

## LESSON 20

## KING MEGHARATH

Once there was a discussion going on in Indra's (head of heavenly angels) court. One of the demi-gods said that there are brave and merciful kings on Earth who would not hesitate laying down their own lives to protect those who come to them for a shelter. Another demi-god doubted his statement. The two began to argue and so Indra intervened by asking them to go to the Earth and see for themselves. The two demi-gods made a plan of action. One of them decided to take the form of a pigeon, and the other took the form of a hawk.

On the Earth, King Meghrath was sitting in his court surrounded by his courtiers. At that time a pigeon flew in through an open window and started circling inside the hall. To the king's surprise, it landed on his lap. The king realized that the pigeon had come there out of fear.

At that very instant, a hawk flew into the king's court too. He said to the king, "This pigeon is my prey." The king was struck with a wonder to hear a bird speak. However, he replied, "It is true that this pigeon is your prey, but I can give you some other food."

He ordered his servants to bring a basket of sweets. But the hawk said, "I am not a human being. I am not vegetarian. I need the flesh for my food."

The king said, "Let me give you my own flesh instead of this pigeon's flesh." Upon hearing this, one of the courtiers said, "Your Majesty, why should you give your own flesh? Let's get the flesh from a butcher's shop."

The king replied, "No, because just as a confectioner's business thrives when we consume sweets, a butcher's trade flourishes when we use up meat. The butcher may have to kill another animal in order to supply us the meat. This pigeon has sought refuge and it is my duty to protect it. At the same time, it is my duty to see that no one else is harmed in this process. Therefore, I will give my own flesh to the hawk."

With these words, he took out his dagger and cut off a piece of flesh from his thigh and offered that to the hawk. The whole court was stunned. But the hawk said to the king, "Oh, king! I want the same amount of flesh as the pigeon."

So, a weighing scale was brought to the court. The king put the pigeon on one side and a piece of his own flesh on the other. The king kept putting more and more of his flesh on the scale, but was still not enough. Finally the king was getting ready to put his whole body on the scale. The court filled with the murmur that the king was giving his own life for an insignificant bird. But the king considered it his duty and religion to be above everything else. He sat on the side opposite to the pigeon in the scale, closed his eyes, and began meditating in the peace.

As soon as the king entered into the meditation, the pigeon and the hawk assumed their original divine form. Both demi-gods bowed to the king and said, "Oh great king! You

are blessed. We are convinced that you are a brave and merciful man.”

With these words, they praised and saluted the king again and left. The whole court resounded with the joyous words, “Long live, the King Meghrath.”

Later on, the soul of King Meghrath became the sixteenth Tirthankara, Shantinath.

A merciful person is someone who is not only influenced by seeing the misery and suffering of others, but goes a step further and attempts to alleviate the pain. He gives financial aid to those who are poverty-stricken and gives food to those who are hungry and needy. A merciful person would not harm others to promote himself but on the contrary, would sacrifice even his own life to save the lives of the others.