

## Chapter 25. The Sage's Compassion

The father's pointed words inflicted great pain on Sringeri's tender heart. They fell like sword thrusts or hammer strokes. The poor boy could bear them no longer, and he fell on the floor, grasped his father's feet, and wailed, "Father pardon me. I was overcome by anger that the king himself should behave so outrageously, so insolently, so irreverently, so inhumanely. I couldn't control my resentment at the insult hurled on you. It isn't proper for a king to behave like this, in this most inappropriate manner, having come to a hermitage; isn't that right?"

### Destiny destroys reins of reason

Seeing his plight, Samika, the ascetic, took the son beside him and said, "Son, the compulsion of the moment is inescapable. The dictates of reason are often brushed aside by man, due to that compulsion. The drag of destiny will destroy the reins of reason. The force of the moment faces man with all its power, and he cannot but yield. This king is a staunch theist, a deep devotee. He has earned spiritual splendour. He is established in moral behaviour. He is the lord of all the regions; his fame has pervaded all the three worlds. He is served always by thousands of loyal men and minds. When he leaves his mansion and moves out, he is accompanied by many guards who await his least command with folded hands and eyes fixed on him, so that they may win his favour by executing them to his satisfaction. As soon as he enters a kingdom, its rule accords him a glorious welcome, with magnificent hospitality and respectful homage.

"A person accustomed to this rich routine was naturally shocked when he didn't receive any sign of welcome here; he wasn't even recognised and respected. The neglect was so serious that he didn't even get a cup of water to alleviate his thirst. He was torn by pangs of hunger and humiliation, for there was no response, even though he called out many times. So, unable to bear the agony and shock, he was led to commit this improper act. Of course, it is a fault, but just for this small misdemeanour, when you reacted so harshly, you brought irreparable damage to the entire community of ascetics and hermits. Alas! What a terrible calamity you have called down!"

The aged hermit closed his eyes and sat silently for a while, seeking some means by which the king could be saved from the curse. Finding none, and realising that God alone could set such things right, since He is all-powerful and all-knowing, he prayed with all his heart. "O, refuge of all the worlds! This immature little boy, with no knowledge of right and wrong, of what one's duty is and what is not, prompted by ignorance, has committed this great blunder, harmful to the king. Pardon or punish this boy, but promote the welfare of the king."

The hermit opened his eyes. He saw the ascetics and the young comrades of his son who stood around him. In sadness, he told them, "Did you notice the injury that my son has perpetrated? It isn't right that we hermits should insult and injure the king, who is the guardian and guide of humanity, is it? Therefore, I request you all to pray God that the king should come to no harm and that only auspicious things be added unto him."

When the sage Samika directed them thus, an aged monk rose. He was the very picture of peace and resignation; "Great Soul! You are showering such profuse grace on this king. The person who pronounced this curse is your own son. Surely your spiritual attainments are much higher than your son's, and you can achieve anything, through them. Why are you so much concerned about the curse that this boy hurled at the king? You can make it ineffective, can't you?"

At this, the rest of the group, the elders and the young ones, exclaimed, “True, true; listen to our prayers and pardon this boy. Bring about the welfare of the king and save him from harm.”

### **Samika decides to inform the king of the curse**

The sage Samika smiled. He closed his eyes and saw with his inner *yogic* vision the past and future of the king. He examined whether his present was conditioned by his past or by his future. He found that Parikshith had to suffer the poisonous bite of the cobra, Takshaka; this was his destiny. He felt that trying to save him from this end would be going counter to the dictates of divinity. He realised that the king’s misbehaviour and his son’s angry reaction of his son were both consequences of that compulsive urge. He concluded that only God, the artificer of all resolutions and achievements, could modify events any effort on his part would amount to an exhibition of egotism.

He knew that egotism is the deadliest foe of hermits. Yet, he didn’t amass his undoubted strength against it and destroy it completely. He decided to render what little help he could to the unfortunate king of the realm.

Opening his eyes, he looked on all four sides to select a clever disciple of his from among the gathering. At last, he called one student to him and said, “You must go immediately to Hasthinapura and return; prepare yourself for the journey and come to me again.”

The student replied, “I am ever ready to obey your command; what have I to do with preparations? I am ever prepared. I can start this very moment; tell me what to do there.” With these words, he fell at his feet and offered his obeisance.

The sage rose and took the student into the inner apartment. He told him in detail all the points that he had to inform the king. Then, the student fell at the master’s feet and set out toward the capital.

### **The messenger meets the repenting Parikshith**

Meanwhile, the king had reached his palace. After a short rest, he awoke to a realisation of the enormity of the wrong that he had done at the hermitage. “Alas, into what depths of foulness did my mind fall! It is indeed a heinous sin that I, the emperor, should cast an insult on that ascetic.” He lamented to himself. “How can I make amends for this crime? should I go to the hermitage and plead for pardon? Or should I offer my head to bear the punishment that is my due? What exactly is my duty now?” He struggled with himself for an answer.

Just then, a guard came to the door and stood silently, with folded arms. He asked him why he had come. The man said, “A student from a hermitage has come and is waiting for audience. He says that he has been sent by the sage Samika and that his message is very urgent and important. He is in great hurry. I await royal orders.”

When these words fell on his ears, the bed of jasmine flowers on which he was reclining appeared to have been transformed into a bed of snakes with fiery tongues, hissing and writhing all around him. He called the guard and pelted him with question after question about the messenger. “How is he? Does he appear sad or angry? Or is he all joy and equanimity?”

The guard replied, “O King! The sage’s son is quite calm and peaceful. He is repeating the words, ‘Victory to the king, Victory to our ruler.’ I don’t see any trace of anger or passion on his face.”

This gave the king some comfort. He sought to find out what reply had been given to the young student’s

questions.

The guard said, “We told him that the king had been to the forest and had just returned, and he is resting for a while. Please wait for some time. As soon as he breaks his rest, we shall inform him.”

The king inquired, “What did he reply?”

“Lord, the young man was most anxious to see you as quickly as possible. He said he had some urgent message to communicate; his master would be awaiting his return and was counting the minutes. He said that the sooner he sees you the better. He repeated within himself all the time, ‘May it be well with the king, May safety and prosperity be on him.’ We offered him a high seat and invited him to occupy it, but he did not accept it. He preferred to stand at the door; he is counting minutes there.”

Tears of joy welled within the eyes of the king. Wiping them off, he hurried toward the entrance, without donning regal robes or insignia, without caring even to wear sandals or a robe over the chest. He fell prostrate at the feet of that son of a hermit. He held both his hands in his own, led him into the inner apartments, and placed him on a high seat. He himself sat on the floor beneath. He prayed to be told the reason for the journey.

The student said, “O King! my master, Sage Samika sends you his special blessings. He has commissioned me to communicate to you some special matters,” and broke into tears.

Seeing this, the king exclaimed, “Well, tell me soon. If I have to do anything, tell me soon. I’m prepared to lay down my life in the discharge of my obligations. Or is my kingdom in any danger? Do I have to take any measure of relief? I’m ready to sacrifice anything to save it.”

The student messenger replied, “O King! No danger threatens the realm or the hermits. No fear can ever bother them. It is you whom dangers threaten, whom harm will overtake.”

When he gave this subtle warning, the king declared exultantly, “I’m indeed blessed. When my subjects and the hermits engaged in asceticism are safe, I don’t care in the least what happens to me. I inhale and exhale so that I can ensure peace and prosperity for them both.” The king quietened after some time and asked the disciple, “Now, tell me what your Master wanted me to know.”

“King! my Master is very much concerned over a grievous wrong that has been committed, out of sheer ignorance. That is the prime reason for his sending me here.”

Parikshith was very much agitated. He asked, “What wrong are you speaking about? Who did that wrong? Tell me, tell me all.”