression and tyranny could not? It is up to each one of us to answer this soul-searching question with honesty; in that alone lies a hope for the survival of Bharat's ancient culture.

SACRIFICE

KUMARPAL, the worthy king of Gujarat, had made nonviolence the principle of his life and he cherished a vision of enlightening a world overhung with the pall of violence, by means of the luminous light of nonviolence. It was the all-wise Acharya Shree Hemachandra who had inspired him with this dream.

Kumarpal tried his first experiment of nonviolence in Gujarat and Saurashtra. Because of his preaching of nonviolence here, even people from the lower castes recoiled at the very name of flesh at a time when even *Brahmins* in other parts of India, such as Bengal and Orissa did not hesitate to partake of meat. The purifying waters of the principle of respect for all living things had seeped even into the lowest stratum of people, as far as Rajputana.

Kumarpal of Gujarat was once faced with a problem. It was a custom in his family over long years to offer animal sacrifices to the family goddess *Kanteshwari* every year on the festival of *Nava-Ratri*. How was he going to stop this slaughter of hundreds of goats and buffaloes offered as sacrifice to the goddess, without moving her to wrath and consequent punishment?

As the festival of the goddess drew nearer, the warriors, noted for their intrepidity, began to feel uneasy. They had always felt secure under the

protection of their goddess, but they always stood in awe of her and had misgivings about provoking her wrath by withholding the traditional sacrifice. They firmly believed that if the goddess was provoked, the Chalukya dynasty would be annihilated or Patan would be destroyed by her enemies. Their hearts were heavy with gloomy forebodings.

Kumarpal was prepared to risk anything to uphold his principle of not taking any life. His determination was as inflexible as his faith in his great *guru*, Acharya Shree Hemachandra. His faith and reverence were shared by his people.

On the eve of the *Nava-Ratri* festival, he held a meeting of his lords and awaited the arrival of Acharya Shree. When he arrived, all stood up to welcome this personality, brilliant as the sun, calm as the moon, pure as gold, fresh as the lotus. As Acharya Hemachandra took his seat, the atmosphere was charged with devotion and expectation.

In his deep and sonorous voice, Acharya Shree addressed the people. "Citizens, it is incumbent on us to offer animal sacrifice to the goddess; there is no question of withholding it. We dare not offend our patron goddess. At all costs, we must please her, or else face calamity."

The flesh-eating votaries of the goddess rejoiced at his words, but all wondered how the apostle of nonviolence to all living things, could openly

advocate the slaughter of animals. Only Kumarpal's faith in his *guru's* guidance was unshaken.

Acharya Shree continued, "By all means, offer animal sacrifices, but do not stain your hands with blood; offer her living animals as sacrifices, not butchered ones! Lead them into the temple courtyard and bolt the doors. Leave it then to the goddess to choose what she wills. So long you have been offering her carcasses; now you will offer her living animals and I assure you, she will be the more pleased with it."

His argument seemed just, his suggestion fair. The flocks and herds were driven in, the doors of the temple were bolted. All night through, the worshippers kept a vigil round the temple, chanting hymns.

When the golden pinnacle of the temple reflected the first rays of the rising sun, there was a mammoth crowd outside the temple, eager to see the result of the living sacrifice. As the heavy doors were swung open at the order of their king, the animals, imprisoned all night in the courtyard of the temple, rushed out in their hundreds, bleating and lowing.

Kumarpal prostrated himself at the entrance to the temple. Rising to his feet, he asked the swarming multitude, "Tell me now, citizens, who demands animal sacrifice? Is it our goddess or is it her greedy, flesh-eating votaries who demand it in her name? We call her *Mata*—mother; would a mother eat

her own offspring—her dumb, harmless offspring? It is an insult to the gods, that man, to satisfy his own carnal appetite, preaches bloodshed, preaches violence to these poor creatures. Hail *Kanteshwari*! Patron goddess of our family and our kingdom with *all* who live in it, men and animals!”

The citizens echoed Kumarpal's words with enthusiasm, the votaries with dismay. Kumarpal rejoiced that his abiding faith in nonviolence had stood a severe test and the goddess would continue her blessings on him and his kingdom.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

THE dark veil of night was slowly being withdrawn from the blushing face of Dawn. Nature seemed bountiful on this spring morning, but it was far from auspicious for the once wealthy citizen of the town. For him, it was a day in autumn with its seared leaves dropping limply to the earth. The tide of affluence was receding slowly but surely.

However, the worthy man viewed the change in the tide with equanimity. Sitting at the threshold of his house this bright morning, he was musing to himself, "Fortune has turned her wheel, but I refuse to be downhearted; she might turn her wheel again and I may go up, who knows?"

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The sun had set; birds had retired to their nests. The full moon came up in the east, flooding the earth with her silvery beams, shining alike on the rich and the poor, the high and the low. A group of humble villagers was sitting in the moonlight after the day's work was done and gossiping. Their conversation turned to the topic of who was the most generous man in the town. Someone said, "Such and such a man is the very incarnation of generosity. Whoever goes seeking his help, never leaves empty-handed."

Another chimed in, "Such a one is the incarnation of Karna. He puts his hand in his pocket and

deals out most liberally whatever he has, without even caring to see how much it is!"

A third man put in, "Agreed; they are all incarnations of Karna, but the philanthropic Hathibhai of our town is a veritable philosopher's stone! His generosity knows no bounds. If he were to touch a piece of iron, it would surely turn into gold. I assert, he is a peerless man for generosity; when comes such another?"

A poor woman, named Satara, living in this squalid part of the village, happened to hear this remark. She was one of the most miserable creatures who had ever lived. She had lost two young sons at short intervals and the third was seriously ill. She had no means to get him medicine or nourishment. These repeated blows had brought the unfortunate woman to the brink of the grave, but she lived on to bear her burden. Now she dared not even hope for anything; but what she had just heard about the generosity of the kind-hearted Hathibhai, kindled a ray of hope in her despairing heart.

The old woman summoned up her courage, took a staff in one hand to support herself, and with a piece of iron retrieved from the junk in her house, she set out in the direction of the charitable man's house. It was a long way to his wealthy manor. Faint with fatigue, labouring for breath, she at last came before him and knelt on the ground to put the piece of iron near his foot, so that at his touch it would turn into gold, as she had heard.

The good man, deeply lost in thought, started at the touch and demanded in an angry tone, "What are you up to?"

"Master, people say you are like the philosopher's stone. At your touch, even iron turns into gold. So I have come to see for myself if it is true. They say the poor and the needy have little sense left in them. I am poor and needy, and perhaps I am ignorant and foolish. I must be very wicked, too, for I live on and on after all my sufferings, after losing two young sons. God knows what more is in store for me! My third son is on his death-bed. Driven to desperation, I have come with this piece of iron, hoping against hope, it might turn into gold at your touch, and I might have at last the means to restore my son to health. Forgive me my audacity, but they did say you were a living philosopher's stone. How could I resist the temptation?" Faint with fear and fatigue, the woman poured out her tale in a torrent of words and stood there, gasping for breath.

The good man gazed at the woman's face, lined with age and suffering, her eyes dimmed with shedding tears of woe, her expression of trust and hope in him, and his heart turned within him with pity. He stretched out his hand for the piece of iron and told her to sit on a bench nearby. But she dared not sit; she stood there as if rooted to the spot, while her heart thumped alternately with fear and expectation. The man had spoken angrily at first, but there was compassion in his eyes. Perhaps he would find it in

his heart to give her some little help, even though the iron had not turned into gold.

The gentleman called his treasurer and told him to weigh the piece of iron. It was full twenty-five *tolas*. Twenty-five *tolas* of gold! He could ill spare so much in his present state. He had given unstintingly when he could spare it. "But then," he thought to himself, "if you give what you can easily spare, it is no charity; it is just the overflow of your affluence; you don't miss what you give. It is like the overflow of surplus water; anyone is free to help himself to it, since you don't need it for yourself. But if you are thirsty and you have only a limited quantity of water, and yet you part with some to quench another's thirst, more unbearable than yours, then and then alone it is true compassion, true charity. 'Give a little from your little,' Bhagwan Mahavira had said. You, who have striven all your life to carry out Bhagwan's precepts, how can you now turn a deaf ear to this woman's piteous appeal?" A beaming smile lit up his face. The woman saw it and took heart.

The gentleman ordered his treasurer to weigh the piece of iron against a nugget of gold and within minutes the woman was grasping it in her skinny hands. She tied it with shaking fingers in her tattered garment and her eyes streaming with tears, she muttered some incoherent words! "God grant him prosperity. What they said is true. He is a living philosopher's stone, and no doubt."

THE PRIDE OF BEAUTY

POINTING to the blushing, beautiful dawn, Lord Indra said to the gods, "Perhaps you think that this is Beauty at its best; you can see the delicacy of a flower, the delightful tints of a lotus in the beauty of dawn, but it is nothing when compared with the beauty of Sanatraj. Words fail to do justice to Sanatraj's beauty. There is nothing in the whole of Creation that can equal his beauty; his face, his eyes, his figure are peerless. Even gods appear pale and insipid before the radiance of Sanatraj."

The gods muttered among themselves, "Surely this is gross exaggeration; human beings, with their limited wisdom, may perhaps believe in such immoderate praise, but how does Indra expect gods to give credence to an obvious untruth like this!"

Two gods, Vijay and Vajant, set out for Hastinapura in the guise of pilgrims to test the truth of Indra's panegyric of Sanatraj. When they arrived, Sanatraj was in the royal bath, getting his body massaged with fragrant oils.

The gate-keeper announced to his majesty the arrival of the two pilgrims from a far-off land, who insisted upon being allowed in the presence of the king before they would accept even a sip of water after their wearisome journey. "I tried to dissuade them, but they would not listen to reason. Can they be permitted to see Your Majesty in the royal bath?" asked the gate-keeper.

The king's lips, delicate as the *Parijataka*,* parted in a faint smile and his head inclined ever so slightly like a flower swayed on its stalk by a gentle breeze.

The two pilgrims were ushered into the presence of the king. The moment their eyes rested on him, they realized that Indra had not exaggerated his beauty. They stood there transfixed, speechless with adoration.

"Strangers, what may you be thinking of that you stand thus, without even a word of greeting?" asked Sanatraj with a self-conscious smile.

Hearing his melodious voice, they woke up from their trance and replied, "Sir, we were lost in admiration of your beauty; beauty such as yours is not found even among the gods!"

These words of praise brought a flush of pleasure to the king's handsome face and his manly chest swelled with pride as he said, "But, how can you expect to see beauty at its best in the bath? You must come and see it in the imperial hall, where we hold our court."

Bowing low, the pilgrims took their leave and attended the king's court at noon.

King Sanat was proudly seated on a throne of gold, studded with gems. He was clad in a flowing robe of heavy silk. He wore a necklace round his noble

* A kind of flower.

neck and diamond rings on his tapering fingers; the crown of diamonds that adorned his head was brilliant as the sun radiating its beams.

With a sweet smile on his vermilion lips and with a haughty lift of his head, he asked the pilgrims, "Well, now do you see beauty at its best?"

To his amazement, the pilgrims shook their heads and replied with all humility, "No, My Lord, the brief moment of supreme beauty has had its day and is gone already! Your body is filled with a million germs that have already started their deadly work of consuming you! If you need any proof of this, you may consult the court physician, and he will bear out what we say!"

The king was shocked at these words. "Could my beautiful body be nothing more than the abode of deadly germs?" he thought in an agony of terror. "How foolish of me to have gloried in my physical beauty, neglecting to acquire spiritual beauty? I was vain of my face and figure; soon, too soon, they will have wasted to ugliness, and my soul that could have acquired everlasting beauty, remains so sadly neglected. Man glories in his physical beauty when he is heading for self-destruction. Henceforth, I will devote myself to beautifying the soul."

Sanatraj was a man of his word. He had conquered kingdoms with courage and determination. Now he turned towards this spiritual conquest with the same

courage and determination and renouncing his earthly power and possessions, he directed his steps towards the lonely woods.

He wandered about over hills and dales, across rivers and forests. The tender soles of his feet were cut with thorns and soon began to bleed, but he took no notice of this. He bore the bitter winter's cold and the blistering summer's heat with equanimity, for he had soon acquired immunity from bodily pain in his zeal to acquire spiritual beauty.

Five years rolled by; now we see Sanat as an ascetic, lost in penance, under a tree. There is peace all around; wild deer stand by his side, watching him with their mild eyes; even the fierce lion prowling in the woods, forgets his ferocity as he stands under the spell of the love and peace that seem to radiate from the still figure seated under the tree.

Once again, the two gods come down to earth, now in the guise of physicians. Approaching the hermit, they introduce themselves as healers and offer him herbs that would cure him of the dreadful disease.

Sanatraj opened his eyes; there was no trace of vanity in them now; instead, they were filled with humility. He passed his right hand over his left and realised that its skin was clear and smooth and healthy.

Addressing the gods, he said, "Friends, I have already acquired the power to heal physical ailments,

so I do not need your help, but I need help to heal my soul. I care no more for physical beauty. I have seen it turn into ugliness. I am striving for spiritual beauty, for only the beauty of the soul is immortal.”

Bowing in reverence to the saintly Sanāt, the two gods, disguised as physicians, disappeared in a glow of light.

ROUGH DIAMONDS

WE were a group of seven travellers, setting out from Dahod on our way to Malwa. Our journey lay through lonely tracts of hills and jungles infested with fierce tigers and with tribes that could equal the tigers in ferocity.

The tribals were usually Bhils; those of them who owned little patches of barren land, eked out a bare sustenance from its meagre produce. A few managed to earn their living as hired labourers in the fields. The rest had no other means of livelihood, but hunting or waylaying and plundering the travellers, often doing them to death even for a paltry sum of money, without the slightest scruples.

As we were leaving Dahod, we were warned of this danger by many of our well-wishers. They advised us to take with us some armed guides who could avoid the haunts of these desperadoes or defend us in case of attack.

We replied, "We are *Sadhus*; we may seek no other protection than God's." And so we set out on this journey, fraught with many dangers, but filled with great natural beauty.

Tall trees swayed in the breeze on either side of the path. Birds sang merrily in their foliage, brooks came babbling down the hillside, the rays of the morning sun filtering through the leaves covered

us with a lacy network of light and shade. Herds of wild deer gazed at us with their big, wondering eyes and darted out of sight into the thickets.

Who could pass by a sight so touching in its beauty without feeling joyful? I did not realise that we had already covered fifteen miles and soon arrived at our first halt under a spreading banyan tree where we refreshed ourselves with food and sleep.

When I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was a group of Bhil youths armed with bows and arrows. With the warning given at Dahod so fresh in my mind, I wondered if these wild youths would turn violent.

The voice of Faith chided me: "Is this mistrust in accord with your belief and your training in the all-powerful charm of Love?" He who can speak the language of love can turn even a fierce beast into a friend. Can you not then turn these mere human beings into friends? If a tiny worm can hollow out a hard stone, can you not soften the hearts of men made of flesh and blood?" These words of Faith threw open to me the gates of the Temple of Universal Love, filled with brightness and fragrance.

I addressed these wild-looking men with civility and friendliness. They drew closer to me, sat down around me and for a long time we were busy talking. I tried to follow their hill-dialect; replied to their questions when I understood them and smiled when

I did not. They would interpret my smile correctly and try to convey their questions through signs and gesticulations. We were so fascinated by this mode of conversation that it was already near nightfall that I realised how late it was.

Picking up their bows and arrows, they bade me goodnight, but promised to come back early next morning to escort us some distance, as the way was not safe for travellers. I watched the retreating figures of these men, black as ebony, whose talk I had found so entertaining. Their clothes were tattered, but their hearts were sound. There were patches on their clothes, but there were no patches of sophistication on their rugged culture. They were children of Mother Nature; their rough and ready principle was, "Strike before you speak." If they had been given the benefit of knowledge, of education; if their impulsive nature had been moulded by sympathetic guidance, then . . . but the speculation is out of place here.

Hardly had the darkness of the eastern sky become lighter, when the sturdy youths arrived, equipped with bows and arrows to escort us. One of us muttered, "This may very well be a pretext to rob us when we reach some lonely spot." I exclaimed impatiently:

*"Faith, embedded in Truth, wavers not;
Life, bereft of Faith, is not worth a jot!"*

I was deeply intrigued by all they had to tell us, and they poured out their jungle lore in my eager ears. They gave me information about trees and birds; hills and dales and rivers; hunting and hidden tracks, even about highwaymen's haunts and secret places to hide from them.

When they mentioned highwaymen, I could not help telling them frankly about the warning we had received from our friends. My confession was greeted with a burst of laughter, and one of them who looked like their leader, exclaimed, "It's true, Maharaj; what they told you is quite true. We will not lie to you. But, didn't your friends tell you whom we rob?"

"Well," I said, "you rob all those who carry anything of value on them!"

"No, Maharaj! That's not the fact. We, too, fear God. We, too, when we die, expect to stand face to face with Him, so we have our own code of honour. There are many men in the towns who are educated, who talk with an oily tongue, who have fattened on the toil of the simple, trusting folk. They are parasites. We rob those in these jungles who rob us in the towns by their dishonesty. They will never part with their money out of love, so we force them to part with it out of fear. But that does not apply to men like you! You are a holy man, a *Sadhu*. You rob nobody and nobody will rob you. If anyone is so base as to rob you, he would have to

answer God Almighty for his deeds. But look! We are at our journey's end. We are very near the town, so, *farewell!* Now we will return to our jungle. If ever you have an occasion to pass this way, come and see us. We will always be happy to receive you."

So they left us; and long after they had gone, I kept on musing: "How can I ever explain to these simple, sincere men that their philosophy is all wrong? That they are not justified in waylaying and robbing in these lonely places, those who thought nothing of robbing them cunningly in the towns? Can two wrongs make one right? Can you create white by blending two shades of black? These were the wild offspring of Mother Nature. They had their own code of honour which they followed conscientiously. How could they understand the laws and codes of the town's people?"

But there was a grain of consolation that I gleaned from this incident. Is it not gratifying that even in this darkness the name of a *sadhu-sant*—a holy man, shines like a star? Maybe, like a dim star, but all the same its light is unmistakable in the surrounding gloom.

THE PLEDGE OF PROTECTION

RAJA Meghrath had taken the sacred vow of *Paushadha*.^{*} The *Paushadha* pledge bound a man to abandon all evil and adopt all good.

One day the Raja was holding a religious discourse with other princes who surrounded him as satellites surround a star of greater magnitude. The subject of the discourse was, "The Purpose of One's Life is to Protect Others."

"Why should the promise of protection to someone in distress be regarded as the highest grade of charity?" asked one of the debaters. "Because a man who promises protection to someone must conquer fear. This fearlessness is not possible unless you rid yourself of all evil. Moreover, to fulfil this Pledge of Protection, a man may have to sacrifice even his life," replied Raja Meghrath.

No sooner had the echoes of his words faded than a dove dropped at his feet, quivering with terror. Its terrified eyes seemed to beseech the Raja for protection, "Save me, My Lord, Save me! None but you can save me! You consider the Pledge of Protection the noblest kind of charity, then won't you extend it to me, My Lord?"

The Raja read the appeal in the dove's eyes and gently smoothing its ruffled feathers, he said, "Poor

* Spiritual retreat for twenty-four hours.

creature, cast off all fear; you have flown to me seeking protection and as a *Kshatriya* prince, it is my solemn duty to grant asylum to anyone who seeks it of me, especially today, when I have taken the 'Pledge of *Paushadha*'. Shed all fear. I hereby promise to protect you at the cost of my life."

That very instant, a hawk flew in like a gust of wind. Fixing his blood-thirsty eyes on the dove that began to quiver again, he thus addressed the Raja: "My Lord, that dove at your feet is my rightful prey. I demand its surrender immediately, for I am dying of hunger."

The Raja replied with calm dignity, "Hawk, it is the solemn duty of a *Kshatriya* to grant asylum to a creature who seeks it in desperation. Moreover, I have taken the '*Paushadha* Pledge' to protect this helpless creature. I will not surrender it to you under any circumstances."

Turning his blood-thirsty eyes towards him, the hawk replied, "But I must eat to live." "Not on a living being!" protested the Raja. "It is against the tenets of religion. How can you fail to understand that just as you would experience agony if one of your wings were chopped off, so, too, would this dove. How can you justify the killing of another bird for appeasing your appetite?"

"My Lord," retorted the hawk, "well may you philosophize about humanity and monstrosity, about

violence and nonviolence, on a full belly! But my belly is empty. I suffer the pangs of hunger and your philosophy does not allay them."

And who can gainsay the truth of this argument? Is not hunger the root of evil? It destroys beauty and youth. It leads to feuds among kith and kin. Hunger makes man forget his culture, his humanity.

Encouraged by the effect that his argument had obviously produced, the hawk continued with greater vehemence, "My Lord, manners and modesty, honour and shame, affection and tolerance, even morality and religion, stand unshaken only so long as they are not ground in the mill of hunger."

Meghrath replied calmly, "I do not deny the validity of your argument. Hunger is indeed a terrible monster; the pangs it causes are unbearable. I am ready to offer you any food you wish. You have only to order what you like, and I assure you, you shall have it."

"Flesh! Nothing but flesh!" screamed the hawk eagerly.

"I can give you any food but flesh," pleaded the Raja. "How can I, pledged to nonviolence, take the life of any living creature to satisfy your hunger? It would be against my religion."

The hawk replied with impatience, "I've told you plainly that nothing but flesh will satisfy me—living

flesh! I am not concerned with your vow. I don't claim to understand this talk of religion, but if you honestly believe in it, why don't you act upon your principle instead of merely philosophizing on it? You can offer me your flesh instead of the dove's! That will be equally welcome."

A cry of horror rang through the assembly. The sky was overcast; as if afraid to see the gruesome sight that would be revealed before him, the Sun hid his face behind the clouds.

Raja Meghrath commanded that weighing scales be brought into the hall. The unfortunate dove was placed in one pan and then before the horrified eyes of all, the Raja cut off slice after slice of live flesh from his thigh and laid it in the other pan. But the scales showed no perceptible change.

The Raja was surprised. "Could there be some foul play?" he wondered. His thigh was bleeding profusely, the pile of slices was growing higher, yet the scales moved not by a jot or a tittle; and then to the consternation of all, the Raja lowered himself bodily into the scale! How could a human life, a Raja's life, be offered to purchase the life of a dove? There was definitely some fraud. Cries of protests were heard from every corner of the hall.

"Perhaps there is some fraud," agreed the Raja, seated in the scale. "But that does not liberate me from the pledge of protection I gave to the bird.

How can a man with faith in religion and morality, break his pledge to a poor helpless creature? It would be a betrayal—a betrayal as much of his honour as of the one he promised to defend. My pledge means everything to me; I will not hesitate to fulfil it even at the cost of my life.”

The clouds hiding the sun grew lighter as gentle drops of rain came down to cool the heavily charged atmosphere. Suddenly there was a radiant light in the sky and a luminous figure emerged. The assembly was struck dumb with awe.

A deep voice was heard from the figure now kneeling before the Raja. “I am Devkumar. I have descended from the heavens to test this gem among men. Lord Indra in heaven praised Raja Meghrath for his unflinching determination in keeping his pledge. I could not believe that a mere human would be capable of courage and fortitude that could credit a god.”

Turning to the assembly, he continued, “I assumed the forms of dove and hawk to subject your Raja to the severest possible test and I frankly admit that even in this land, celebrated for its great saints, I had not expected to find such greatness.

“O Shantinath! The sixteenth *Tirthankara** to be of this great land of Bharat, I prostrate myself before you; I beseech you to forgive me for having

* An Apostle of Jain philosophy.

doubted your strength to keep your vow even under such duress. The earth is blest because of you."

All stood silent, watching the celestial figure that gradually faded from their vision. Bright rain drops refreshed the earth, the sky was once again clear. Suddenly a shower of rose petals floated gently down on Raja Meghrath, spreading its perfume through the great hall.

Blessed are they who keep their Pledge!

THE HYMN OF SACRIFICE

WORDS gushed out of Bhagwan Mahavira's mouth like the Niagara Falls and the grandeur of their melody soothed the burning hearts of angels as well as human beings. Speaking on the beneficence of sacrifice, Bhagwan said, "the river quenches man's thirst with her fresh water; trees satisfy man's hunger with their luscious fruits; sandalwood yields its cooling paste to soothe his burning skin; the sugar-cane rewards with its sweet juice those who crush it. Should not man then yield something? Man is greater than all these; his contribution should be greater too."

Just as the parched soil absorbs water, so too the heart of Mahanama of Kapilvastu absorbed these inspiring words of Bhagwan. Meditating on these inspiring words, he returned to his home town of Kapilvastu just in time to hear the fearful tidings—that Raja Viddubha of Shravasti had invaded Kapilvastu. He was already on his way with a large host and there was no hope to save the town from devastation. The peace-loving heart of Mahanama cried out in agony, "What madness seizes these rulers drunk with power? Why can't they let people be at peace? To satisfy their lust for power or retribution, they overrun each other's territory, deaf to the piteous cries of their innocent victims."

Even as he was thus thinking, a rumour ran like wild fire through the town that their ruler had abandoned the town, leaving the people to the foe's mercy.

“Shame on his manhood!” exclaimed the enraged Mahanama, “such cravens are unfit to rule! What could be more dishonourable than deserting his people in this hour of peril.”

The conquering Viddubha stormed the fort, made a triumphant entry into the town, rejoicing at the opportunity he now had to wreak vengeance on the people for the treachery and arrogance of their monarchs. He granted his soldiers freedom to plunder the town unscrupulously and to put to the sword anyone who dared to defy them.

Cries of weeping and wailing, screams of terror rent the air—and, Mahanama’s heart. What could he do to stop these inhuman atrocities? He thought of a way in which he might wield some influence over the ruthless conqueror.

With the respect that his name commanded, he had himself ushered into the presence of Viddubha. Seated before the Raja he asked, “My Lord, do you recognise me?”

The Raja, despite his reputation for fierceness, replied courteously, “Mahanama, who would not know you? You are the most eminent citizen of Kapilvastu, respected even beyond your kingdom for your knowledge and wisdom, your courtesy and culture, and I share their respect for you.”

“I don’t mean that, My Lord; I have not come here to trade my prestige. But, I am asking you,

don't you recollect any kinship between us?" Stressing the word 'kinship', he looked the tyrant fearlessly in the face.

His grave face, white sweeping beard, his eyes beaming with compassion like a lake brimming with life-giving waters lent an air of reverence and dignity to the old man. His words struck a chord in the tyrant's mind. The present linked itself with the distant past. He was here today to settle old scores. His father, Raja Prasenajit of Shravasti, had once been grossly insulted by the haughty ruler of Kapilvastu, who had scornfully rejected a proposal of marriage between his daughter and Prasenajit. This incident had all but touched off a war, but this venerable old man, this peace-loving Mahanama, had offered him in marriage the daughter of a maid from his own household to pacify the angry Prasenajit, and so had poured oil over troubled waters. So Viddubha was the son of Prasenajit by this maid, and Mahanama was his grandsire. He recollected, too, how as a child he had come to Kapilvastu when this old man had tutored him; so he was his pupil, too. Thus, there was a double kinship between him and Mahanama—he was like a grandsire to him as well as his *guru*.

The hardened warrior, who had struck terror in the hearts of many a foe, looked abashed and softened for a while and whispered, "Grandsire, *Gurudeva!*"

"Yes, I was your *Guru*. Do you not recollect that,

at the time of parting, you had offered me *gurudakshina*—my fees as a tutor, but I had told you to keep it as a deposit with you till I needed it. Years have rolled by, and now the occasion has arisen when I can claim my *gurudakshina*.”

Viddubha exclaimed, “Of course, you can! I know my duty; even without your asking, I grant you full protection. None dare touch you; your person and property are sacred. The retribution I seek does not include you. I have sworn complete annihilation of Kapilvastu, but you and yours are immune from the flames of revenge that will raze to the ground the whole of this town.”

Raising his hand in protest, Mahanama intervened, “But surely I have not come to ask a boon for myself! I am seeking a pledge of protection for the whole town!”

Viddubha roared like a lion, “Do not ask for the moon, *Gurudeva*! No sermons can put out the flame of revenge that I have nursed in my bosom all my life; it will burn itself out only when the town and the people are reduced to a heap of ashes!”

“I cannot bear to see this massacre. Won’t you grant me this boon? I plead for it as I have never pleaded to anyone for anything,” urged Mahanama in a beseeching voice.

After a moment’s pause, Viddubha replied with a twinkle in his eyes. “Let us strike a bargain; I remem-

ber you are an expert diver. Perform one of your wellknown feats of diving in the pond. I will command that so long as you are under water, the slaughter should be withheld; all those who can make good their escape within that time will be allowed to do so. More than this, I cannot, will not, grant," he concluded with a ring of finality in his voice.

Mahanama agreed readily to this odd bargain. "I must content myself with sparing as much bloodshed as I can," he said almost dreamily. On the screen of his memory, the holy words of Bḥagwan seemed to take shape and glitter with celestial luminosity:

"The river quenches man's thirst with her fresh water; trees satisfy man's hunger with their luscious fruits; sandalwood yields its cooling paste to soothe the burning skin; the sugar-cane rewards with its refreshing juice those who crush it. Should not man then, yield something? Man is greater than all these; his contribution should be greater too."

Mahanama thought to himself, "The hymn of sacrifice that Bhagwan chanted is carved in my heart; now is the time for me to chant it in my own humble way, even if it be only a faint echo of Bhagwan's song."

Viddubha, unaware of what was passing through the saint's mind, was thinking to himself, "Now he is old; how long can he remain under the surface of the water? Two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes

at the most! How many of the citizens will manage to escape within that brief time? I shall have kept my word to the old man and at the same time, kept my vow to avenge my father's name."

Mahanama went to the pond; the people, even in their panic, halted their flight momentarily to cast a look of gratitude and wonder at the old man who had undertaken this feat to earn them a few moments to escape. Even as the news spread through the town, Mahanama had dived into the pond, fastened himself to the column of victory in its centre and was lost in deep meditation.

Mahanama's heart was full of love and compassion for his fellow human beings; there was an overpowering urge within him to save them even at the cost of his own life. So he gladly surrendered himself to Death within the depths of the pond.

Time passed; seconds ran into minutes and minutes into an hour—two hours, but still Mahanama did not rise to the surface. The victorious Viddubha itching for his revenge, and his soldiers lusting for blood and plunder, at last gave up hopes.

Viddubha finally realized what had happened and he felt a stab of compunction. A chill of horror ran through him as he grasped the significance of his grandsire's self-immolation. The fire of hatred that had consumed him for years, suddenly cooled down as he saw to what grandeur a man could be inspired by love.

The citizens of Kapilvastu rushed to the pond on hearing the news of Mahanama's sacrifice. They untied his body from the column and laid it on the bank. Their tears mingled with the water that dripped from his body. His face, calm even in death, seemed to say, "Life cannot be worth more than this!"

THE LORD AND HIS DISCIPLE

THE sun lit up the earth with its golden beams as Bhagwan Mahavira arrived to enlighten the minds of the thousands who had assembled in the vast grounds of the royal palace. Even King Bimbisara of Magadha was present, eager to see and hear the holiest of holies.

The vast concourse of humanity experienced a thrill of awe and bliss at the sight of his gracious personality, his benign face, his serene eyes. His speech, fresh and sweet and forceful as the holy waters of the Ganga gushing down the lofty Himalayas, flooded the hearts of the congregation with an overflowing happiness.

Then arose Gautama, brilliant as the sun yet gentle as the moon, and asked his *guru* a question that was in everybody's mind: "My Lord, would you tell us what makes the soul heavy and base and what makes it light and sublime?"

The question was grave and pertinent. All wanted to lighten the load of life and were naturally eager to know Bhagwan's solution to this baffling problem.

For a moment Bhagwan gazed at his breathless congregation with his compassionate eyes and then spoke:

"Gautama, we are all aware of the quality of a hollow gourd to keep afloat. It is in its very nature.

Suppose a man buys a hollow gourd, making sure it's dry and without a hole. Then he coats the gourd with clay and lets it dry. When it is dry, he coats it again, and thus repeats the process eight times over and over again, and then he puts it gently on the surface of a pond. Do you think that this gourd with its inherent capacity to float will now keep afloat?"

"No, My Lord!" exclaimed the congregation with one voice.

"The gourd," continued the *guru*, "even with its inherent capacity to float, could not keep afloat—nay, it sank into the water. Even so, the soul, coated with violence, untruth, dishonesty, intemperance, anger, pride, hypocrisy and greed, becomes heavy, and despite its original virtue to keep afloat, sinks to the bottom."

The listeners were moved in heart and mind by these words of wisdom.

"But Gautama," Bhagwan went on, "perchance the top layer on the gourd peels off and it becomes a shade lighter, it might not sink so deep; and if one after another, all the layers that weighed it down were peeled off, the gourd would recover its natural tendency to keep afloat. So, too, the Soul. Were it to get rid of the eight vices that encumber it, by acquiring the eight corresponding virtues—non-violence, truth, honesty, temperance, forgiveness,

modesty, simplicity and generosity, it could surely unburden itself and regain its natural virtues of lightness."

Drawing the moral from Bhagwan's teaching, Gautama summed up for the benefit of the congregation:

"Vices make the Soul heavy and base, Virtues make it light and sublime."

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Inspiring Anecdotes unrolls a colourful panorama, from the ancient times of Bhagwan Mahavira through the ages, to our own times. Saints and seers, kings and warriors, peasants and merchants pass in a pageant, each with a message for the reader who has ears to hear. But need one say more? In the very first anecdote Mahatma Anandghanji says to his disciple, "Come In, Come In!". We extend the invitation to you, too—"Come In, Come In!"

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