

Kesava



Kundanpur, there lived a merchant named Jasodhara. His wife 's name was Rambha. He had two sons by her, Hansa and Kesava. The two brothers used to read and play together.



One day they were taking a stroll, and they reached the park where they saw a muni who was giving a talk. In the presence of the muni, they took the vow to not take food at night. The muni approved of this, and gave them an inspiration to remain steadfast in their vow.



The brothers returned home. Before the sun went down, they asked their mother to serve them food. Their mother was furious when she found out about their vow. She told them not to indulge in odd things. She served them food late in the night. Jasodhara asks about his sons. They came in but they would not touch anything. Jasodhara became furious. He said,

"I won't allow this in my family."

The two boys remained steadfast and went to bed without eating.



Jasodhara told his wife not to fix any food during the day, so the boys would eat at night. The next day, the boys ask their mother to serve food before sunset. She told them dinner would be served at night. This is the wish of your parents and you both should abide by the wishes of your father and mother.



The next day, the boys went to work with their father. That night the father asked the boys to dine with him, but they declined. The very next day, the father imposed on them heavy duties, so there would be no time to eat, and that night they would not take it even though it was offered.



Five days had passed, and on the sixth day Jasodhara sent for both of them. He told the boys that even the learned people took food during the first quarter of the night, and there was nothing wrong with it. Jasodhara became very angry, and told Kesava to get out of the house at once. Kesava was holding steadfast like a rock, while Hansa was getting very hungry. Kesava wanted to endure hardship instead of giving in to the vow that he had taken. As Hansa was about to follow Kesava out his father grabbed his hand, and asked him to give up the fast. Hansa had a very weak personality. He finally sat down to dine.



After leaving home, Kesava walked all night without stopping. At last, he reached a yaksa temple where people were assembled to offer worship. After the service everyone welcomed him and they started to bring him fruits and sweets, and begged him to accept them. He gathered his courage and said,

"Friends, I am under a vow not to take anything at night. I can not transgress it. It is this very issue why I left home."



The people became very angry because he was their guest, and they wanted to entertain their guest. They told him if you do not take food then the rest of us must go without food. In the interest of religion and the greater good, therefore, take food with us.



Just then a giant came out of the idol with large blood shot eyes and said,

"Kesave! Come and take food, otherwise, I will wipe you out of existence with my mace."



Kesava stood firm, as if in a trance, and he gave no reply. He was definitely ready for the worse. The yaksha read into Kesava 's mind. He was quite sure he could not change Kesava 's mind about making food. After some time, a few returned with a monk named Dharmaghosa, who was tied fast with ropes. The yaksha was playing a trick on him, and he knew this was not his master. Addressing the monk, the yaksha said,

"Monk! You permit this follower of your to take food. If you don't, you will be put to death."



The monk told Kesava that he had put his life in danger. You should not transgress a vow for the sake of a deva, one's own master. If you have any consideration for me, give up the vow at once and take the offering. Kesava replied at once,

"My master does not take food at night. He follows the path of Jina, who is free from all attachments. If a man is in fear, he can not be my master."

The yaksha shouted loudly,

"You wretch! Take food at once or your master will go rolling on the ground."



Kesava said,

"This is not my master. You are not in a trap, and you will never be able

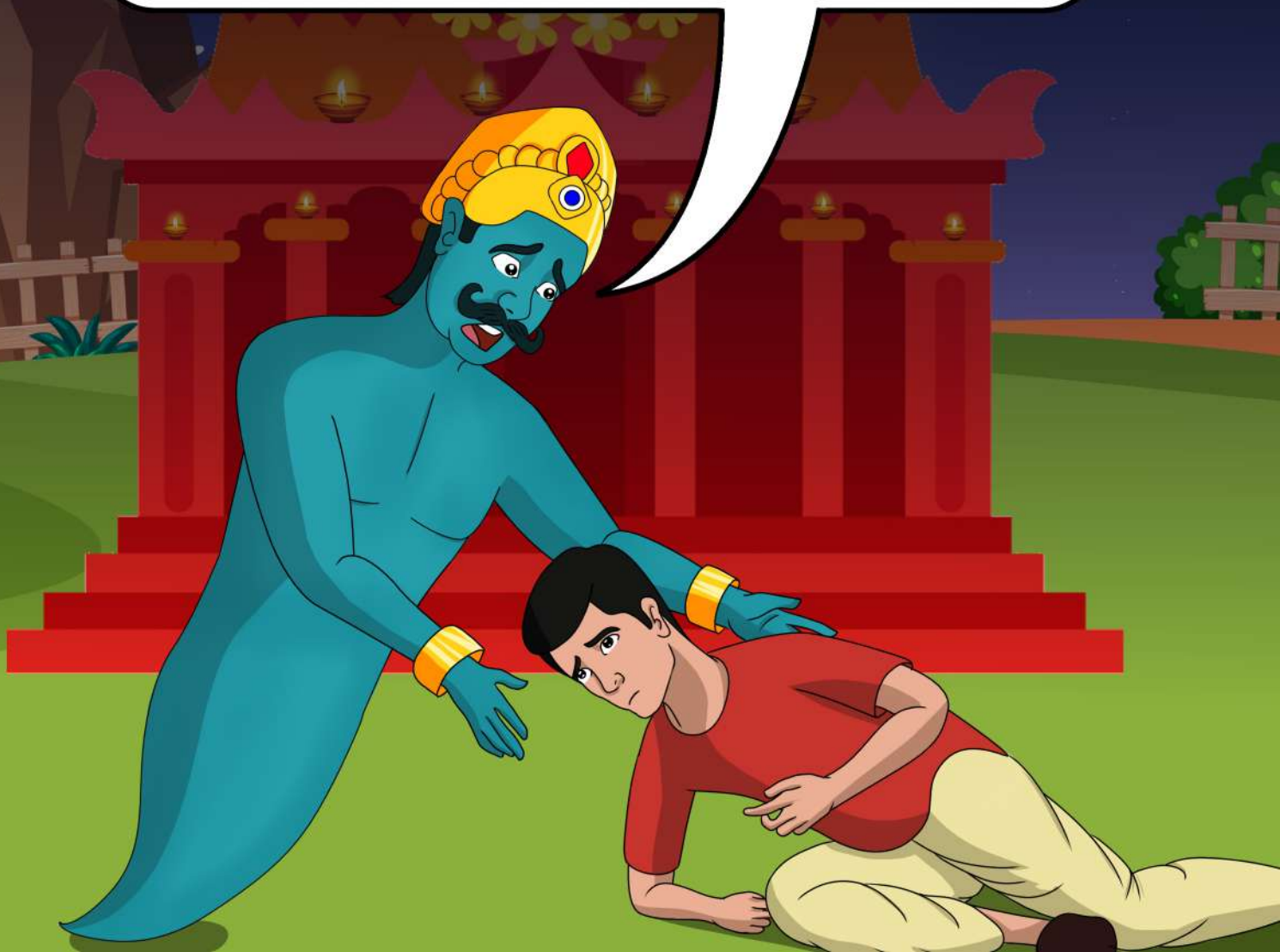
The monk told Kesava,

"I am the one who fixed you in your vow. Take food so that I may be saved."



At that time, tears started to roll down the monk's cheeks, his voice was shaky, his lips were quivering, and he was not able to stand any longer. As he was about to fall, the monk caught him and laid him upon the ground. After he had picked up the mace, the monk said,

"Kesava, if you will partake of the offering, I will restore your master to life. You will be in luxury, and if this isn't acceptable to you, then you will suffer the same fate as your master did. I will break you into pieces with this mace. "



Kesava did not believe a word he had said. It was then, the yaksha changed his strategy and became his friend. The yaksha took Kesava into his arms and told him truly, this man is not your master. He is the creation of my magical powers to test your steadfastness. Furthermore, a dead man can not be restored to life either. All of the followers agreed to not take any food until sunrise, but Kesava had to do this also. They apologized to him for giving him so much trouble. They brought him a cushion, and Kesava laid on it. Soon, he was fast asleep.



After a while, the yaksa woke him up just as the sun was rising to invite him to partake of the offer. Kesava stood up, and rubbed his eyes. He didn't think he had been asleep that long. He wasn't sure if it was morning or not. He thought it was another one of the yaksa 's tricks. Kesava looked all around and he saw it was still the dead of night. He said to the yaksa,

"The sun is not yet up. It is all a trick by you. I will not accept any food before sunrise."



Kesava opened his eyes and discovered to his surprise that there was nothing there. There was not a temple, nor the yaksha, nor the devotees. Instead, he saw a divine person who said,

"Kesava! You have passed your test. You have fulfilled the vow with the same steadfastness with which you started it, so you deserve to be congratulated. Today, I am the eyewitness to your strength. The ordeal you have been through is my creation. I am asking for your forgiveness."



Kesava replied,

"I want to fulfill my vow my whole life. I do not want anything else."

The deva wanted him to ask for something else. Kesava told him he was content with the way things were. The deva finally gave him the water to wash the first toe of his foot which would cure any disease. The deva placed Kesava on the outskirts of the city and disappeared.



The next morning, Kesava entered the city, and went where the religious assembly was in session. Acharya Dharmashri was giving a talk to the people assembled there. Kesava sat down to listen.



Dhananjaya was the ruling king of the city called Saketa. He was anxious to renounce the world and join the holy order. He did not do this since he wanted a son who would be his successor. The king was present, and when the talk was over he said,

"Holy sir! I received an indication last night during a dream that in today's assembly there would be a young man who would assist me in my spiritual design, and set me free from my present anxiety. It is to your advantage to tell me about your dream."



By the power of his superior knowledge, then Acharya realized the whole situation. As he was pointing to Kesava he said,

"Here is your young man; his name is Kesava, the deva who tested Kesava 's steadfastness."



The king embarrassed Kesava and took him to the palace. Kesava was put on the throne as the king of Saketa. Dhananjaya joined the holy order.



Some time had passed, and one day, as Kesava was seated at the palace window, his eyes fell on an old man in the street who was in tattered clothes. Kesava did not recognize him as his own father.



He at once came down and touched his feet. The old man was happy to see that his son was a king. Seeing his father alone, he asked about his elder brother. The old man told him it was a sad story. The same night you left, I forced him to break his vow. He dined with me and it so happened that food he ate was contaminated with a deadly poison which spread through his body. A healer was called, and he tried to save him. A month has passed, and I do not know if Hansa is still alive or not.



By the grace of the deva, he, along with his father, was at the bedside of his brother for a moment. The deva reminded him of the healing powers he had given to him. A potion was made and it was sprinkled on Hansa's body. At once, Hansa was all right.



The story of Kesava's magical power to heal spread throughout the city. Many people came to be cured of their ailments. Kesava then took his paternal family to his city, Saktea. The king issued a special proclamation, which the people gladly courted:

"Avoid taking food at night."

