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FOR CHILDREN

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READINGS IN VEDIC LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN
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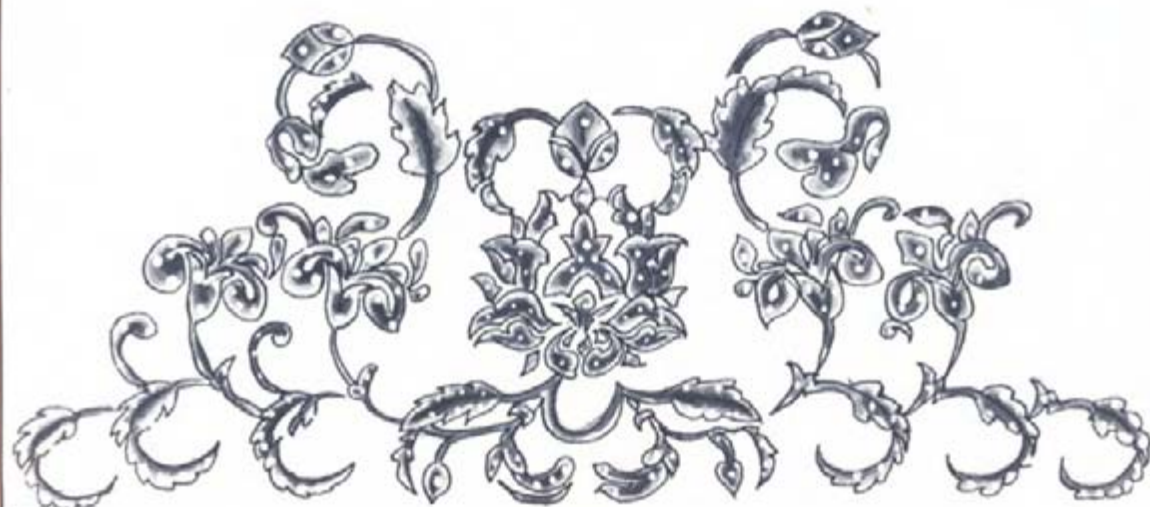


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 9

Part One

The Birth of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu 12
The Two Thieves 13
The Student Becomes A Teacher 14
Keshava Kashmiri Challenges Nimai Pundit 15
The Magic Mango Tree 16
Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Moves the Clouds Away 17
An Astrologer Studies Chaitanya Mahaprabhu 18

Part Two

The Voice in the Sky 20
The Birth of Lord Krishna 22
The Putana Witch 24
The Whirlwind Demon 25
The Butter Thief 26
Krishna's Headache 27
The Cows Come Home 28
How Lord Krishna Spent His Days in Dwarka 30
Krishna Visits His Devotees 32
The Fatal Promise 34
A Gift of Love 36

Part Three

Shakshi Gopal 42
The Story of Maharaj Pariksit 46
The Final Blow 50

"READINGS IN VEDIC LITERATURE
FOR CHILDREN"

contains summary stories
from the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*
and the *Chaitanya-charitamrita*.

The original English translations
of these works are by
His Divine Grace
A.C. Bhaktivedanta
Swami Prabhupada,
founder-*acharya* of the
International Society
for Krishna Consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

"Readings in Vedic Literature for Children" introduces young people to the culture of scriptural India. The influence of Vedic literature pervades Western writing. Aesop's fables were taken directly from the *Pancha-tantra* and the *Hitopadesh*, as were the fables of La Fontaine; Victor Hugo was inspired by the *Manu-samhita*; H.G. Wells discovered many of his themes in the *Puranas*; Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson were avid readers of the *Bhagavad-gita*; Goethe, Kant, Hegel, even Albert Einstein – were all inspired by these ancient texts, and university courses in the Sanskrit Vedas have been taught since the late 1700's.

This book draws its stories from two main sources: the *Shrimad-Bhagavatam* by Vyasadeva, and the *Chaitanya-charitamrita* by Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami. The former is considered by scholars to be quintessential Vedic wisdom and the most intimate section of all Vedic literature, for it describes the pastimes (*lila*) of Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as He enacted them on this planet 5,000 years ago. The latter, a 16th Century Bengali classic, describes the life of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Krishna Himself in His incarnation as a devotee, Who appeared 500 years ago in Bengal to propagate the chanting of the holy names of God as the most effective means for spiritual realization in this age.

The chapters in this book are of increasing length and language complexity, progressively challenging the child's reading skills. The Chaitanya stories, although chronologically later than the Krishna stories, appear first, as they lend themselves more easily to simplification. Sanskrit diacritic marks have been eliminated and phonetic spellings added to facilitate pronunciation.

The Editors

PART ONE

STORIES FROM THE CHAITANYA—CHARITAMRITA

The most important scriptures of India are called the Vedas. In the ancient Sanskrit language, Veda means knowledge. The Vedic scriptures tell us that in this age God, Who is called Krishna, appeared 500 years ago as Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the district of Bengal, India. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's mission was to show people how to live a holy life.



THE BIRTH OF CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU

“My dear wife,” said Jagannath Mishra, “in a dream I saw the spiritual world in our hearts! And now I see a beautiful radiance all around you! Surely ours will be a very special child!”

Sachidevi smiled. She knew that soon her child would be born. There had been an eclipse of the moon, and all of Bengal was chanting the holy names of the Lord. There was much music and dancing.

When the child was born, devotees of Krishna all over Bengal were full of happiness. Many came to see the child and give Him gifts.

“This child looks just like Krishna,” one devotee thought, “but His color is different. Krishna had a darkish color, but this child is golden!”

Jagannath Mishra and his wife Sachidevi watched Him grow, day by day. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was called Nimai as a child, for He was born just near a Nim tree. Nimai played like an ordinary boy, but sometimes He did the most extraordinary things!



THE TWO THIEVES

One day baby Nimai was playing alone in the courtyard of His house. His mother had dressed Him in splendid jewelry. Two thieves passed by.

“Look at that child’s jewels!” said one thief. “Let’s steal them!”

The thieves entered the courtyard and picked up Nimai. No one saw them. “Where are we going?” asked Nimai.

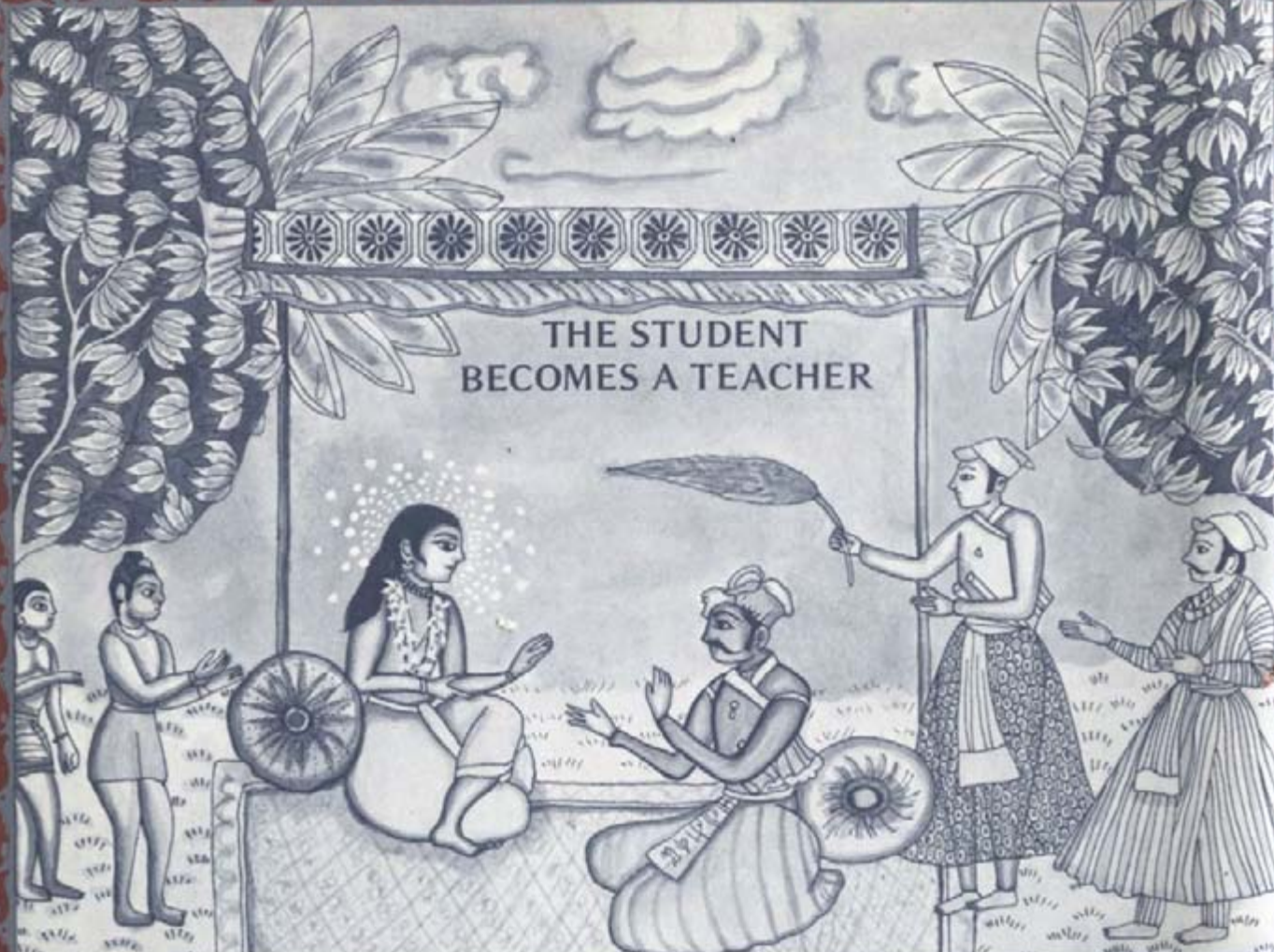
“We are going to eat some sweets,” replied the second thief.

“Oh, that’s wonderful! Let’s go!” said Nimai. Quickly the thieves took Nimai and ran off into the forest. They ran as fast as they could, carrying the small boy. Farther and farther into the deep forest, they ran as fast as their legs could carry them. At last they heard, off in the distance, the sound of voices. As they came closer, the thieves could finally understand what the voices were saying.

“Nimai! Nimai! Where is Nimai!” To their dismay, the thieves found themselves right back in Nimai’s courtyard.

With His mystic power, Nimai had made them run in a big circle.





THE STUDENT BECOMES A TEACHER

When Nimai was five years old, His father taught Him to read. In just a few days Nimai learned all the letters and combinations of letters.

After some time, Nimai started studying grammar. Simply by hearing the rules of grammar once, He immediately learned them. He very quickly became the best student in His class.

By the time He was eleven years old, Nimai began to teach and was known as Nimai Pundit. A pundit is a very learned teacher. Nimai Pundit was a very popular teacher as well and had many students. Little by little, people from all over Bengal heard of His classes and came to be His students. In all His classes Nimai Pundit taught the chanting of the holy names of God.

Sometimes a learned scholar would challenge Him to debate. But no one could defeat Nimai Pundit, not even the great Keshava Kashmiri.



One evening Nimai Pundit was sitting on the bank of the Ganges with His disciples. The famous pundit, Keshava Kashmiri came to Him and said, "I have heard that You are a great teacher of grammar."

"Oh, I am not very expert," replied Nimai Pundit, "but you, dear sir, are a true pundit, a very learned scholar and poet. Please make up a poem in praise of mother Ganges."

Keshava Kashmiri was very proud of his learning. Within an hour he made up and recited one hundred verses about the Ganges. Without hesitating, Nimai Pundit recited the sixty-fourth verse by heart and explained many errors.

Keshava Kashmiri said, "You are just a teacher of grammar. How were you able to find so many poetic faults? And how did You learn that verse so quickly?" Keshava Kashmiri was struck with wonder.

That night the goddess of learning, Saraswati, appeared to Keshava Kashmiri and told him that Nimai Pundit was the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself. Keshava Kashmiri felt ashamed, for he had acted very proud in front of Nimai Pundit.

The next morning Keshava Kashmiri came before Nimai Pundit, bowed humbly, and begged to be forgiven. Nimai Pundit embraced him with affection and accepted the scholar as His disciple.

THE MAGIC MANGO TREE

By the time He was twenty-four years old, Nimai Pundit was known as Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. One day He and His devotees went through the streets of their town chanting Hare Krishna (sankirtan). After many hours they felt tired and sat down to rest.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu took a mango seed and planted it in the ground. Right before their eyes, a mango tree grew! Soon it began to produce mangoes. All the mangoes were sweet. They had no skin and no seed. Just one of these mangoes was enough to satisfy a hungry devotee.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu picked two hundred mangoes from the tree, washed them, and offered them to Lord Krishna. Then He ate one mango and gave the rest to His devotees.

Ripe mangoes were always on that tree. Every day for twelve months Chaitanya Mahaprabhu held a mango-eating festival after sankirtan with all the devotees.



CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU MOVES THE CLOUDS AWAY

When Chaitanya Mahaprabhu chanted and danced, He looked very beautiful. His eyes were large and shaped like lotus petals. He wore bright yellow garments made of silk, and a flower garland hung from His neck. His hair was long and black.

One day, while Mahaprabhu chanted Hare Krishna with His devotees, clouds appeared in the sky. It was evening, and the devotees were afraid when they saw so many clouds coming together. The clouds thundered.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu played His hand cymbals (kartals) and began chanting Hare Krishna while looking up at the sky. It seemed as if He were directing the demigods to move the clouds away. In just a few moments the sky became clear again, and all the devotees could see the moon rising. Mahaprabhu danced with His jubilant devotees.



AN ASTROLOGER STUDIES CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU



There was an honest old man who walked the dusty streets of Bengal. He was an astrologer and could tell many things, both past and future, from the study of the stars.

According to the Vedas, people are reborn many times, and to learn about their past and future lives, people consulted this old man. One day the astrologer visited the house of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

“Please tell Me who I was in My last life,” Mahaprabhu asked. In just a short time the old man finished his study. He was amazed and could not speak. Again Chaitanya Mahaprabhu asked him, “Please tell Me who I was in My last life.”

“My dear sir,” replied the astrologer, “in Your last life You were the Supreme Personality of Godhead! You are still the Supreme Personality of Godhead in this life!”

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu answered, “I do not think you know who I really was in My last life. I happen to know that I was a cowherd boy. I gave protection to the calves and cows.”

Mahaprabhu was having some fun with the astrologer, for as Krishna Himself, He was the Supreme Personality of Godhead Who had spent His days caring for the calves and cows.

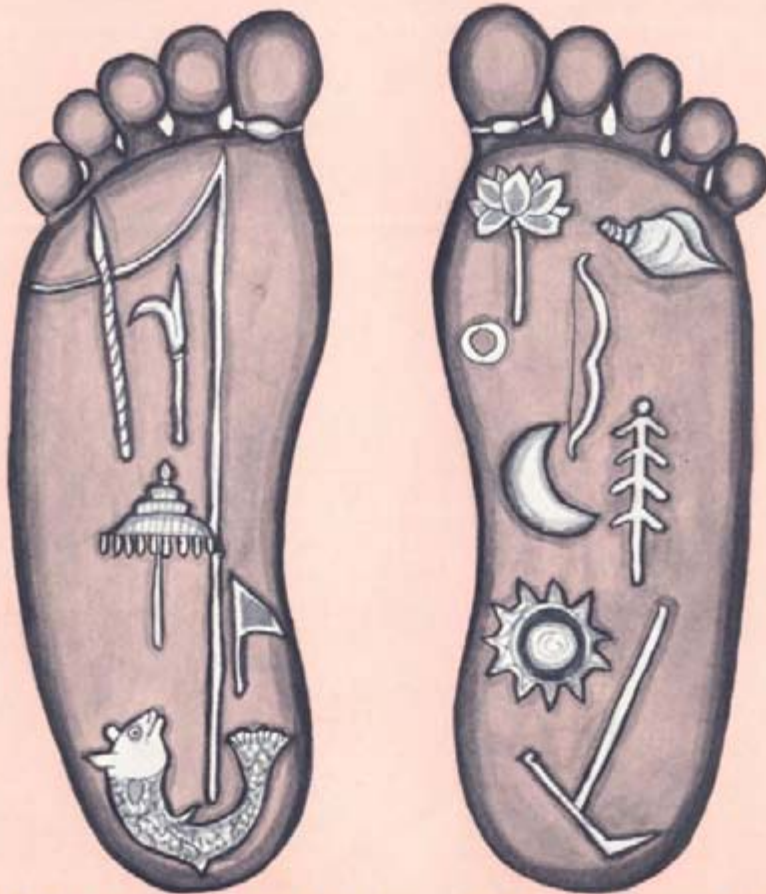
The honest old astrologer said, “Whatever You may be, I offer my respectful obeisances unto You!”



PART TWO

STORIES FROM THE SHRIMAD-BHAGAVATAM

The Vedas explain that Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, came to earth 5,000 years ago. His birth and adventures are still celebrated all over the world. His purpose in coming was to establish religion and chastise the evil-doers.

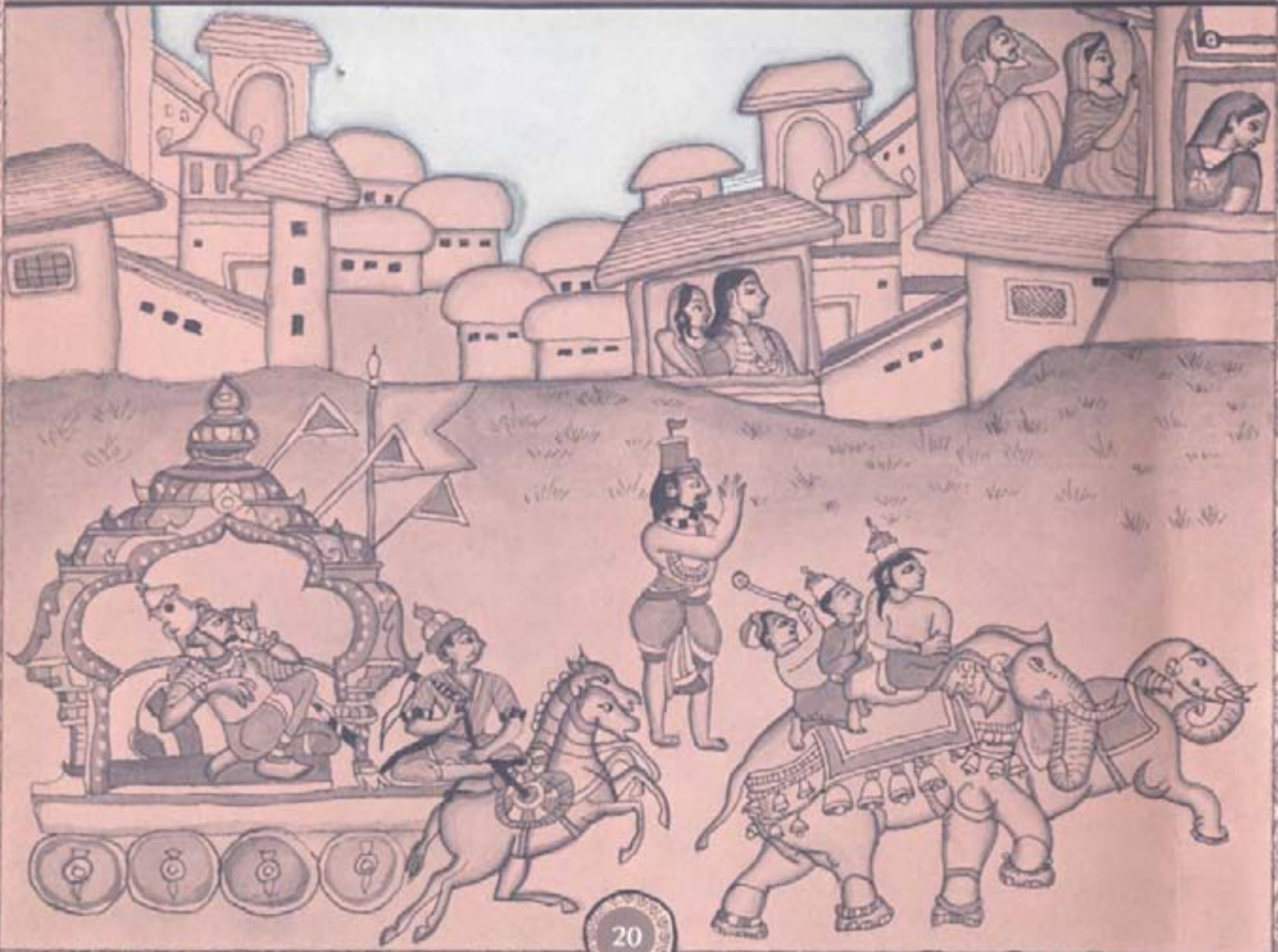


THE VOICE IN THE SKY

Princess Devaki's wedding day was wonderful. To celebrate her marriage to Vasudeva, Devaki's father, king Devaka, gave her many fine gifts. He gave her four hundred elephants, each wearing a golden garland. He also gave her many horses and chariots and sent two hundred young girls to serve her and be her friends. It was a joyful celebration. No one knew that the future held great sorrow for Devaki and Vasudeva.

After the wedding, Devaki's wicked brother, Kamsa, drove the newly-weds to his palace on a golden chariot. As they passed through the streets, they heard the beating of drums, the sounding of conchshells and the blowing of bugles, all in celebration of the wedding.

Suddenly from the sky they heard a loud voice proclaim, "Kamsa! You are a fool! You honor your sister on her wedding day, but you don't know that

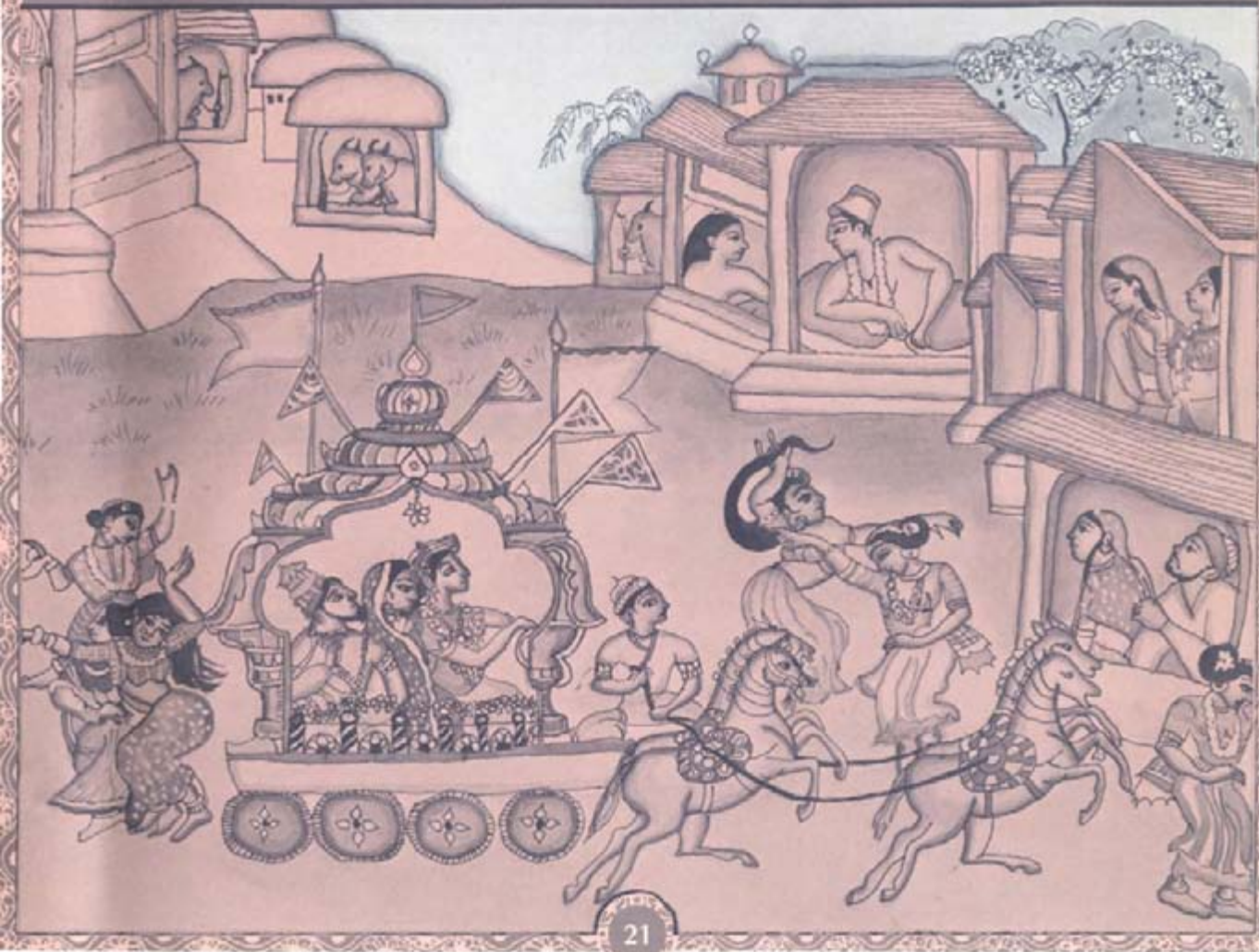


her eighth child will kill you!" Kamsa was more concerned with his own life than anyone else's. He grabbed Devaki by the hair, intending to kill her with his sword. Vasudeva tried to pacify Kamsa.

"Please do not be afraid," said Vasudeva. "Your sister will not hurt you. It is not her but her eighth child who is a danger to you. We do not yet have any children. Spare Devaki, and I will give you all our children. You may do with them as you like. I promise."

Kamsa knew Vasudeva was a good man and would keep his promise, and so he agreed. He put Devaki and Vasudeva in his prison where he could watch them.

The sinful Kamsa did not know that Devaki's eighth child would be Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.



THE BIRTH OF LORD KRISHNA

Wicked king Kamsa lived in constant fear of Devaki's eighth child. One by one, Devaki gave birth to seven sons, and one by one Kamsa killed them all.

The night the eighth child appeared there were signs of good fortune everywhere. The stars were bright, the birds sang sweetly, and everyone felt peaceful and happy. When Krishna was born, His parents were overwhelmed by His extraordinary beauty. The child appeared before His parents fully dressed in yellow silk garments. He wore many jewels, and His complexion was the color of a dark raincloud.



Vasudeva and Devaki offered prayers with folded hands to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but their joy was mixed with sorrow.

“Dear Lord Krishna,” said Devaki, “we are afraid Kamsa will try to kill You. Please hide Yourself.”

Krishna blessed them and said, “I want you to take Me to the village of Gokula. Mother Yashoda and Nanda Maharaj live there. Yashoda has just given birth to a girl. Bring the baby here and leave Me with Yashoda.” Then Krishna changed into a small baby, lying in the lap of His mother, Devaki.

All around the prison cell were guards, and the doors of the prison were locked. When Vasudeva picked up the child and prepared to leave, the guards fell fast asleep and the doors miraculously opened. Even though the sky was dark and thunder and rain filled the night, a wonderful radiance came from Krishna’s body. Vasudeva could see everything as clear as day.

To reach Gokula, Vasudeva had to cross the Jamuna river. The Jamuna roared with huge waves. When Vasudeva approached carrying baby Krishna, the river parted, making a path for them to cross.

At last Vasudeva reached the home of Nanda and Yashoda. Yashoda had just given birth to a baby girl, as Krishna had described. Yashoda was sleeping and did not know if the child born to her was a girl or a boy. Vasudeva did not want to awaken her, so he silently took the girl and replaced her with baby Krishna. Then he left and returned to the prison.

After Vasudeva was back in his cell, the doors of the prison locked and the guards woke up. As soon as they heard the child cry, the guards rushed to tell Kamsa.

“Devaki’s eighth child is born!”

THE PUTANA WITCH

King Kamsa soon discovered that Krishna had been brought to the village of Gokula. Almost daily, Kamsa would send horrible demons there to kill Krishna. The witch Putana was the first.

Putana picked up baby Krishna and put Him on her lap. Mother Yashoda did not forbid her, for Putana seemed to show motherly affection for the child. Secretly, Putana had put poison on her breasts, hoping that when Krishna would drink the milk He would also drink the poison and die.

Krishna did take the milk, but at the same time He drew out Putana's life as well. Putana screamed, "Oh, child! Leave me! Leave me!" As she fell, the sound filled the sky and shook the earth.

The gopis (cowherd women) found baby Krishna playing on Putana's gigantic body. Even though Putana wanted to destroy Krishna, He thought "I drank her milk, therefore she is My mother."



THE WHIRLWIND DEMON

By the time He was one year old, Krishna was plump and jolly and liked to play on His mother's lap. One day, Krishna felt so heavy that Mother Yashoda put Him down and went off to do her housework. Taking advantage of the moment, a demon named Trinavarta entered Gokula in the form of a forceful whirlwind, blowing dust and dirt everywhere. Gokula became so dark that no one could see anything. Trinavarta picked up baby Krishna and whisked Him high in the sky.



Mother Yashoda was mad with grief. "Where is my child? Where is my child?" she cried and fell to the ground.

Krishna made Himself very heavy, as heavy as a mountain. Trinavarta could no longer carry Him. The demon screamed loudly, crashed to the ground, and died.

The residents of Gokula thought that Lord Vishnu must have saved the child. They did not understand that Krishna Himself was the Supreme Lord, Vishnu. To them He was only their beloved child.

THE BUTTER THIEF

Krishna spent His childhood in Gokula at the house of Nanda and Yashoda. He was a very beautiful child and very naughty. His elder brother, Balaram, was as beautiful and as naughty as Krishna.

Every morning Krishna and Balaram let the calves run loose. The calves would run to their mothers and drink all the milk, so that when the gopis came to milk the cows, there was no milk left. The gopis had to return home with empty milk pots.

Sometimes the two brothers stole butter and yogurt. If the gopis caught Them stealing, Krishna and Balaram would say, "We didn't steal your butter and yogurt. Why would we do that? We have plenty at Our house!"

Sometimes they fed the butter and yogurt to the monkeys. The monkeys ate and ate, and when they could eat no more, the boys complained to the gopis. "This butter and yogurt are no good. Even the monkeys will not eat it!"

To stop the boys from stealing, the gopis hid their butter and yogurt in a dark place, but the radiance coming from the boys' bodies lighted even the darkest corner. The gopis tried hanging their pots from the ceiling, out of the reach of Krishna and Balaram. The two brothers just piled wooden boxes on the grinding machine and climbed up to the hanging pots.

If the gopis complained, the boys made innocent faces that melted their hearts. No matter how bad, the boys were loved by everyone. Even today, Krishna is still adored as the Butter Thief.

KRISHNA'S HEADACHE

The test of a pure devotee is that he is always ready to please the Lord. The gopis are a good example.

Once Krishna had a headache. He called for Narada Muni. "My dear Narada, I have a headache," He said. "The cure is dust from the feet of My pure devotees. Please get this dust for Me."

Narada Muni left at once. He went to a place where some brahmanas were making an offering to the Lord. Narada said, "Dear brahmanas, Lord Krishna has a headache. Only the dust from the feet of His devotees will cure it. Can you give me some?"

The brahmanas bowed before Narada Muni with fear in their hearts. "Dear Narada," they said, "we cannot give you any dust from our feet. We will go to hell for putting our dust upon the head of the Lord!"

So Narada left them. Soon he saw some gopis chanting Hare Krishna. "My dear gopis," said Narada, "Lord Krishna had a headache. He wants some of the dust from your feet to cure it. Will you give me some?"

The gopis quickly collected dust from their feet. They were very happy. Narada asked them, "Aren't you afraid of going to hell for giving this dust? Do you know that Krishna wants to put it on His head?"

The gopis smiled. "We do not care if we go to hell. Nothing matters to us but Krishna's happiness. Please take our dust."



THE COWS COME HOME

“My dear friends,” said Krishna, “here is a nice place to eat our lunch. It is just near the sandy banks of the Jamuna river. The Jamuna is full of lotus flowers, and their fragrance is everywhere. The birds are chirping, and the leaves whisper in the trees. Let us eat our lunch here while the cows drink the water of the Jamuna.”

With Krishna in the center, the cowherd boys all sat in a big circle and began to eat their lunch. They laughed, joked and played while eating together.

Suddenly, the boys noticed that the cows had wandered deep into the forest. They were nowhere to be seen. “Krishna! Krishna!” they cried, out of fear for the cows.

“My dear friends,” said Krishna, “please go on eating your lunch. I will find the cows and bring them back.” With His flute and bugle pushed into His belt, Krishna went off to find the cows.

From high above the earth, Lord Brahma, the powerful demigod, watched Krishna and His friends and decided to play a trick on them. While Krishna was away, Lord Brahma stole all the cows, calves and cowherd boys and put them in a cave.

Krishna looked everywhere for the missing cows. When He did not find them, He returned to the spot where the boys were eating lunch. But the cowherd boys were gone, too!

Krishna knew everything. He knew Brahma’s tricks also. Still, He was concerned. “How can I go home without the cows and cowherd boys?” He thought. “Their mothers will all cry.”

So Krishna multiplied Himself into as many cows and cowherd boys as there were before. Looking at them, no one could ever have seen a difference!

Lord Brahma was eager to see what Krishna would do without His friends. After some time, he returned to the forest. To his great surprise, Lord Brahma saw all the boys and cows playing with Krishna! Brahma was amazed. He had put them all in a mountain cave, yet here they were again!

Lord Brahma came before Krishna and bowed humbly. "Dear Lord Krishna, You are beyond my understanding. Please excuse my foolish trick."

Brahma immediately returned the boys, calves and cows. They began playing with Krishna as if nothing had ever happened.



HOW LORD KRISHNA SPENT HIS DAYS IN DWARKA

After His childhood in Gokula, Krishna went to the city of Dwarka and became the king. He married 16,108 wives and lived with them in magnificent palaces surrounded by parks and gardens.

Early each morning, Krishna woke when the cock crowed. He heard the bees humming and smelled the parijata flowers growing in the gardens. Rising from His bed, Krishna washed His hands, mouth and feet and sat down to meditate. After that, He bathed in holy water and dressed Himself in clean clothes. Then He offered fruit and grains into a sacrificial fire and chanted the Gayatri mantra (a silent prayer). He worshipped the sun and the demigods and distributed cows in charity. The cows wore silk covers and pearl necklaces. Their horns were covered with gold and their hooves with silver. Krishna's cows were healthy and peaceful, and their bags were full of milk.

By following a regular program of such religious duties, Krishna set an example for all the people of Dwarka. Krishna was a careful dresser as well. Usually, He



wore yellow garments, a flower garland, and the kaustubha jewel around His neck.

After bathing and dressing, Krishna visited the citizens of Dwarka and gave them His blessings. The people showed their love for Krishna by presenting Him flower garlands and sandalwood paste. Krishna would take the gifts and distribute them to the brahmanas, old people, and to His queens and ministers. If anything remained afterwards, Krishna would use it Himself.

Krishna would then ride to the meeting hall of Dwarka in the royal chariot. The meeting hall was a gift from the celestial architect Vishwakarma. While inside this meeting hall, no one became hungry or thirsty, no one grew sad or confused, and no one suffered from old age or disease. Entering the meeting hall, Krishna would sit on His royal throne. Jesters, dancers and singers performed for His pleasure.

After organizing the affairs of Dwarka, Lord Krishna would return to His palaces and attend to His wives and children. In all ways, He was the ideal Vedic king.



KRISHNA VISITS HIS DEVOTEES

In the city of Mithila there lived a faithful devotee of Lord Krishna, named Srutadev. He was a peaceful brahmana and lived very simply, always engaged in Krishna's service.

The king of Mithila, Bahulashva, was rich and powerful. He was also a pure devotee of Lord Krishna and never desired anything but His service.

One day, Krishna decided to visit His devotees in Mithila. Narada, Vyasa and other great sages accompanied Him. The citizens of Mithila were so joyful at seeing Lord Krishna that their hearts blossomed in happiness. King Bahulashva and the brahmana Srutadev fell at the feet of Lord Krishna. The king asked Krishna to visit his palace, and the brahmana asked Krishna to visit his humble hut. Lord Krishna accepted both invitations. Just to please His pure devotees, Krishna changed Himself into two Krishnas, and He had the sages do the same. One group went to the king's palace, and one group went to the brahmana's humble cottage.

At the king's palace Krishna and the sages sat down on comfortable chairs and pillows. The king washed their feet and sprinkled the water on the heads of his family members. He offered his guests flower garlands, sandalwood pulp, new garments, jewels, lamps, cows and bulls. When the king had fed his guests and all were sitting together, king Bahulashva offered songs in praise of Krishna's glories.



At the same time, Krishna and the sages entered the home of the brahmana Srutadev. Srutadev was a poor man. He offered his guests simple wooden planks and straw mats on which to sit. In his great happiness Srutadev danced and danced. He and his wife washed the feet of their guests and sprinkled the water on the heads of their family members. They then offered fruit, incense, scented water, clay, tulasi leaves, kusha straw and lotus

flowers. These were not costly items, but they were offered to Krishna with love, and Krishna was pleased to accept them. Srutadev's wife cooked dahl (bean soup) and rice and fed the sages. All the while, Srutadev chanted the glories of Lord Krishna.

Krishna and the sages left Mithila feeling very pleased. The love of the brahmana and the love of the king were both pure, and Krishna blessed them equally. He did not care about their material position.



THE FATAL PROMISE

Once a demon names Vrikasura wanted a special power. He met the sage Narada Muni and asked him, "Which demigod should I worship to get a special power?" Vrikasura was a demon, so Narada told him to worship Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is worshipped by demons and ghosts.

Vrikasura was pleased with Narada's idea. He went to a holy place and lit a fire. While chanting prayers to Lord Shiva, he cut flesh from his body. Then he offered the flesh into the fire with more prayers.

Vrikasura cut pieces from his body for six days. Each day he offered the flesh to Lord Shiva, but Shiva never came. The demon grew impatient. "I will cut off my head and offer it to Lord Shiva. Surely then I will win his favor."

On the seventh day the demon took a bath in a sacred lake, and when his hair and body were wet he started to cut off his own head. Seeing this, Lord Shiva came before the demon.

"Why are you doing this?" Lord Shiva asked. "Please do not cut off your head. I am pleased with a simple offering of Ganges water. I do not need your flesh. Tell me what favor you want, and I will grant it."

Vrikasura said, "I want the power to kill my enemies by touching their head with my finger."



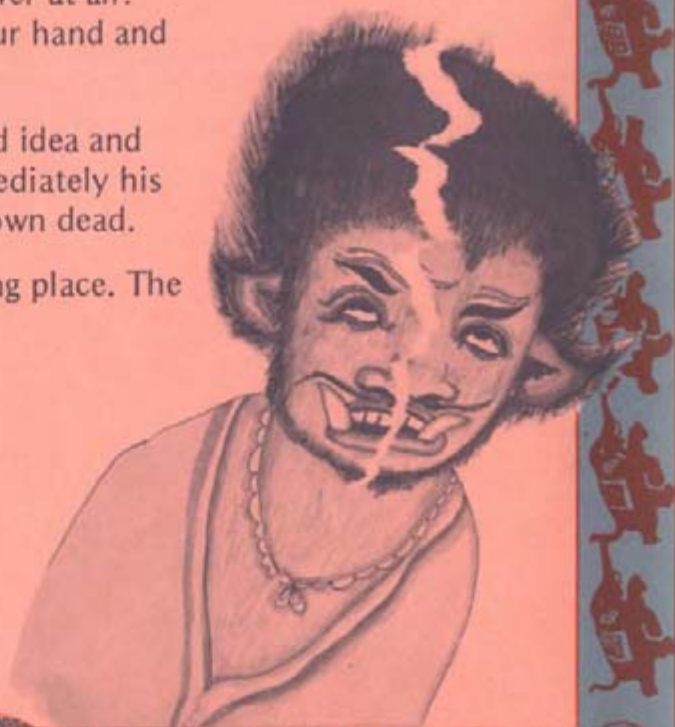
Lord Shiva did not want to give such a terrible gift to Vrikasura, but he had to keep his word.

Vrikasura was not very intelligent. He decided his first victim would be Lord Shiva. "When I touch his head, it will crack. Then I will take away his wife!" thought Vrikasura. He lifted his hand and pointed it at Lord Shiva's head. Shiva fled for his life.

On and on they ran, across the universe. At last Shiva reached Lord Krishna's home. Krishna knew what Vrikasura wanted to do. He changed Himself into a young boy, in order to speak with Vrikasura without being recognized. When Vrikasura arrived, Krishna told him, "My dear Vrikasura, I think Shiva has cheated you. I do not think he has given you this power at all! Just touch your own head with your hand and see!"

The demon thought this was a good idea and touched his hand to his head. Immediately his head cracked, and Vrikasura fell down dead.

Lord Shiva came out from his hiding place. The trick had worked.





A GIFT OF LOVE

There once lived a poor brahmana named Sudama. He was so poor that he and his wife dressed in rags. They had very little to eat and always looked thin.

One day Sudama's wife said, "My dear husband, I am not concerned for myself, but for you. There is no food and hardly anything to wear. You are a great devotee of Lord Krishna. You and He were friends in the Gurukula school of your teacher, Sandipani Muni. Please go to Lord Krishna and ask Him to help us."



Sudama did not like the idea of asking Krishna for help, but he thought this was a good excuse for going to see his dear friend. Sudama's wife gave him a small quantity of rice as a gift for Lord Krishna. It was a humble gift. It was all they had.

While proceeding to Krishna's capital city, Sudama thought to himself, "It may not be my destiny to become rich, but by going to Dwarka I shall certainly see Lord Krishna, the root of all joy."

When Sudama arrived at Dwarka, he was very happy and excited about seeing his dear friend, Krishna. Sudama passed through large gates and beautiful gardens. He walked beneath the arches of regal palaces as tall as skyscrapers and at last came to the most splendid palace of all and went inside. There he saw Krishna and His queen, Rukmini.

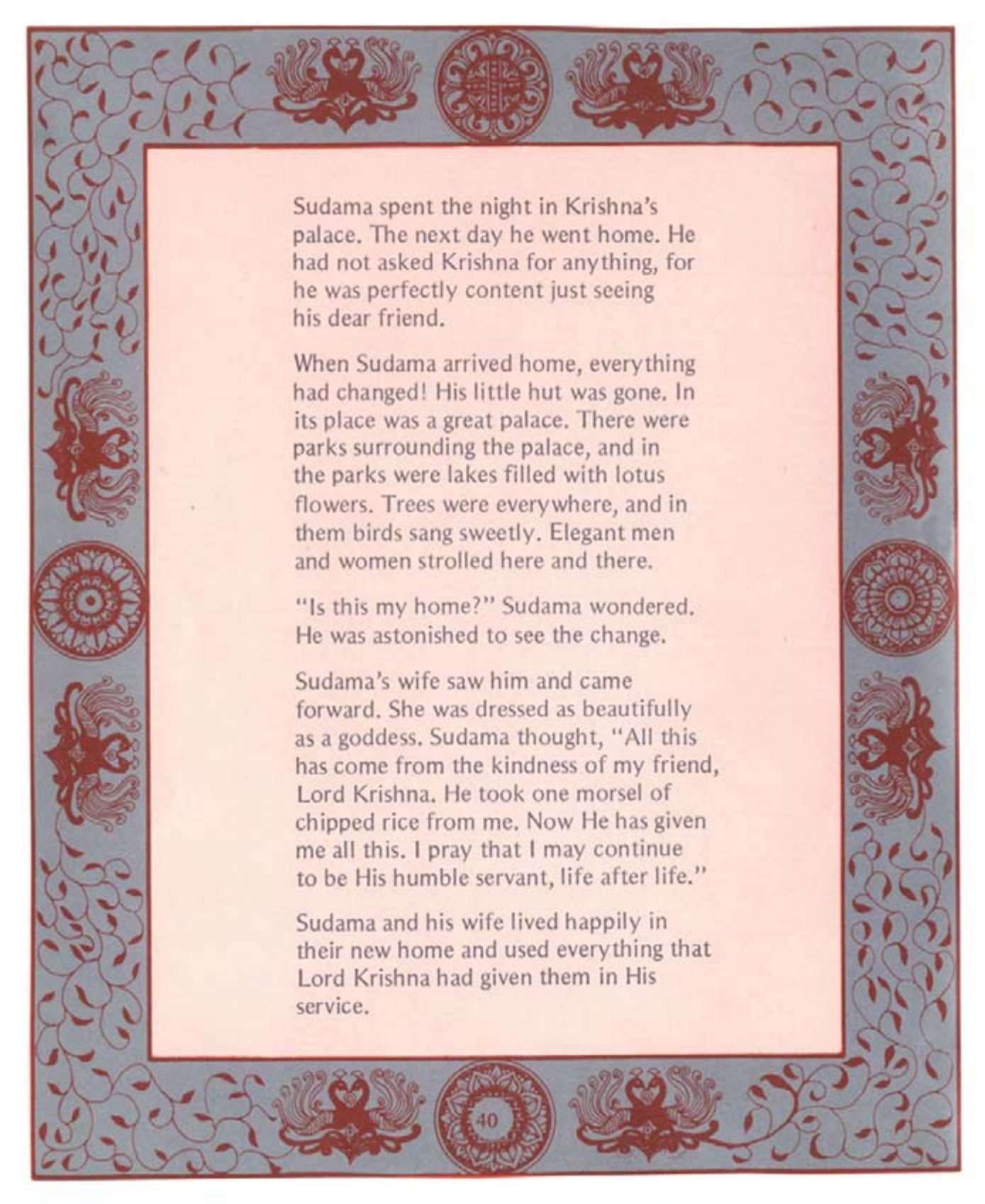
Lord Krishna was very pleased to see His old friend and embraced him with great affection. He made Sudama sit down on His own bed and gave him food and drink. Lord Krishna washed Sudama's feet and sprinkled the water on His own head, as was the custom. Then He applied sandalwood paste to Sudama's body to cool him after his journey. All the while, queen Rukmini fanned Sudama with a yak-tail fan.

Then Krishna and Sudama began to talk together about their school days and about their teacher, Sandipani Muni. Krishna remembered the time He and Sudama went out to the woods to gather firewood. It grew dark, and they held hands walking back to the Gurukula. Thus they spent the evening joyfully remembering their childhood.

Sudama still carried the small quantity of rice in his cloth. He did not want to give Krishna such a plain gift. Krishna knew this and asked, "Have you brought Me a nice offering?" Sudama did not answer.

"My dear friend," said Krishna, "I do not need anything. But if My devotee gives Me some small offering with love, then I will take it." Krishna snatched the bag of chipped rice from Sudama's shoulder. "Oh, you have some chipped rice for Me!" Then Lord Krishna ate one grain of chipped rice and felt completely satisfied.





Sudama spent the night in Krishna's palace. The next day he went home. He had not asked Krishna for anything, for he was perfectly content just seeing his dear friend.

When Sudama arrived home, everything had changed! His little hut was gone. In its place was a great palace. There were parks surrounding the palace, and in the parks were lakes filled with lotus flowers. Trees were everywhere, and in them birds sang sweetly. Elegant men and women strolled here and there.

"Is this my home?" Sudama wondered. He was astonished to see the change.

Sudama's wife saw him and came forward. She was dressed as beautifully as a goddess. Sudama thought, "All this has come from the kindness of my friend, Lord Krishna. He took one morsel of chipped rice from me. Now He has given me all this. I pray that I may continue to be His humble servant, life after life."

Sudama and his wife lived happily in their new home and used everything that Lord Krishna had given them in His service.

PART THREE

STORIES OF KRISHNA'S DEVOTEES





SHAKSHI GOPAL

Two brahmanas were going to the holy village of Vrindaban. One was young and poor, the other old and rich. The young man served the old man as they traveled. At last they reached Vrindaban and the old man said, "Thank you very much. I could not have come all this way without your help. I want to give you some reward."

The young man replied, "No, no. It was my duty to serve you because you are old and I am young. I must not take any reward."

All this time, the young man and the old man were standing before the beautiful Deity of Gopal. The old man said, "My dear boy, I want to give you my daughter in marriage."

The young man said, "It is a great offense to promise something in front of the Deity and then not keep the promise."

The old man replied, "I know this, and you may be sure that I will keep my word."

Many months passed. The old brahmana returned to his home, and one day the young man came to visit him. He spoke to the old man in a humble voice. "Once you vowed in front of the Deity of Gopal that I could have your daughter as my wife. Now you must keep that promise."

The old man's wife became very angry. "How could you promise our daughter to such a poor brahmana boy?" His son was also very angry. The old man did not know what to do.

The son came out and said, "If my father has made this vow in front of the Deity, then let the Deity come here and tell us."

So the young man left and went back to Vrindaban to see Gopal. "My dear Lord, I beg You to come and witness my marriage. The old man vowed to give me his daughter. You must come and witness or he will not keep his vow."

Then Gopal spoke to the young man. "How can I come with you? I am just a stone Deity."

"If a stone Deity can talk, then a stone Deity can walk," said the young man. "Please come with me."

The Deity of Gopal was defeated by the young man's logic. "You may take some rice and milk to offer to Me on the journey," said Gopal. "You walk ahead, and I will follow after you, but you must not look back at Me. You will know I am following by the sound of My ankle bells."

The young man and the Deity walked for some time. As they came near the village of the old man, the young man could no longer hear Gopal's ankle bells. He turned around to see if the Deity was still there. Just then, Gopal stopped and would not walk any farther.

The young man ran to the village and told everyone that Gopal had come to witness his marriage. All the villagers were amazed to see that Gopal had walked so far!

The marriage of the poor brahmana and the daughter of the rich old man was held in front of the Deity. Then a large temple was built for Gopal. Since that time, the Deity has been known as Shakshi Gopal – the witness Gopal.



THE STORY OF MAHARAJ PARIKSIT

From his childhood, Maharaj Pariksit showed signs of greatness. Rather than play like other boys his age, Pariksit preferred to worship his Deity of Lord Krishna. As he grew, Pariksit showed many of the royal qualities of his grandfather, the great Arjuna. When he reached the proper age, Maharaj Pariksit became king and ruled with wisdom and strength.

It was the practice of kings in those days to prepare for battle by hunting in the forest. On just such a hunt, Maharaj Pariksit once rode for hours in pursuit of prey. He grew tired and, seeking relief from his hunger and thirst, took shelter in the hermitage of an old sage.

Entering the hut, the king discovered the sage deep in meditation. It was the custom to greet all guests with kind words, a place to sit, some food and water. But the sage was in a deep trance and did not stir.

Maharaj Pariksit grew angry and turned to leave. Just outside the hut, the king noticed a dead snake. With the end of his bow, Pariksit picked it up, went back into the hut, and placed the dead snake around the shoulders of the sage like a garland. Then he mounted his horse and rode off.

The sage had a son named Shringi, who possessed some of his father's mystic powers. When Shringi found out what the king had done, he became very angry and cursed Maharaj Pariksit.

"This foolish king should never have entered my father's house! For what he has done, I curse him! On the seventh day from today, a snake will bite him and he will die!"

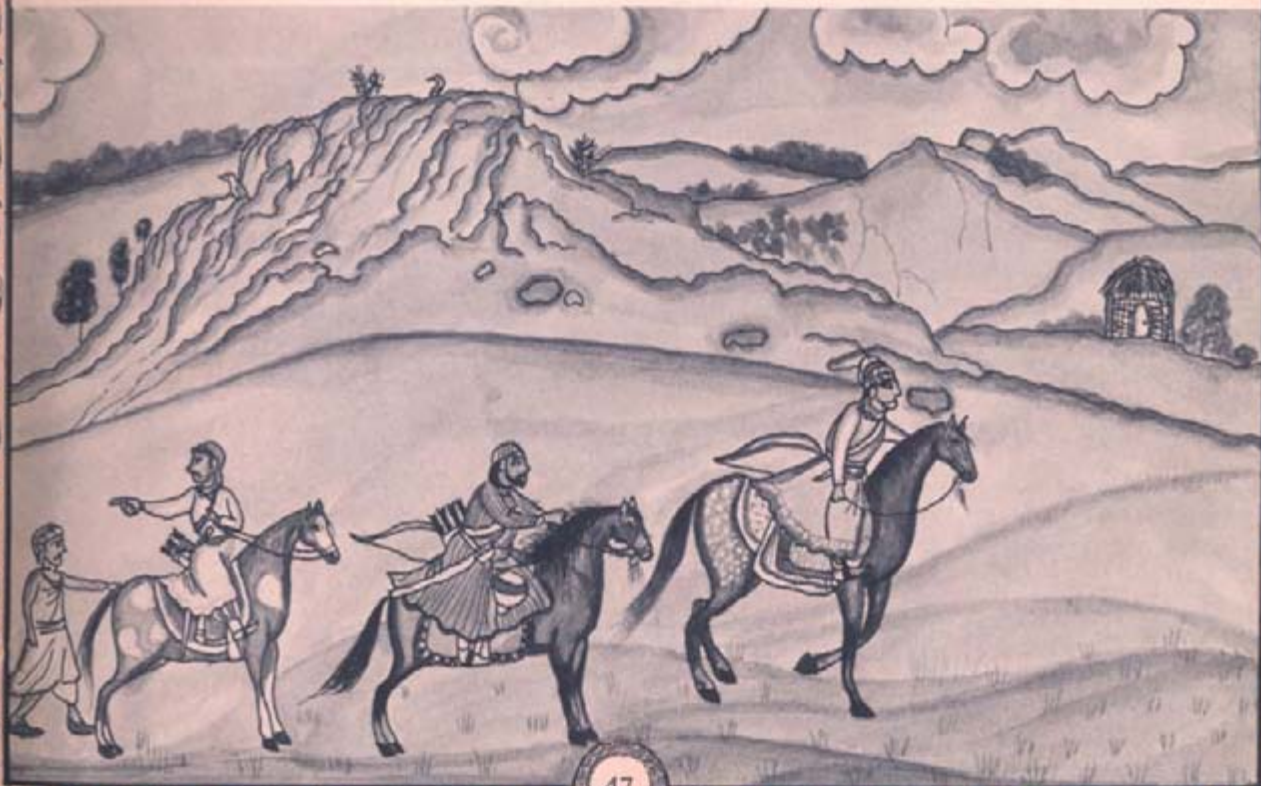
Quickly, word of Shringi's curse spread until it reached the ears of Maharaj Pariksit. "This is only just," thought the king. "My

offense was great. Let me now spend the remaining days of my life preparing for death." He then went to the bank of the Ganges, took off his royal garments, and sat down in meditation.

When it became known that the king was preparing for his death, all the great sages came to visit him. The youngest among them was also the wisest. Sukadeva Goswami advised the king that the best thing for one who is about to die is to hear about Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Maharaj Pariksit sat on the southern bank of the Ganges and did not eat or sleep for seven days. His spiritual master, Sukadeva Goswami, was only sixteen years old, but he was a fully qualified teacher. He had no interest in material life, the pursuit of money, women or fame. All his attention was on the service of Krishna.

The sages present knew him to be a great soul. As soon as they saw him coming, the sages rose and offered him the seat of honor.



Maharaj Pariksit bowed his head before the boy, and Sukadeva took his seat.

The king spoke. "By thinking of you, seeing you, touching you, washing your holy feet, or by offering you a sitting place, we become purified. You are the master of all great saints and devotees. Kindly show me the path of perfection, for I am about to die."



The saintly Sukadeva said, "My dear king, if you want to be free from fear at the time of death, then you must hear, chant and remember topics about the Supreme Personality of Godhead."

For seven days, Sukadeva Goswami told king Pariksit about the glories and pastimes of Lord Krishna. The king listened with perfect attention, and at the time of his death went back to the spiritual world.





THE FINAL BLOW

Once, long ago, when kings still ruled the earth, there lived a man whose very name struck terror in the hearts of the innocent — Hiranyakashipu. Hiranya means gold, and kashipu means soft bed. These were his only concern, and nothing else mattered.

By attacking smaller kingdoms without mercy, Hiranyakashipu built his empire until Indra, the king of heaven himself, trembled. "Can nothing stop him?" Hiranyakashipu's lust for power and wealth knew no limits. Even after he had conquered all the surrounding lands, Hiranyakashipu turned his eyes toward heaven, as if to warn Indra of his coming.

Hiranyakashipu thought of a plan for expanding his influence to the ends of the universe. "I will perform severe penances," he decided, "and when the Gods see my suffering, they will come and grant me what I most need to conquer Indra and win the throne of heaven — immortality!"

In a remote place deep in the forest, Hiranyakashipu began his penances. He stood on the tips of his toes and stretched his arms up as high as he could reach. His muscles strained and his bones ached, but Hiranyakashipu stretched farther and farther, until his pains were more than any mortal man could bear.

Year after year he held that position. Through bitter cold and scorching heat, he endured the miseries of nature without uttering a word. The demigods grew more and more alarmed, for Hiranyakashipu's penances were beginning to disturb the planets in their orbits. In haste, the demigods approached Lord Brahma, the original person in the universe and the architect of the planetary systems.

"Is there nothing that can be done to stop him?" they begged.

"I shall go myself and put an end to his penances," Brahma replied. So saying, Brahma mounted his swan and flew to the spot where Hiranyakashipu had been performing his penances for 120 years. At first Brahma could not see him. All that remained where Hiranyakashipu once stood was a large anthill. Then Brahma saw that the ants had built their hill around the body of Hiranyakashipu and that they had eaten away his flesh. All that remained was his bones.

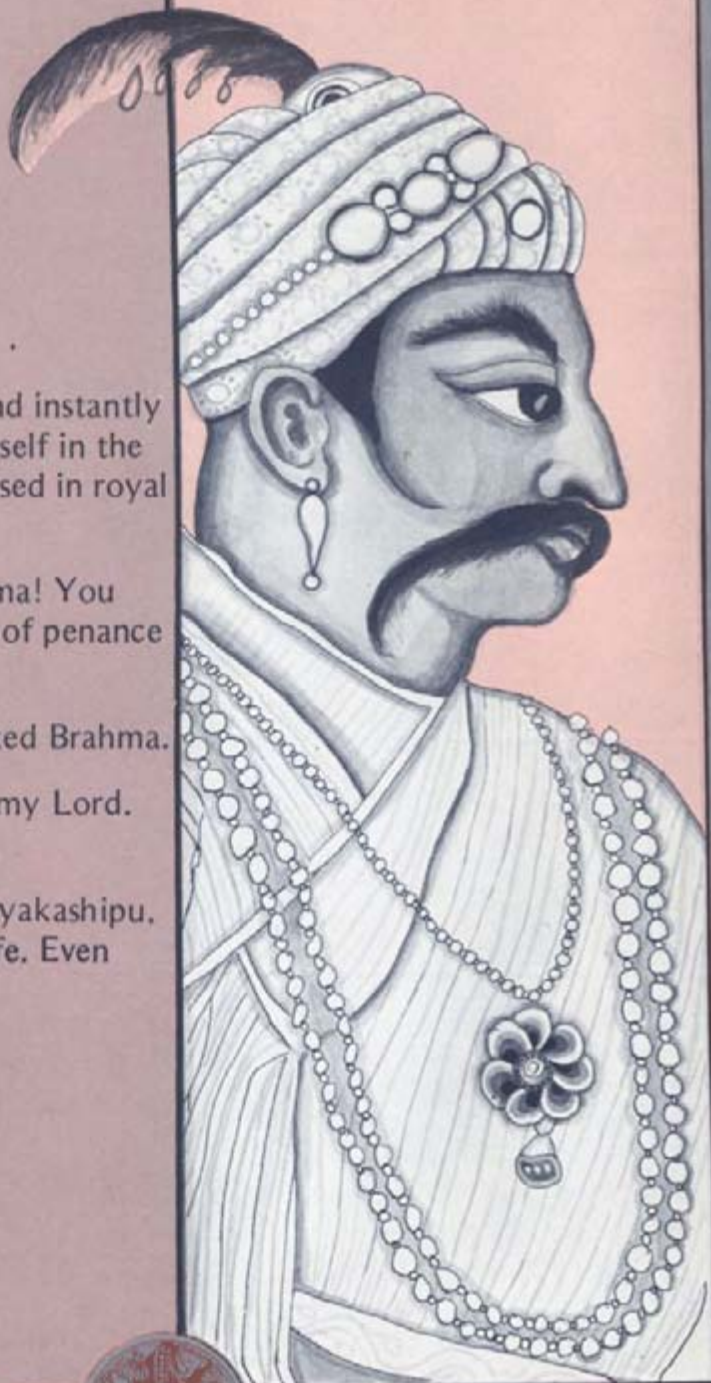
Brahma waved his hand, and instantly Hiranyakashipu found himself in the body of a strong man, dressed in royal garments.

"At last!" he cried. "Brahma! You have come! Now my years of penance will be rewarded!"

"What is it you want?" asked Brahma.

"Grant me just one thing, my Lord. Grant me immortality!"

"Ha! You are a fool, Hiranyakashipu. No one can grant eternal life. Even I must die."





Hiranyakashipu thought of a way to fool Lord Brahma. He said, "Grant that I shall never be killed by man nor beast, nor by any weapon. Grant that I shall never be killed on land, in the water, or in the air. Grant that I shall never be killed during the day or during the night, nor on the inside or the outside of my palace."

"Granted," said Brahma.

"Ho! Now I have my wish despite you Brahma!" cried Hiranyakashipu, and with that he set off to plan his attack on heaven.

With his new powers, Hiranyakashipu began his attacks, and before long he put Indra to flight and seized the palaces of heaven. The demigods were powerless to stop him, and it seemed as if the monster's rule of terror would go unchecked.



Now it happened that while Hiranyakashipu was performing his penances, his wife gave birth to a son. His name was Prahlad, and from his very childhood he was devoted completely to the service of Lord Krishna and wanted nothing else.

Hiranyakashipu had vanquished his enemies in all directions, and he was anxious to have his son share the wealth. He called for Prahlad.

“Well, my son, now you are five years old. What have you learned in school?”

“My dear demonic father, I have learned that nothing is so glorious as service to Krishna, for this and this alone completely satisfies the soul.”

“What! Where have you learned this nonsense?” Hiranyakashipu called for the boy’s teachers and told them to destroy all such ideas in his mind. “Teach him to be a successful materialist like his father!” Hiranyakashipu cried.

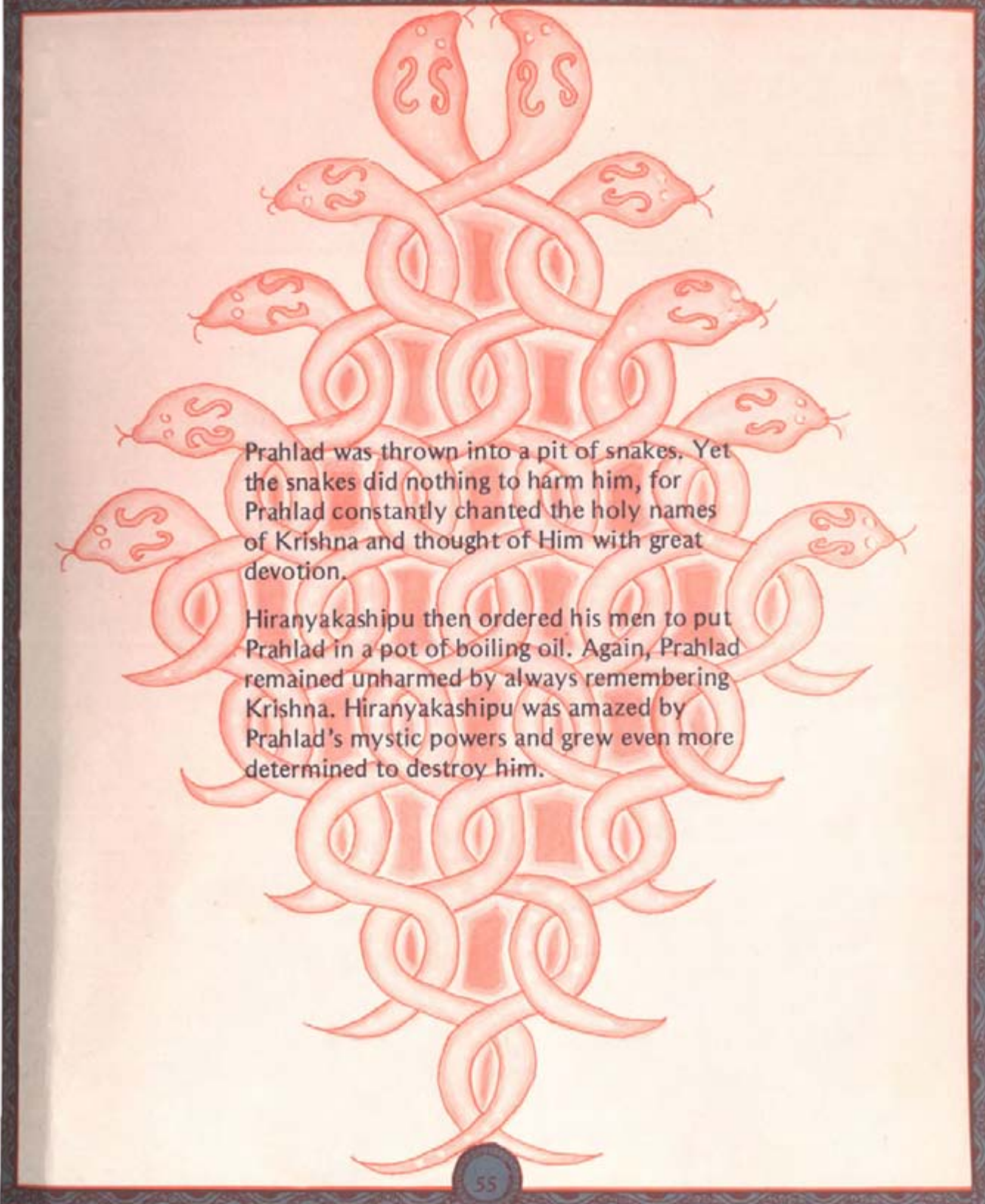
Prahlad was brought back to class. As soon as the teachers left the room, Prahlad taught his classmates how to chant the holy names of God. It was during the chanting that Prahlad’s teachers returned. Greatly distressed, they brought him back again to his father.

“Your behavior is disgraceful, Prahlad! I will give you just one more chance. Tell me what is the most valuable thing in the world.”

Prahlad was unmoved by his father’s threats. “The most valuable thing is hearing and chanting the glories of the Supreme Lord. Everything else dies with the passage of time. Only this is of lasting value.”

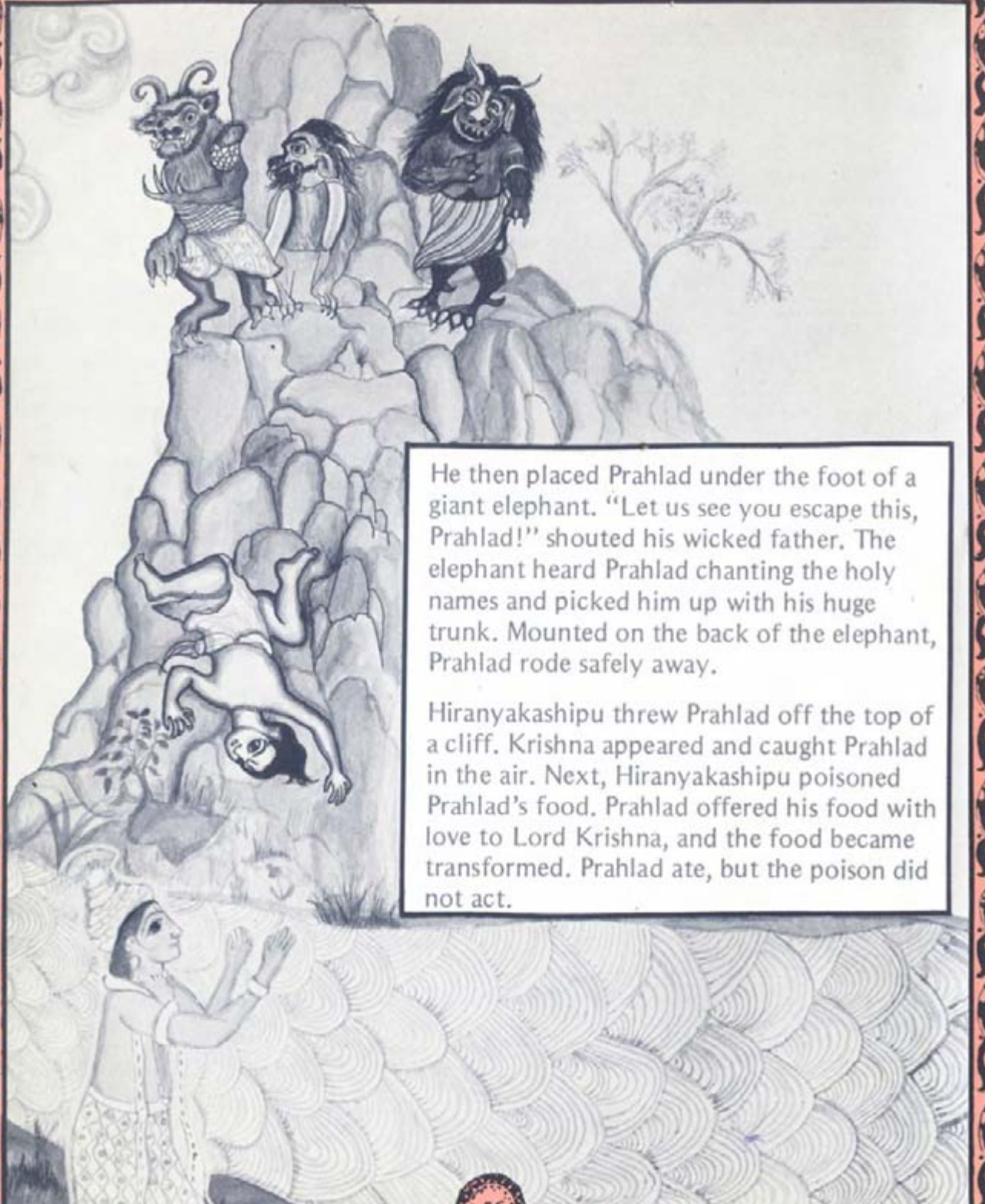
This was more than Hiranyakashipu could bear. “Take him away!”





Prahlad was thrown into a pit of snakes. Yet the snakes did nothing to harm him, for Prahlad constantly chanted the holy names of Krishna and thought of Him with great devotion.

Hiranyakashipu then ordered his men to put Prahlad in a pot of boiling oil. Again, Prahlad remained unharmed by always remembering Krishna. Hiranyakashipu was amazed by Prahlad's mystic powers and grew even more determined to destroy him.



He then placed Prahlad under the foot of a giant elephant. "Let us see you escape this, Prahlad!" shouted his wicked father. The elephant heard Prahlad chanting the holy names and picked him up with his huge trunk. Mounted on the back of the elephant, Prahlad rode safely away.

Hiranyakashipu threw Prahlad off the top of a cliff. Krishna appeared and caught Prahlad in the air. Next, Hiranyakashipu poisoned Prahlad's food. Prahlad offered his food with love to Lord Krishna, and the food became transformed. Prahlad ate, but the poison did not act.



Finally Hiranyakashipu picked the boy up and threw him across the room of the palace. "Where do you get your powers, Prahlad!"

"From the same place you get yours, father," the boy replied. "From Krishna."

"Krishna!" screamed the demon. "Where is this Krishna?"

"He is everywhere, father."



"Everywhere? Is He in this pillar?" Hiranyakashipu yelled, pointing his sword at a large pillar. "We shall see, Prahlad, we shall see."

With that, Hiranyakashipu struck the pillar with his sword. Instantly the pillar burst into pieces, and with a sound as terrible as death itself, Lord Nrisingha sprung from the pillar. Krishna came in the form of a half-man, half-lion to destroy Hiranyakashipu. Krishna in the form of Nrisingha roared so loud that the sound filled the universe. Demons and demigods alike shook with fear.

Nrishinga swooped on Hiranyakashipu and drew him screaming across His lap. In a second Nrishinga tore apart the evil Hiranyakashipu with His nails. The demon thought himself as smart as Lord Krishna, but Krishna proved Himself to be Supremely intelligent. Hiranyakashipu was killed at dusk, so it was neither day nor night. He was killed by Krishna's nails, so it was not a weapon. He was on Krishna's lap, and therefore neither on land, nor in water, nor in the sky. He was killed on the threshold of the palace – neither inside nor outside. Since Krishna appeared as Nrishinga, half-man, half-lion, Hiranyakashipu was not killed by a man or beast. All of Brahma's blessings were fulfilled, and still the demon was slain.



Demigods approached Prahlad and begged him, "Go to Lord Nrishinga. Only you can appease Him!"

Prahlad humbly approached Nrishinga and offered Him prayers and a garland.

"My dear Prahlad," said Nrishinga, "You are My pure devotee. You may ask from Me anything you like."

"I do not want anything for myself," said Prahlad. "Just to serve You is itself the greatest treasure. But I beg that You free my father from his sinful deeds."

"Dear Prahlad," replied Nrishinga, "because you are My pure devotee, twenty-one generations of your family, past and future, are all freed from their sinful acts. Do not fear."

Prahlad grew to be a great and righteous king. Where his father once struck terror, Prahlad brought peace and prosperity.





