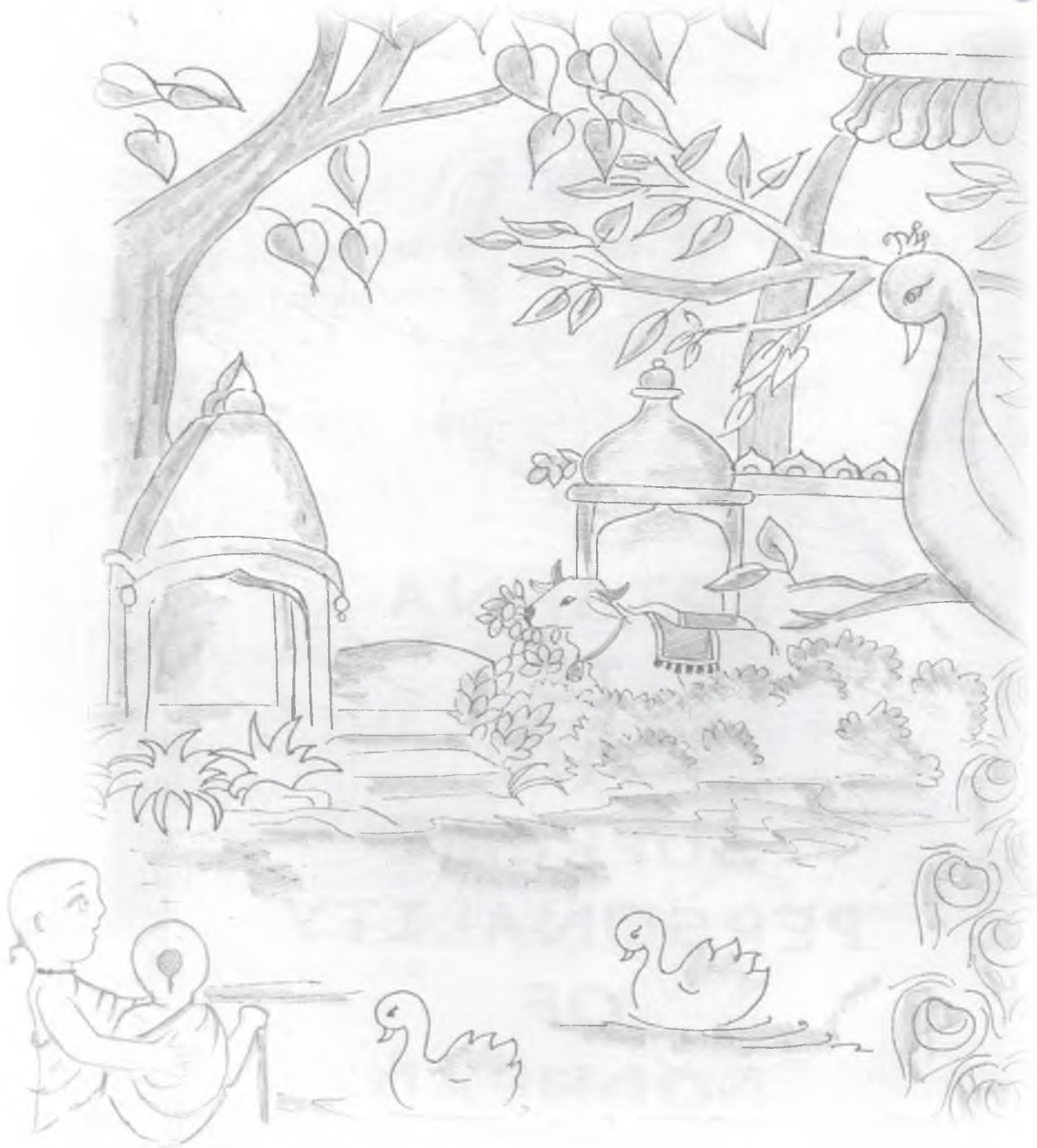


4 Sakshi Gopal

Many many years ago in Vidyanagar in South India, there lived two brahmanas who set off for a pilgrimage at the same time. They made a long tour of different holy places like Gaya, Kashi and Prayag. Finally they came to Mathura.



Mathura is the place where Lord Krishna appeared five thousand years ago. The river Yamuna flows here. There are twelve forests situated on the banks of the Yamuna.

One of the forests is named Vrindavana. The Vrindavana forest stretches from the town of Vrindavana up to Nanda-grama and Varsana.

The village of Panchakashi is situated here. In that village there was a big temple where Lord Gopal was worshiped in a very opulent way.

These two brahmanas visited all these holy places. Now, one of the brahmanas was rich and elderly and the other was young and quite poor.

The younger brahmana helped the elderly brahmana throughout the pilgrimage. He tried to make the journey comfortable for him in every possible way. He was even ready to do menial service.

The two brahmanas bathed at different bathing places along the river Yamuna, such as Keshi ghata and Kaliya ghata. Then they arrived at the temple of Gopal.

They stayed there for a few days. The beauty of the Gopal deity attracted their hearts and made them feel very happy.

One day as they were standing in front of the Lord, the older brahmana said, "You have served me so nicely during this pilgrimage. Due to your assistance I have been able to travel comfortably without feeling tired. Even my own son has never served me so well. I would like to repay you in some way. Therefore I promise to give you my daughter in charity."



The younger brahmana was surprised to hear these words. He replied, "My dear sir, you are saying something quite unusual. Such things never happen. You are from a rich aristocratic family and you are well educated. I am a simple brahmana with no decent education and no wealth. Dear sir, I am not a suitable bridegroom for your daughter, I rendered service to you only for the satisfaction of Krishna. It is said that the Lord is pleased when we serve the brahmanas."

But the older brahmana was not ready to listen. "My dear boy, please do not doubt me. I will surely give my daughter to you in charity. I have given my word."

The younger brahmana tried once more to convince the older one. "You have a wife and sons and you have a large circle of relatives and friends. You will have to take permission from all of them. Just consider the story of Queen Rukmini and her father Bhishmaka."

The older brahmana had made up his mind. "My daughter is my own property. Therefore I can do what I want and no one can stop me. I don't care about anyone else's opinion. Just accept my proposal."

"If you have decided to give your daughter to me, then say so before the Gopal deity."

The elderly brahmana made a solemn promise in front of the Gopal deity to give his daughter in charity to the younger brahmana.

"My dear Lord, You are the witness. I shall call You to testify, if it is necessary, later on."

Soon afterwards the brahmanas set off on their return journey. As before, the younger brahmana served the elder one very sincerely. After returning to Vidyanagar, both brahmanas went

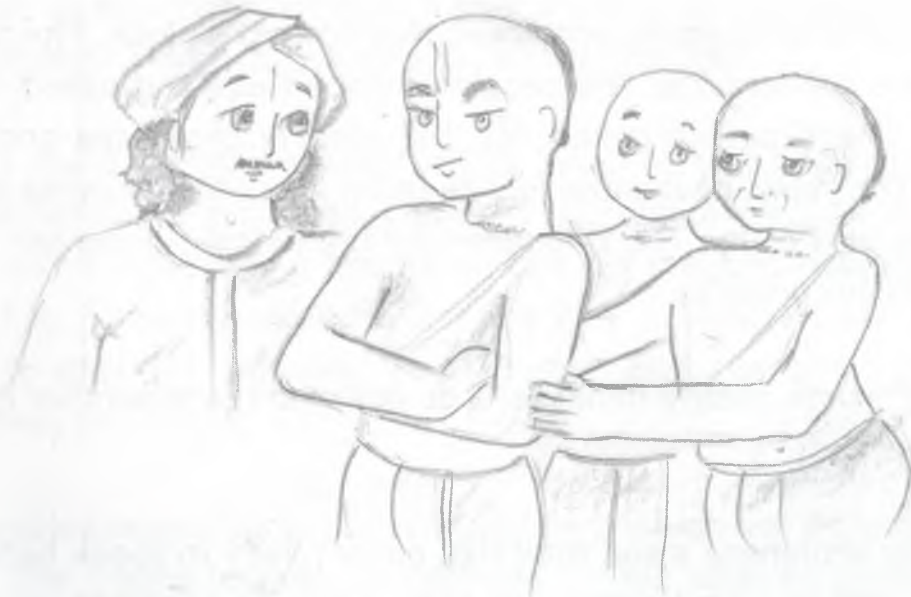
to their respective homes.

Some days passed by and the elderly brahmana started feeling anxious. He thought to himself, "I have given my word to a brahmana in a holy place. The time has come to fulfil my promise."

A few days later the elderly brahmana called for a meeting of all his relatives and friends. He told them the whole story. The friends and relatives were shocked. They started protesting and expressing their disapproval.

"If you give your daughter to a poor person the name of our family will be ruined", said a friend. "People will laugh at you", said another.

The elderly brahmana explained that he had made a promise in a holy place while on pilgrimage. Therefore he wanted to keep his word under any circumstance. The relatives did not agree. "If you give your daughter to that boy we shall cut off all connections with you".



His wife said, "If such a thing happens, we shall take poison and die."

The elderly brahmana said, "If I do not give my daughter to the young brahmana he will call Gopalji as a witness."

His son said, "The deity may be a witness but He is in a distant place. How can He come here to bear witness against you? When the young brahmana comes here, just say that you do not remember what you said. I will handle the situation."

The elderly brahmana was quite confused and started to pray to Lord Gopal to help him.

The next day the young brahmana came to the elderly brahmana's house. He bowed down and spoke in a humble voice, "You have promised to give your daughter in charity to me. Why are you quiet? Is there some problem?" The elderly brahmana remained silent. In the meanwhile his son came running out with a stick in his hand. "Oh what a fool! You want to marry my sister? You are just like a dwarf who wants to catch the moon."

Seeing the stick, the young brahmana fled from the place. The next day however, he gathered all the people of the village and asked them to help him. These people called for the elderly brahmana and held a meeting. The young brahmana told them all about the promise made by the elderly brahmana. The villagers told the elderly brahmana that he should fulfil his promise.

"My dear friends, please hear me, I do not exactly remember making a promise like that."

The elderly brahmana's son took this opportunity to speak before the assembly, "While on pilgrimage to the various holy places, my father

carried much money. Seeing the money, this rogue stole it and gave my father some herbs to make him forget everything. Now he is claiming that my father promised to give him his daughter in charity. All of you assembled gentlemen, please judge whether this poor brahmana is a worthy husband for my father's daughter."

Hearing this story the people gathered there started having doubts. They were thinking that it was possible for a poor person to be tempted by riches and also give up religious principles.

The young brahmana begged the village people to believe him and not to listen to the son of the elderly brahmana. He explained to them how the elderly brahmana had insisted upon making this promise in front of the deity.

Finally he said, "I have called upon a great personality in this transaction. I have asked Him to be my witness. The entire world accepts the words of the Supreme Personality of Godhead."

Hearing these words, the elderly brahmana said, "If Gopal personally comes here to serve as a witness, I shall surely give my daughter to the young brahmana." His son also agreed to this condition.

Krishna is the Supersoul present in the heart of all living entities. He knows the desires of everyone. The elderly brahmana was willing to give his daughter to the young brahmana but his son and relatives were stopping him. The son was an atheist and very cunning. He was thinking of ways to stop the wedding. Now Krishna had created a situation wherein they all agreed.

The assembled people prepared an agreement which was signed by both parties. The young brahmana declared, "This elderly brahmana is certainly truthful and is following religious principles. He had no desire

to break his promise, but fearing that his relatives would commit suicide, he deviated from the truth. I shall call the Supreme Personality of Godhead as a witness. Thus I shall keep his promise intact. "

Some villagers started disbelieving and joking. Some said, "Who does he think he is? He wants the Lord Himself to come and bear witness." "Have you ever heard of such a thing?" said another.

After the meeting the young brahmana set off for Vrindavana. He bowed down to the deity and narrated the whole story in full detail. He prayed to the Lord, "My dear Lord, I don't want to become happy by marrying a rich girl. I am thinking that the brahmana has broken his promise and will have to suffer the reaction. You are very merciful. Therefore kindly protect the religious principles of us two brahmanas. Please bear witness in this case and help us."

Lord Krishna said, "My dear brahmana, please go back to your home and call a meeting of all the men. In that meeting, just try to remember Me. I shall certainly appear there and at that time I shall protect the honour of both of you brahmanas."

The brahmana said, "My Lord, even if You appear as a four handed Vishnu deity, none of these people will believe Your words. Only if You go there in this form of Gopal and speak Yourself will these people be satisfied."

Krishna said, "I've never heard of a deity walking from one place to another."

The brahmana replied, "That is true, but how is it that You are speaking to me although You are a deity? My dear Lord, You are the son of Nanda Maharaja. If you can talk, you can walk as well. "

Shri Gopalji smiled and said, "My dear brahmana, just listen to Me. I shall walk behind you and in this way I shall go with you. Do not try to see Me by turning around. As soon as you see Me, I shall remain stationary in that very place. You will know that I am walking behind you by the sound of my ankle bells. Cook one kilo of rice daily and offer it, I shall eat that rice and follow behind you."

The next day, the brahmana set off and Gopal followed him, step by step. The brahmana was very happy to hear the tinkling sounds of His ankle bells. The young brahmana walked in this way till he reached his town. Along the way, he offered rice to the Gopal deity.



When he neared his own village, he began to think, "I have now come to my village and I shall go to my home and tell all the people that the witness has arrived." The brahmana thought, if the people didn't directly see the Gopal deity, they would not believe that He had arrived. Thinking thus, he turned to look back. He saw the Supreme Personality

of Godhead, smiling. The Lord said, "Now you can go back home. I shall stay here and shall not leave."

The young brahmana went to the town and informed all the people about Gopal's arrival. Everyone was wonderstruck.

All the villagers gathered there and bowed with great respect. The people were attracted to the beauty of Gopal.

The elderly brahmana was very pleased and fell like a stick in front of the deity.

In the presence of all the people, Krishna bore testimony that the elderly brahmana had offered his daughter in charity to the young brahmana.

After the marriage ceremony was performed, the Lord said, "You two brahmanas are my eternal servants birth after birth. I am very pleased with the truthfulness of both of you. Now please ask for a benediction."

The brahmanas begged for a benediction with great happiness. "Please remain here so that people all over the world will know how merciful You are to Your servants." Eventually the king heard this wonderful story and came to see Gopal and was very satisfied. He constructed a nice temple. The Gopal deity was worshipped in the town of Vidyanagar for a long time and is famous as 'Sakshi Gopal'.



Activity Time

Discussion:

Mango Story



There was once a spiritual master who lived in a simple cottage near the edge of a forest. He had a number of disciples who lived with him. The guru took great pains to teach the young boys to become good devotees. He taught them about Deity worship, chanting, reading from Holy Scriptures and other aspects of devotional service. The boys were eager to learn and were always ready to serve their spiritual master.



One day the spiritual master called all his disciples. He made them all sit and placed a big ripe mango in each boy's hand.



"Now I want all of you to take this mango and go to a solitary place and eat it up. Remember, you have to eat it in a place where no one can possibly see you. When you have finished this task, come back here."





"Yes Guruji", replied the boys eager to please their spiritual master.




A few boys ran away quickly. Some waited and thought about the task, a few recited some prayer and then walked away.









One boy went into a dark cave. Two boys walked into the forest and climbed tall trees, some crawled under the bushes. After some time all the boys had eaten the mangoes and returned.





They shared their experience with their Guru. He smiled and said nothing.




Finally, only one boy remained. It had become dark but there was no sign of him. The boy had not returned even by mid-night. Everyone went to sleep. The Guru chanted softly on his beads, waiting for his disciple.



Next morning when the disciples got up they saw their missing friend. His clothes were crumpled. He looked tired. It seemed as if he had been walking all night. They were surprised to see that he still had the mango in his hand.



"O Spiritual Master, I am sorry. I could not follow your instructions. I searched everywhere but could not find a single place where I could eat the mango without anyone watching."



What does the little boy's answer tell you?



Think :-

I know my mind and feelings too
But I can't understand what's happening to you
There is someone who is present in trees, animals, plants & birds
He knows all our thoughts, deeds and words
As Paramatma, He is present in all of our hearts
He is the Supreme whole and we are His parts
His knowledge has no beginning or end
He is our dear most well wishing friend



Word Search

There are 13 witnesses who are watching us all the time. Can you spot them? The name of some witnesses appear more than once. Have fun finding as many as you can.



D	I	R	E	C	T	I	O	N	S
E	S	K	Y	N	O	O	M	A	U
M	K	Y	L	A	T	H	G	I	N
I	Y	L	A	N	D	F	I	R	E
G	N	I	N	E	V	E	O	Y	R
O	Y	A	D	R	N	U	S	K	I
D	D	E	M	I	G	O	D	S	F
S	K	Y	O	F	M	O	O	N	Y
W	A	T	E	R	E	T	A	W	K
W	L	U	O	S	R	E	P	U	S

Sun, Moon Day, Night, Evening, Supersoul, Land, Water,
Sky, Fire, Air, Demigods, Directions



Musical Dhams

Let's play a fun game which will remind us of the different holy places.

Make circles of thick rope or long scarves

Set them in a circle on the floor.

Name each circle with a name of a holy dham like 'Dwaraka,' 'Jagannatha Puri', 'Vrindavana', 'Mayapur'.....

It's a lot of fun if there is one circle less than the number of children.

As the music starts everyone walks around the dhams.

Stop the music after a minute and everyone quickly jumps inside one of the holy dhams.

Since there is one circle less, two children will squeeze together into one holy dham.

Remove one of the dhams and repeat the game.

Each time one dham is removed more children will need to squeeze together.

Whoever can't fit in to the circle is out.

Have fun!