

The Story of Dhruva

Manu, the son of Bramha had two sons: Priyavrat and Uttanpad.

In due course, Uttanpad became the king. He was a good and dutiful monarch, well loved by his subjects. He had two wives. The elder one was Suniti and the younger one was Suruchi. The only defect in the king's flawless character was that he loved Suruchi more and was guided in everything he did by her. So though he was a noble king, he was often guided by his younger wife into doing things that were not worthy of him.

In spite of all this Suruchi was jealous of Suniti. She wanted no rivals in the palace. She planned and plotted against the elder queen. She made constant complaints against Suniti and said many false things about her to the king. At last in anger the king asked Suniti to leave the palace and go away.

Suniti's pride would not allow her to go back to her parents. So she went away to the forest and began living the life of an ascetic. She began to spend all her time in prayers.

One day the king went out hunting. He began chasing a deer. For a long time he followed the animal and soon the king's companions lost track of him. When at last the king was tired he stopped, and found that he was alone. The sun had already set and Uttanpad realised that he had lost his way. Far away he saw a little earthen lamp flickering softly in the breeze.



He went nearer and saw that it was a roughly built hut. When he called, a woman came out and to his surprise it was Suniti. He was very happy to see her. Suniti, too, was overjoyed at this unexpected meeting with her husband. She gave her lord a warm welcome. The king stayed with her for a few days and realised what a good and sensible person she was. He requested her to go back to the palace with

him but the queen refused. So the king returned to the palace alone.

After about a year, Uttanpad came to know that Suniti had given birth to a son. He sent word to her that at least for the sake of the child she should return to the palace. Because a prince had to learn many things and it was not desirable that he should be brought up like a hermit in the forest. This time Suniti agreed and returned to the palace. Shortly afterwards, Suruchi too gave birth to a son.

Suniti's son was Dhruva and Suruchi's son was called Uttama. Both the boys were fond of each other and played together all the time but Suruchi's behaviour towards the elder queen became worse. She hated both, Suniti and Dhruva, and tried to humiliate them whenever she got a chance. The elder queen was miserable but there was nothing she could do.

Dhruva was the elder son but Suruchi was determined that he should never become the king. "Uttama is the rightful heir to the throne," she said, "and I shall see that he becomes the king."

One day Dhruva and Uttama were playing quietly. Uttanpad had finished his work. He sat down and watched the children play. Suddenly Uttama saw the king and came running, scrambled up and sat on the

king's lap. Seeing this Dhruva also ran upto the king and tried to get onto his lap. Just then Suruchi came in and pulled Dhruva away roughly "You have no



right to sit on the king's lap," she said. "Uttama is the future king and only he has the right to sit there."

Dhruva felt very bad. "Can I never sit on my father's lap?" he sobbed. "No," said Suruchi angrily. "If you want to sit on your father's lap or want to be the king you have to be born as my son. Go and pray to Lord Vishnu, that you may be born as my son in your next life."

Dhruva was stunned by Suruchi's cruel words. Without a word further he went to his mother crying

bitterly. Suniti took her son in her arms and tried to make him forget his stepmother's insulting remarks, but Dhruva remained inconsolable. "Tell me mother," he said, "is it true that, if I ask Lord Vishnu to give me the right to sit on my father's lap, he will grant my wish?"

"Yes son," said Suniti, "your stepmother is right. Only Lord Vishnu can fulfill your heart's desire."

Now Dhruva's mind was filled with many questions. He asked again, "Mother, why did



she say that if I was to sit on the throne I should have been born as her son?" Suniti told him sadly that it was because Uttanpad loved Suruchi more.

Dhruva heard this and clung to his mother saying, "I am lucky to have you as my mother," but Suniti only shook her head sorrowfully. She said, "You would have been fortunate if you had been born as Suruchi's son. Then no one would have stopped you from sitting on your father's lap and you would have been the heir to the throne as well."

For the first time in his little life Dhruva realised that there was someone who was even more important than his father. He asked his mother if Lord Vishnu was indeed so powerful that he could make the impossible possible.

His mother answered with profound faith, "There is nothing that the Lord cannot do." Dhruva was filled with deep reverence for the all powerful Lord Vishnu and he told his mother that he had decided to go out in search of the Lord.

Suniti's heart was filled with apprehension when she heard this. Dhruva was only five years old and too young

to leave home. In fact, little Dhruva had been brought up amidst luxuries and had never known any hardship. She explained to him that there was a time for everything and that he was too young to think of meditation. "You can think of these things when you are a young man," she told him.

But Dhruva was not convinced. He had made up his mind and nothing could stop him now. He knew that his mother's mind was filled with all sorts of unknown fears and she would never grant him permission to go away.

So one night when everyone was asleep, he left home and went away. This little boy who had never



wandered farther than his palace garden stepped out of the palace, into the thick forest unafraid of the dangers that lurked there. His mind and his heart was filled with great devotion as he walked on, wondering who would guide him on the right path.

When Suniti woke up and saw that her son had gone, she was filled with desolation and dread. How would a little boy who had never walked a step unescorted, find his way alone ? How would he protect himself against the wild beasts of the forest unarmed ? The little child who had never walked except on the soft carpets, how would he walk barefooted on hot and dusty paths ! She had always cooked the best food for her son and fed him with her own hands ; what would Dhruva eat in the forest ? Where would he find food ? Such questions kept worrying Suniti and she wanted to send some guards and bring back Dhruva. But better sense prevailed. "My son has gone in search of Lord Vishnu," she thought. "Then how can He fail to protect him ?"

So Suniti left her child's fate in the hands of Lord Vishnu and began to spend all her time praying to the Lord to guard Dhruva.

Dhruva, on the other hand, walked on, totally unaware of the thorns pricking his feet, the hot sun,

rain or hailstorm. His mind was filled with the thought of Vishnu and he wondered how and where he could find Him. In the heart of the dense forest he found the ashram of seven hermits. Dhruva touched the feet of the hermits and said, "I am the son of Uttanpad, I have left home in search of Vishnu. Oh great and wise sages, help me in fulfilling my desire. I am young and know not how to find the Lord."

The sages were pleased with the boy's devotion. They asked him, "You are the son of the greatest king on earth, all the pleasures of the world are within your reach, you are not likely to be denied anything in life yet why have you forsaken everything just to wander about in the forest?" asked one hermit. Another said, "This sort of a life is not for a prince. It is for those whose desires have not been fulfilled, who have been disillusioned and are tired of life."

So Dhruva told the venerable sages about his humiliation.

The sages were moved when they heard the little boy's story. "What is a mere throne?" they consoled him. "If you please God, He will grant you that place in the universe which is above all places."

Dhruva bowed to them and the seven sages blessed him and he moved on again.

After covering some distance Dhruva met a young hermit. He held a musical instrument in his hand and walked along singing a song in praise of the Lord. He was no other than the heavenly sage Narada, who, of course, knew all about Dhruva. He tried to dissuade the little boy from his mission by telling him that it was silly of him to take Suruchi's words so seriously. "Go back home, little boy. When you are old enough, you can go in search of Lord Vishnu."

But Dhruva was determined and nothing could change his mind. He asked Narada why the sage wished to turn him away since he himself was the messenger of the Lord and was always singing hymns in praise of Him.

The sage now spoke gently to the little boy, "You have set before you a difficult task, my son. Many big sages have failed in achieving what you have decided to achieve. You are young and tender and there are too many difficulties in your way, that is why I am advising you to go back now."

But Narada's words had no effect on Dhruva. "I am the son of the greatest Kshatriya king, how can I turn back defeated?" said Dhruva. He folded his hands and begged the sage humbly to help him in his search for Lord Vishnu.



Pleased with the boy's determination Narada decided to help the boy. He told him to go to the Madhuvan forest, bathe in the river Jamuna and after clearing his mind of all worldly thoughts, to begin chanting the name of Narayana. "Narayana is another name of the Lord

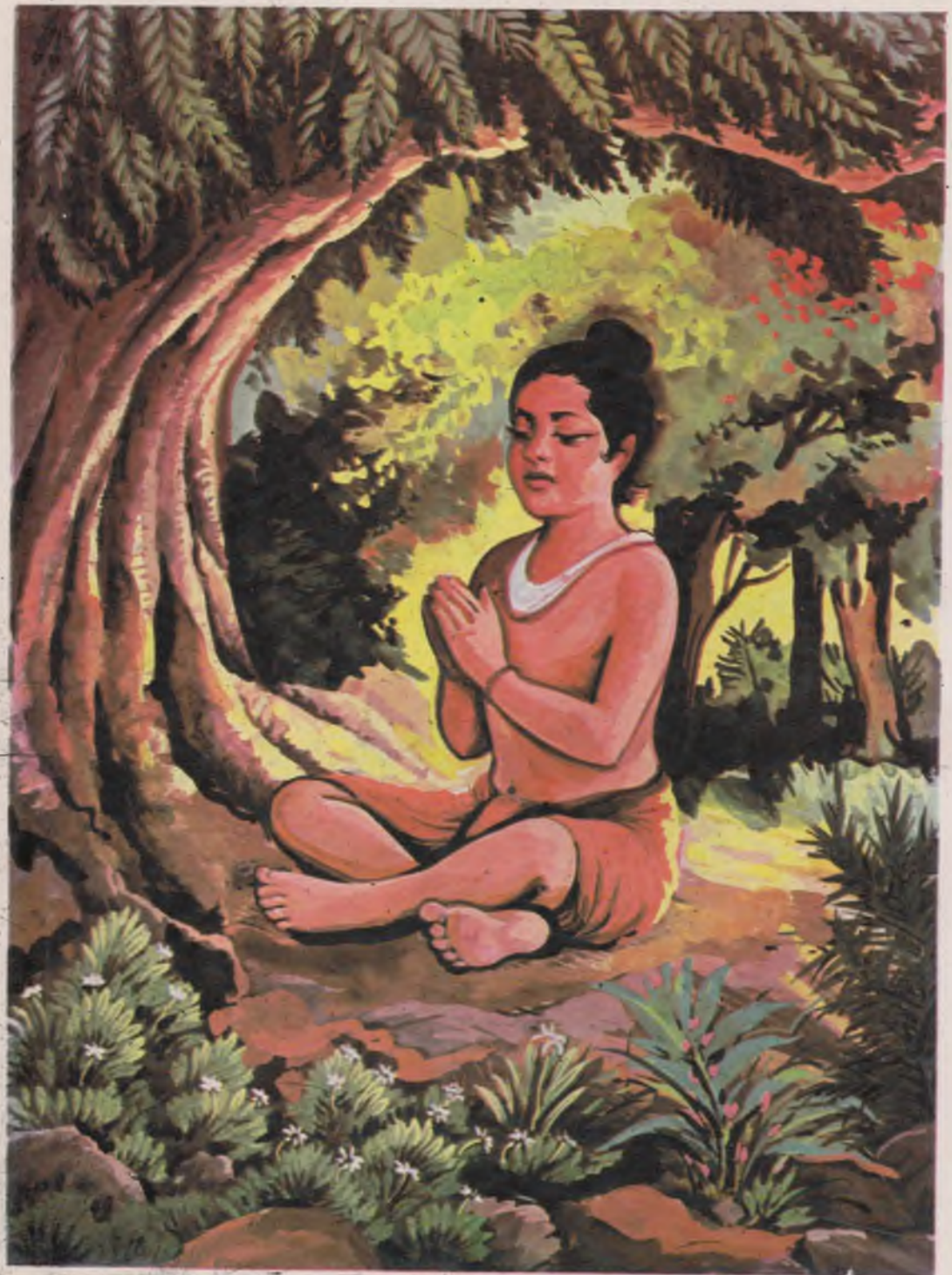
and you should go on chanting his name till he appears before you," said Narada. "You will see him covered in an aura of light holding a disc, a conch shell, a mace and a lotus in his four hands. Once he appears before you he will fulfill all your desires." After seeing Dhruva off on his way, Narada decided to visit Dhruva's parents.

When Suruchi had rebuked Dhruva for sitting on his father's lap, Uttanpad had remained silent. But later the king had been filled with remorse and shame at his own weakness and his inability to stand up against the unreasonable demands of his second wife.

Later, when he learnt that Dhruva had left home and gone into the forest his heart was filled with bitter remorse ; for Dhruva was too young and the king blamed himself for letting the boy into the forest alone to face innumerable dangers. Uttanpad could not forgive himself and kept praying to God to send Dhruva back to him.

Suniti, too, spent all her time praying to God for her son's well-being. Narada knew all this, so he paid the royal couple a visit to set their minds at rest.

King Uttanpad welcomed the sage and when Narada asked him why he looked so downcast, the king confessed



to Narada of his weakness and how he was responsible for Dhruva's leaving home. He also told Narada how he could not find a moment of peace since his son left home.

Narada heard all this and consoled the king. "Do not worry for your son's safety," he said. "One who goes out in search of God with faith in Him will certainly be looked after by Vishnu."

The king bowed his head and listened to the sage. Narada further told him that though his act was unforgivable yet he should not regret it. "Your son will achieve in six months what great sages have not been able to achieve in a life-time. Be at peace, for your son is destined to be great ; greater than any other mortal." So saying Narada disappeared.

Meanwhile, Dhruva did as he was told. He bathed in the river Jamuna and sat down in the shade of a tree and began to chant the name of Vishnu.

Dhruva ate wild fruits and berries on every third day. The first month passed like this. In the second month he ate only a few leaves and drank water on every sixth day. Another month passed and the little boy was now drinking only water and that too after every nine days. Thus when three months passed and nothing happened Dhruva began a complete fast. He felt no

hunger, thirst or discomfort for he had forgotten everything, even his body. His mind was filled with only the thought of God. He kept calling God again and again.

In the fourth month Dhruva even gave up breathing. He stood on one foot and continued to meditate. When the body stopped breathing there was a great calamity on earth. The devtas tried to shake the boy out of his meditation. They came in the form of terrible demons and monsters and tried to frighten the little boy. When nothing worked, one of them took the form of Suniti. She came crying, begging him to go back. All the attempts of the devtas to distract the little boy were futile.

In desperation they went to Lord Vishnu. Vishnu of course, knew everything. He smiled and told the devtas to be at peace. "The boy's devotion is too powerful even for me to resist any longer." So Vishnu appeared before Dhruva. But Dhruva was by now so lost in his meditation that he remained unaware of the Lord's presence. At last Vishnu spoke with love and tenderness, "Open your eyes, son, I am here."

Dhruva opened his eyes and saw Vishnu standing in an aura of light, smiling at him. The boy was overwhelmed by the presence and fell at Vishnu's feet. He could not say a word. Dhruva's heart was filled with

overwhelming devotion. He wanted to sing a hymn in praise of God, but he was only five and no one had taught him any hymns. Dhruva touched the feet of Vishnu and suddenly his heart was filled with a glorious joy and peace. All at once all the hymns flashed into his mind and he began reciting them to welcome God.

“I am pleased with your devotion,” said Vishnu. “You shall have what you desire.”

But Dhruva’s heart was cleansed now and there was no worldly desire left. His only desire now was to serve God. He prostrated himself before Vishnu and said, “I want no boon, I want no kingdom. I want only Your blessing.” Vishnu smiled at the little boy and said, “Nevertheless all your wishes will be fulfilled. You shall be king.”

Vishnu spoke again, “You shall also have a place of your own, where no one else has ever been before. It will be called Dhruva star.”

Saying this Vishnu vanished, and Dhruva began his homeward journey. He walked with heavy steps for he felt rejected by God. He had no desire to go back to his old life or to become king. All that he desired now was to spend his time in meditation and prayers. All at once he heard a voice telling him to cheer up, “You are going to sit on the throne because it is my



wish, so return to your parents with a light heart. You can serve me even as a king.” The news of Dhruva’s return spread like wildfire. Uttanpad took his own diamond necklace and presented it to the first messenger who gave him the good news. The king called for his magnificent white elephant, the queens called for their palanquins and a huge joyful procession set out to receive Dhruva. As they reached the outskirts of the town they saw Dhruva. The king got down from his elephant and rushed towards his son, picked him up and held him in a tight embrace. Tears of joy trickled down his cheeks. Suniti rushed



out of her palanquin and hugged her son again, smiling and crying at the same time. Suruchi, too, got

down slowly from her palanquin with her eyes downcast looking repentant and ashamed. She took Dhruva in her arms and she was filled with joy and love. She felt as if suddenly all her jealousy, pride and meanness were washed away and she felt purified.

Dhruva and Uttama began to grow together and learnt everything that young princes had to learn. When Dhruva grew up, his parents got him married.

At the appropriate time Uttanpad crowned Dhruva as the king.

Dhruva was a wonderful monarch. He was just and kind, brave and fearless. He looked after his people like a father and his subjects loved him dearly. But amidst all his work Dhruva never forgot Lord Vishnu and spent a large part of each day in meditation.

After many, many years of rule Dhruva felt that he had fulfilled all his earthly duties and it was time for him to join his Creator.

He sat down for his last meditation. He called to Vishnu to take him away. There was the sound of thunder and lightning as a dazzling golden chariot came down from heaven. People heard a voice telling Dhruva, "I have come to take you away. Your place now is in heaven amongst the stars. You shall live forever as

Dhruva star which will be above all other constellations.”

Dhruva ascended the chariot, and escorted by the seven hermits reached Indralok where he became the Dhruva star or the Pole Star, which is the most important of all stars, because for centuries people have been guided in their journeys by this star. When travellers went astray it was the Pole Star twinkling in the North that showed them the way and guided them to safety.

On any clear night you can see the Pole Star in the sky surrounded by a cluster of seven stars known generally as the Great Bear. They are the seven hermits who had helped Dhruva in the forest.