

## CHAPTER 25

### THE SAGE'S COMPASSION

**T**he pointed words of the father inflicted great pain on the tender heart of Sringi, the son. They fell like sword thrusts or hammer strokes. The poor boy could bear them no longer. He fell on the floor and grasping the feet of his father, he wailed, "Father pardon me. I was overcome by anger that the king himself should behave so outrageously insolent, so irreverently, so inhumanely. I could not control my resentment at the insult hurled on you. It is not proper that a king should behave like this, in this most inappropriate manner, having come into a hermitage; isn't it?"

Seeing his plight, Sameeka, 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 with folded hands and eyes fixed on him, his least command, so that they may win his favour by executing them to his satisfaction. As soon as he enters a kingdom, the ruler thereof accords him a glorious welcome, offers him magnificent hospitality and respectful homage. A person accustomed to this rich routine was naturally shocked when he did not receive any sign of welcome here. He was not even recognised and respected. The neglect was so serious that he did not get a cup of water to alleviate his thirst. He was torn by the pangs of hunger, and of humiliation, for, there was no response even though he called out many times. So, unable to bear the agony and the 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 have you called down!"

The aged hermit closed his eyes and sat silent for a while, seeking some means by which the king can be saved from the curse. Finding none, and realising that God alone

can set such things right, since He is all-powerful and all-knowing, he prayed with all his heart. “Oh, refuge of all the worlds! This immature little boy, with no knowledge of right and wrong, of what is one’s duty and what is not, prompted by ignorance, has committed this great blunder, harmful to the king. Pardon this boy or punish him; 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 is not right that we, hermits, should insult and injure the king who is the guardian and guide of humanity?”

“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 Rishi Sameeka directed them thus, an aged monk rose from the group. He was the very picture of peace and resignation; he said, “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 then 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.”

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

He knew that egoism is the deadliest foe of hermits; but yet he did not 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 proceed 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 I have to do there.” With these words, he fell at his feet and offered his obeisance. The sage rose from his seat 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 towards the capital.

Meanwhile, the king had reached his palace and after a short rest, he awoke into 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 heinous sin that I, the emperor should cast an insult on that ascetic." He lamented within himself. "How am I to make amends for this crime? Shall I go to that hermitage and plead for pardon? Or shall 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, he saw a guard who came up to the door and stood silent 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 he has been sent by the sage Sameeka. He says his message is very urgent and important. He is in a great hurry. I am awaiting 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 to come near him and he pelted question after question at him about the young man who had come from the hermitage: how is he? does he appear sad or angry? or, is he brimful of joy and equanimity?

The guard replied, "Oh King! The sage's son who has come to have your audience is quite calm and peaceful. He is repeating the words 'Victory to the king,' 'Victory to our Ruler.' I do not 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 questions asked by the young student. The guard said, "We told him the King had been to the forest, he returned only just now, he is taking rest 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 say in reply to this?" The guard said, "Lord, the young man was most anxious to see you as quickly as possible. He said he had some urgent message to communicate. He said his master would be awaiting his return and counting the minutes. He said that the sooner he sees you the better. He was repeating 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 towards 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 and led him into the inner apartments, where he placed him on a high seat and himself sat on the floor beneath. He prayed that he might be told the reason for the journey.

The student said, “Oh King! my master, Sage Sameeka 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 anything has to be done by me, tell me soon. I am prepared to lay down my life in the discharge of my obligations. Or, is my kingdom in any danger? Have I to take any measure of relief? I am ready to sacrifice anything for saving it.”

The student messenger replied, “Oh King! No danger threatens the realm or the hermits. No fear can ever bother them. You are the very person whom dangers threaten, whom harm will overtake.” When he gave this subtle warning, the king declared exultantly, “I am indeed blessed. When my subjects and the hermits engaged in asceticism are safe, I do not in the least care 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.” He replied, “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 to you.”

Hearing this, Parikshit was very much agitated. He asked, “What is the wrong, you speak about? Who did that wrong? Tell me, tell me all,” he pleaded.