

Lakshmi Punja



At Hastinapur, there lived a merchant named Sudharma. A devout Jaina, the merchant was very poor and ran a very small business. His wife's name was Dhanna.



One night, as she was fast asleep, she saw in a dream the Goddess Shree Lakshmi (the goddess of prosperity) in Lotus Lake. Dressed in the best of her robes and ornaments, she was seated on a lotus. Dhanna woke up after this good dream, and when she apprised her husband of this, he said,

"Now our days of misery must be nearing their end. Indications are that a boy will be born in the family, and his fame will go far and near."

With this sweet thought in her mind, Dhanna could not sleep for the rest of the night.



The arrival of a pious soul becomes a turning point in the life of a family. From the day Dhanna had the dream, there was a turn for the better in Sudharma's material condition. The profit from business also looked up. Sudharma started worrying about how to welcome the pious soul.



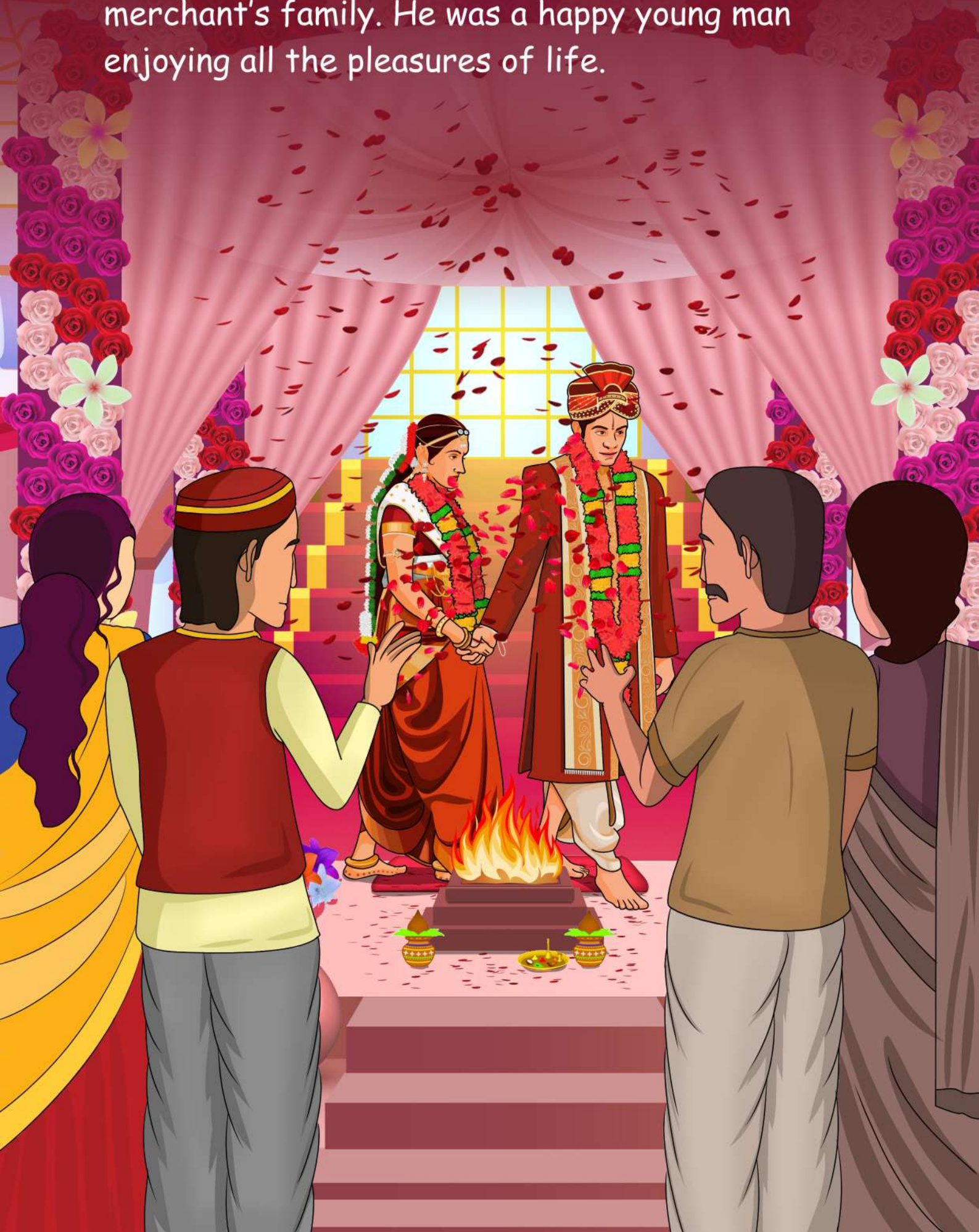
One day, as he was standing in the courtyard with this thought in his mind, a portion of the earth slipped from beneath his feet, and a jar full of gold and gems peeped through it. This was a major turning point.



Henceforth, fortune smiled on him, and he was living in a mansion of his own, served by many servants and attendants. At the right moment, a male child was born to Dhanna.



He was married to a beautiful damsel from a rich merchant's family. He was a happy young man enjoying all the pleasures of life.



One day, a thought came into his mind,

"From where did this non-ending treasure come from?"

On the same day, he had the following revelation about his previous birth.



There was a city named Laksmidhara where a merchant named Gunadhara. He was rich, but he was a man of very simple and unassuming habits.



One day, he went to the park, where a muni was giving a sermon on adattadana, the vow not to acquire anything unless it has been bestowed or bequeathed. When the sermon was over, the merchant came near the muni, paid him homage and obeisance, and took the vow of adattadana.



The merchant started with a convoy of 500 carts loaded with merchandise for another city. When the convoy reached a dense forest, the merchant felt that it would be risky for him to move with it, and so on horseback, he separated from it, taking an obscure route made of footprints. On the way, he came across a costly necklace that he did not even care to look at. As he wanted to proceed fast, he struck the horse with his heels and put it to gallop.

500
Carts



At one place, the merchant saw a jar full of treasure, but, with perfect detachment, he put the horse to a still greater speed.



But before the horse could go far, it dropped down exhausted and died on the spot. This was a great shock for the merchant, who felt that the horse died prematurely because of him. So he said aloud,

"If anyone can restore the horse to live, I shall give him my whole treasure."

But, as none came, the merchant discarded the dead horse and proceeded on foot.



The merchant was now proceeding alone through the dense forest. He became very thirsty, but there was no water to be seen anywhere in the neighborhood.



Soon he discovered a leather container full of water hanging from a tree. He came beneath the tree, but as he remembered his vow, he shouted:

"To whom does this container belong?
I am very thirsty."



At another branch of the same tree, there was a cage from which a parrot responded,

"This belongs to a medicine man. He has gone in search of herbs in the denser parts of the forest. Nobody knows when he may come back. If you are thirsty, you may very well drink from the container. But neither its owner nor his agent is present here at this moment."



Gunadhara was so badly thirsty that his eyes had almost shot out, and it was not possible for him to speak or to walk. Still, he said to the parrot,

"Thirst may take my life, but I don't accept a thing not properly given to me."

He sat down with his eyes closed.



When after some time he opened them, he found to his surprise that neither the leather container nor the parrot and the cage was there; instead, there stood a deva who said,

"Sir, I am a resident of Vipula which is located atop the mountain Vaitadhya. My name is Sura, and I am a Vidyadhara. My father, who has joined the holy order, resides in a park outside your city. I had been there to pay respect to him just at the time when you took the vow of not accepting anything not duly given. You are a merchant, and you have to move to far-off lands on business. So I wondered if it would be possible for you to honor your vow. It was for testing you, therefore, that I laid a few traps: the necklace, the jar full of treasure. It was I again who made the horse die. The leather container, the cage, and the parrot were all placed by me on the tree."



So saying, he recalled the necklace, the jar, the horse, and many other things and made a gift of them all to the merchant. Said Gunadhara,

"Why do you give me all these?"

The Vidyadhara responded,

"It was my father who told me to keep away from excessive riches, but I did not care to listen to him, because I could not free myself from attachment. But today I have seen in you one who has conquered attachment, and this has inspired me. I have now resolved to seek total detachment. I hold you as my master, and I want to make a gift for my master."



Said Gunadhara,

"But why don't you return them to their proper owners?"

Said the Vidyadhara,

"Well, sir, all these belong to me, and all these are now yours."

"Very good. But I too am under a vow to bestow my all to one who restores the horse to live, and since you have done so, you are henceforth the rightful owner of everything I have."



"Sir, you are my superior, and so I cannot accept your treasure; but, as you say, you are under a vow, and so you can no longer retain its ownership. what will happen to all of this, then?"

Gunadhara gave a solution.

"Let neither of us uses it. Let it be given as a gift for some public, social or religious purpose."

The solution appealed to both.



From that time, Gunadhara changed the course of his life. He became immersed in dharma-dhyana (spiritual meditation). Thus he ended his life.



The same merchant has been reborn as Laksmipunja with so much affluence of wealth and treasure. This revelation revived Laksmipunja's memory of his previous birth. His detachment came up soon, and he renounced everything. He entered the spiritual order and lived therein, enriching his soul by practicing penance and restraint.

