

## *Dileepa*



"Please leave the cow. You can eat my own body, and feel satisfied. Being a friend, do accede to my request."

An Emperor known for his valor thus begged of a lion. How strange! Being so valiant, why did he not kill the lion? Further more, instead of living in grandeur and happiness like a king of kings, why give his body to the lion for the sake of a cow?

Isn't it strange?

Yet, how good and dignified does it show the Emperor to be!

You have heard of Sri Ramachandra. He belonged to the race of the Sun god. One of his famous ancestors in that race was Dileepa.

Sri Rama's father was Dasharatha, who was born to Aja. Aja's father was the great king Raghu, because of whom the dynasty was also known as Raghuvamsha, or the race of Raghu. Raghu's father was emperor Dileepa.

## ***Dileepa***

Even before Dileepa there were quite a few great and good kings in the solar race of kings. Of them Harischandra was known for his truthfulness.

The kings of the Sun-dynasty lived very good lives. Not doing anything evil and being pure, they ruled over the kingdom only for the welfare of the people. They were interested only in good things. And they never left anything half-done. They were all very heroic. They helped the angels too. They performed sacrifices as prescribed, for the good of the world. And they were very generous to the needy. They knew statecraft very well. They never uttered falsehood or practiced deceit. They thought that the countrys good was their own good and were always careful. They did not have the selfishness that happiness should be theirs only and they only should be profited. They collected money and gave it away as gifts. They spent to help others. They spoke sparingly but truthfully.

The kings of the Sun-race had a vast realm. Yet the way the princes of this dynasty were educated was surprising. Those kings thought that if there were no keen desire for knowledge, then knowledge would not come that there could be no knowledge without humility and hard work. So they got their children educated just like all other children. Even these princes stayed in the abode of the teachers and did all service to them. They went on rounds, as prescribed, seeking alms. With all humility they learnt from' their teachers. No such prince could ever get the feeling that he was the son of an emperor and therefore superior to other students. When they grew up, they served society; when old, they gave up their

## ***Dileepa***

kingdom, lived in hermitages like sages, and finally practicing control of the senses through yoga, and gave up their lives in the meditation of God. King Dileepa was of such lofty lineage.

Dileepa excelled all others in his handsomeness and good nature. With a broad chest and strong shoulders, he had a build and strength befitting a king. He was courageous and valiant. He had his lessons, even when very young, from the sage Vasishtha and was considered very intelligent. Those who erred would be terrified at his mere sight. But he appeared to be mild to all good men. He was learned, spoke sparingly, and strong but forgiving. He was generous but disliked flattery, and was very righteous.

The sole aim of his life was the welfare of the people. He collected from his subjects only one sixth of their income as tax. And he spent it for their own welfare. He was like a father to all his subjects. Dileepa ruled over his kingdom easily, as if it were a town.

Sudakshinadevi, a daughter of the royal house of Magadha, was Dileepa's queen. She was as good-natured as she was beautiful, and treated the subjects as her own children.

People were all very happy that it was their good fortune to have such a good king and queen.

The King thus had plenty of wealth and wealth. But there was no happiness in his mind. His life was sufficiently advanced "But there was no child to continue his royal lineage. That was a great worry in his mind. It was the only worry for queen Sudakshina also. Whenever she saw friends of her own age caressing their children, her sadness

## ***Dileepa***

became sharper. For how long a time had kings of the Sun-dynasty been ruling over this kingdom! If only she had a son! They could have trained him to be a good king, and gladly handing over the kingdom to him in their old age, could have gone to do penance. All she needed to make her happy was just one son to rule over the country righteously, and make the land glorious. Dileepa's sorrow was all the greater, when he saw the queen vexed.

The king, sunken in sorrow, yet had an idea. He felt they should seek the blessings of sages. He resolved to call on sage Vasishtha, the preceptor to his entire dynasty, and follow his advice. So he handed over the administration to his ministers, and getting into the chariot with his queen Sudakshina at an auspicious time, left his capital Ayodhya to go to sage Vasishtha's hermitage. A few persons went with him as his retinue.

The kings of yore were the ones who punished the wicked and protected the good. The sages gave them guidance.

These sages lived in hermitages in the forests and were dressed in cloth of red ochre color. This color indicated that they did not want anything for themselves. They observed a routine of bathing, penance, meditation and ritual sacrifices unflinching. Their food consisted only of fruits and bulbous roots. They would not eat even these when they sat for severe penance. They also ate dry leaves, Sometimes water was their only sustenance. At other times they sat for penance taking in only air.

The sages did not want anything for themselves. They and their wives did not want any earthy happiness. The sages always thought

## ***Dileepa***

of the good of the world. All their penance, meditation and teaching was for the uplift of the people. In the olden days these sages ran residential schools called the Gurukulas where deserving pupils were given free board and lodging, and were educated. They shaped the generation, which would develop the country. Even great kings, whenever problems arose, went to these sages for advice to solve those problems. They saluted them, served them and sought advice. They destroyed the Rakshasas, the demons who obstructed the meditation of the sages. The other subjects were giving one sixth of their income to the king. What about the rishis who themselves had no wealth or property? But even they did give something. The king received a sixth part of the good result of their penance. Of such rishis Vasishtha was one of the greatest. His hermitage was in a forest far from the city of Ayodhya.

The king and the queen were both in great enthusiasm that they were going to see the Guru who was the teacher for their whole royal lineage. As the chariot sped along, the trees, plants and creepers on both sides appeared to be racing in the opposite direction. There was a cool breeze carrying the scent of fragrant plants and scattering the pollen of flowers. The plants waved in the blowing breeze. Dileepa was explaining the specialties of the Ashrama to queen Sudakshina. And by the evening they set eyes on the hermitage itself.

Some sages were bringing people twigs for the sacrificial fire. Some others fetched fruits and the Darbha grass. The deer, which were brought up like so many children of the sages and their

## *Dileepa*

spouses, were waiting at the doors of the cottages for their food. Water had just then been poured into the tree-beds and birds were drinking water from them. A few of the deer were chewing the cud in the leaf- house. Here was no noise or bustle as in the city. There was no dust or running about or speed. There was calm every where. The king and the queen felt a great peace of mind even as they stepped into the hermitage. They seemed to have entered a New World.

Dileepa thought that if all persons of his retinue entered the Ashrama, it would disturb the sages. So he asked them to stay out. Only the king and the queen went into the hermitage. The sages who were there welcomed them and offered seats. The royal couple then approached Vasishtha. They prostrated before the sage and his consort Arundhati, touching their feet. As they stood with folded hands, the holy pair gave their blessings.

And Vasishtha said, "Dileepa, you have both had a long and tiresome journey. You must take rest." He gave them milk and fruits.

Later the sage continued his talk - "Are all people happy in your kingdom? Do you have timely rains and good crops? Do you have sufficient grains and money, and are the cows well fed?"

And the king answered - "O sage, when you are there to ward off all troubles that may assail my kingdom, I have no fears. My realm has never seen scarcity or famine. Nor does it have thefts, robbery or murder. Thanks to the force of your penance and your blessings, my arrows do possess the power to kill enemies. Thus there is no fear of any foes. We have timely rains and good crops. Owing to your sacred splendor, my people have no troubles at all."

## ***Dileepa***

Dileepa thought that though Vasishtha would have known of the purpose of his visit with his inner eye, it would be proper for him also to mention it. So he said: "Sage, though my land has all prosperity and happiness, my queen and I have no joy. I have no son to rule over this kingdom and protect the people, after me. My ancestors have had their troubles set right by you, our preceptor. I also need your help and favor."

The learned sage closed his eyes for a while. He was thinking as to why his disciple had no offspring. His mind's eye could make it out. And he said:

"O king, there is a reason for your not having a son. Once upon a time you had gone to Heaven to help Devendra, the Lord of Heaven. While you were returning, there stood the divine cow, Kamadhenu, in the shade of the Tree of Wealth in Paradise. You should have gone round the divine cow in obeisance and then proceeded further. But you failed to do so. It looked as if you sighted Kamadhenu. The heavenly cow was angry; for your fault of neglecting her, she has pronounced a curse on you, that you shall not have any issue, and that you would have children only if you worship her own daughter Nandini, and please her and win her favor. You did not hear her cursing you. But if the worthy are not saluted and respected, none can be happy."

Dileepa felt very sorry for the mistake that had occurred. "For this fault, both of us have suffered the punishment in the way of our consuming worry. I am very eager to make amends. You must guide

## ***Dileepa***

me as to how it could be done. Where is the sacred cow, Nandini? How can I get her favor?" - The king asked.

Vasishtha replied - "Kamadhenu's daughter Nandini is now in the netherworld Patala. Varuna is performing a sacrifice there and has taken her there for providing the milk, curds, ghee and other things needed for the sacrifice. She is the cow belonging to this ashrama and may return here some time now, with the sacrifice completed. Please wait till then. You and your wife must both do service to Nandini every day. You will of course get a good son. Don't feel sad."

Just then they could see Nandini at a distance approaching the ashrama. It had a skin smooth like tender leaves and ochre in color, with white hairs growing on it. Vasishtha then explained the way in which Nandini had to be served and worshipped, thus:

"Dileepa, even as we mentioned Nandini's name, she came to us. Know then that your wish will be fulfilled soon. With your wife you must stay in this ashram, eating only bulbous roots, and attend on this cow, worshipping her. You must stand where she stands, follow where she goes, rest where she lies down, and drink water where she does so. Your wife also, with great devotion to the cow, should worship her with sandal paste and flowers in the mornings and then send her to graze. In the evenings, as soon as Nandini returns, the queen must worship her and show courtesies. So serve this Nandini until you win her favor. Let your work go on- with no impediments. May you get a son who has good qualities like you and will do good to the subjects." The king bowed to the injunctions of his preceptor.

## ***Dileepa***

As it was night then, Vasishtha asked the king to sleep. Since Dileepa was to attend on the cow with his wife from that very day, both of them ate only some esculent roots as advised by the sage-teacher. They lay down on a spread of grass in an arbor in the hermitage. The vedic chanting by the disciples of the sage in the early dawn awakened them.

As soon as it was morning, Sudakshinadevi brought fresh and fragrant flowers and worshipped Nandini. The king held the calf for Nandini to feed it, and then tied it in its place. Then he released Nandini to go for grazing. The queen also started to follow the cow, but he asked her to stay in the ashrama. And then, to protect Nandini from any possible danger, Dileepa himself, so famous as a king, started as her guard. When the king starts out, it is the duty of his servants to follow as his guards. So they also got ready to go. But Dileepa said: "None of you need come for my protection. And I am enough to protect this cow." He sent them back.

Though he was a great king, Dileepa did not feel it lowly to graze the cow. He looked after Nandini much better than any cowherd who had ever served a cow. He put tasty tender grass into Nandini's mouth. He chased off flies and other insects, which sat on her and teased her. The cow roamed about, as it liked. Close on her heels was king Dileepa. When she stood, he waited. He followed her, whatever the direction she chose. If she lay down, he squatted nearby. Where she drank water, there he also drank. He followed Nandini like her shadow.

## ***Dileepa***

Dileepa had now no royal emblems. He had no crown or ornaments, no royal fan or the white umbrella. Yet the luster of his body did not diminish. He was always watchful against wild animals' causing any danger and remained close to Nandini, ready to shoot them down with his arrows.

It was evening. Light was gradually receding. Nandini made the spots of her jaunt clean and holy and remembering her young one, turned towards the hermitage. The king was just by her side. Wild boars jumping out from pits, peacocks strutting towards the trees which were their homes and deer prancing on grassy plots, were all prancing on grassy plots, were all sighted.

Dileepa found the whole forest a black expanse. He walked behind the holy cow intently, as if the eyes were his whole being.

Nandini returned to the hermitage. Sudakshina was overjoyed at its sight. She came with a cup of coloured rice. She went round the cow respectfully, made an obeisance, and worshipped her placing colored rice and vermilion on her forehead between the horns.

Though Nandini was very eager to see her own child, she received the courtesies and worship offered by queen Sudakshina. The king and queen were both very pleased. The king then prostrated before sage Vasishtha who was sitting with his wife Arundhati, and then offered his evening worship. After the calf fed itself with Nandini's milk and the rest of the milk was drawn out, the king did other services to Nandini. He placed good grass before her and also lighted a wick nearby. Nandini lay down. The royal couple sat nearby;

## ***Dileepa***

when Nandini slept, they also slept. When she got up next morning they too got up.

It went on like this for twenty-one days. The king always followed the cow like its shadow. Day and night Dileepa and Sudakshina followed the ritual of serving and worshipping Nandini.

It was the twenty-second day. The cow took a different route, to another forest.

Dileepa was extra careful on that day. When he was there for the cow's protection, what wild animal could come near it? He did not espy any such wild animal. Nature around was decked in utmost beauty. It was a lovely green below and such a pleasant green wherever the eye turned. In between were smiling flowers of various hues and different designs - blue, red, pink and yellow. The fragrance of the flowers and a cool spray from a waterfall from atop nearby were carried all around by a gentle breeze. The beauty of the hilly tract captivated his mind. He was lost for a while in seeing the charm of nature around.

Suddenly he came to his senses. Nandini was bellowing loudly in fright. The sound of her loud cry was echoed by the caves around. When the king turned that side, he saw a terrible lion, which had jumped, on to Nandini's back!

Dileepa was stunned for a moment. He bit his fingers for losing himself and being absent-minded for a while. However, he was very valiant and had killed many a lion while hunting. He was very angry

## *Dileepa*

now, that a lion was trying to kill a tame cow. He took his bow in his left hand and lifted his right hand to snatch an arrow from his quiver.

But lo! He could not move his hand that stretched to the quiver. He was like a king in a painting. He could not move a step forward.

A hero of so many wars, one who had vanquished so many! But he could not even lift his hand now! He was burning with the anger inside. But what could he do?

As a further surprise to an already amazed king, the lion talked with him like a human being - "O king, stop your labor. You just cannot show any valor before me. You will not be able to shoot a single arrow. Even if you could, it would go to waste. The wind that can bend trees cannot break a hillock."

"O king of beasts, who are you that you talk like a human being?" asked Dileepa.

And the lion continued - "I am a slave of Lord Shiva. My name is Kumbhodara. Do you see that cedar tree? Goddess Parvati has watered that tree and grown it. She loves it as she loves her own son Shanmukha. So even the Lord Shiva loves it as his own son. Once something extraordinary happened. A wild elephant rubbed its itching cheek hard against that tree. A part of the bark fell off and the juice of the cedar began to trickle down. Seeing that, Parvati was in great sorrow. She felt as sad as if her son Shanmukha was himself hurt by the Rakshasas. Then onwards God Shiva has changed me into a lion and kept me here to frighten the wild elephants away. He has also commissioned me to kill any animal coming near here, and eat it for

## ***Dileepa***

my food. Well, this is my lunch time, and I am very hungry. Right at this time this cow has come here by itself. Let me have my fill with her flesh and blood. Without any hesitation you can leave the cow to me and go to your teacher. You need not be afraid that the sage would be angry that you did not protect the cow. Would he not be able to make out that I have Lord Shiva's permission for this? If you cannot protect that which cannot be protected by any weapon, you do not get a bad name."

Hearing the words of the lion, the king realized that he suffered defeat only because he did not have the help of God Shiva. He had felt great shame that a lion had made him eat the humble pie. Now he could withstand that shame. But the lion was saying that he should leave the cow there for its food! Could he go back like that? Could he make over to the lion the cow that trusted him? How could he show his face to his preceptor later? So he told the lion:

"O king of beast, as I have been vanquished, you might feel amused at my words. Since you are Lord Shiva's servant, you would certainly understand what there is in the mind of any living being. This world has been created by Shiva. The existence and welfare of the world depend on Him. So I certainly worship God Shiva. I would not oppose His command. But I am also obedient to my preceptor. It is my duty to protect this cow which belongs to my Guru who is engaged in performing sacrifices. Besides, the cow is held sacred by all; and protecting a cow is the duty of all persons. How can I see it destroyed right before my eyes? Its young one is there in the hermitage. As it begins to get dark, the calf would be eagerly waiting

## ***Dileepa***

for its mother. So please leave this cow. To satisfy your hunger, you can eat me."

The lion smiled at this and said to the king, "O king how very surprising this is! You are the king of this whole world. And you have all wealth with you. Your subjects love you. Are you giving up all that because of this small matter? Are you so stupid? If you die out of pity for this animal, what survives is only a cow. But if you remain, you can look after all your people like a father. If your teacher is likely to become angry at the loss of a cow, it is possible for you to pacify him by giving him a crore of cows, each of which can yield a pitcherfull of milk. Instead of that, why do you wish to die? First protect your own body. You are equal to the Lord of Heaven, Indra, in wealth."

Dileepa looked at Nandini. He saw the gleam in her eyes. And then he told the lion again,

"O Lion! I am a warrior by caste and it is part of my righteous way of life that I should protect those who are in trouble. If that is not possible, why should I be king and why should I live at all? The sage Vasishtha's anger would not be satisfied by giving other cows. This cow is not in any way inferior to Kamadhenu. There is none other equal to this cow. You were able to attack her only because of your strength as Lord Shiva's servant. Otherwise you would not be able to go anywhere near her. Therefore please eat me up and let the cow go. By that you would get food for your hunger, and besides, this cow, which is helping the sacrifices performed by the sages, would also survive. Appointed to guard this cedar tree, you know the significance of your work. Similarly I have been appointed to guard

## ***Dileepa***

my Guru's cow and I know the importance of my work. What does it matter if this body is no more? It is enough if I retain a good name. The learned say those friendship sprouts when we come together and talk to one another. So now we are friends. Please leave the cow. You can satisfy yourself by eating me. Do oblige a friend."

Saying so, the king stood looking at the lion, wondering what it would say.

"Be it so," the lion said, and released Nandini.

Though Dileepa had to give his body to the lion now, he did not have the least bit of sorrow. He went close to the lion, and sat down submissively with a bent head.

The lion did not pounce upon him. Instead, the flowers rained by the angels from the sky fell upon him. The king, utterly surprised opened his eyes. He heard a sweet, divine voice - "Get up, O son!"

There was no lion. Only Nandini stood there radiating affection like a mother. And she said to Dileepa: 'well, my son, get up. There is no danger to your life, this lion was an illusion. The incident took place only to test your devotion. The power of the sage Vasishtha's penance is such that there can be no danger to me even from Yama, the Lord of Hell. You have shown your devotion to your teacher and similar devotion and kindness to me. I am pleased with you. Ask for any boon you want, and I'll give it.'

Dileepa prostrated before Nandini. He rejoiced that there was no danger to Nandini. And that the divine cow was pleased with him

## ***Dileepa***

put him into rapture. Then he made his request. "Please grant that my queen Suclakshina will give birth to a son who will be righteous and will bring glory to our Sun-dynasty."

"So be it," said the cow. "Draw my milk into a leaf-cup and drink it. Your wish will be fulfilled."

But the king replied, "Mother, I will take only what remains after your young calf feeds itself from your udder, and my preceptor's sacrificial worship is over with your milk. With my teacher's permission, I and my wife will both drink it." Nandini was happy and started for the ashrama.

As soon as Dileepa reached the hermitage, he reported to his teacher the fact that he had obtained Nandini's favor. He told his wife also. Later, after the calf had its feed and the milk required for the sacrificial worship was kept apart, the king took the rest of the milk with permission from Vasishtha. The sage also gave the king his blessings, that he be got a good son.

The next morning, Dileepa with his wife observed all rituals for the conclusion of his vowed worship of and service to the cow. He prostrated before the sacrificial fire of the hermitage, before Vasishtha and Arundhati, and before the divine cow Nandini with her calf.

The subjects were overjoyed that the royal couple had returned. After a few months, queen Sudakshina became pregnant. She gave birth to a son on an auspicious day. The king's joy knew no bounds.

## ***Dileepa***

He gave gifts to everyone. He fed all the poor, and gave them clothes. All his subjects also felt happy that the future king was born.

Just then the royal teacher Vasishtha came from his ashrama to Dileepa's capital. The king went out to meet him and welcomed him. He told him the good news by saying - "Your blessing have borne fruit. I have a son, thanks to the boon granted by the divine cow Nandini." Then Vasishtha described to him the greatness of a cow thus:

"There is no living being more sacred than a cow. Grazing a cow, rearing it and milking it - these are not lowly jobs. A cow should be looked after with reverence. Looking after a cow augments our money and grains. You did not hesitate to do service to a cow though you are a king.

You guarded it in the jungle and you offered yourself to the lion which come to kill the cow and eat it. Your history of worshipping the cow and getting the wishes fulfilled is an example to people."

Dileepa thought of a name for his son. He called him 'Raghu' in the sense of one who was learned in the shastras and who vanquished the enemies in war.

Raghu grew up well day by day. The parents were overjoyed with his play, his education and his brightness. According to the tradition of the Kshatriyas or the warrior caste, Dileepa performed a ceremony for Raghu to have the sacred thread and sent him to the Gurukula or the teacher's hermitage to acquire knowledge. Obedient to the Guru, Raghu there mastered all branches of knowledge. He

## ***Dileepa***

learnt the martial arts also. Then he returned to the palace and was formally made the crown prince.

Dileepa now pondered as to what else was his duty. A king had to perform the Ashwamedha sacrifice. Well, when the heroic prince Raghu was there to guard the horse, there was no need to fear anything. So, one after another, he performed ninety-nine Ashwamedha sacrifices and achieved high glory. He decided to perform one more, and get the throne of Indra, the Lord of Heaven. So he first underwent the consecration ceremony. Then he left the sacrificial horse to go in any direction it chose. For its protection, crown prince Raghu started with an army. Now Indra was worried. If the hundredth sacrifice was completed, then Dileepa would become Indra. So Indra thought of seeing to it that this time the Taga' or sacrifice was not completed. Unseen by any one he came and took away the horse. Raghu's soldiers were surprised and did not know what to do.

Just then Nandini the divine cow came there. Was it not by serving and worshipping Nandini that Dileepa got Raghu as his son? Raghu also knew it. He thought the arrival of Nandini was a good omen. He prostrated before her and worshipped her. Owing to her favor, Raghu could now see Indra taking away the horse meant for the Ashwamedha sacrifice- Raghu chased him. A terrible war was ensued between the two. In the end Indra used his Vaira' weapon, the thunder. Seeing Raghu fight on in spite of that, Indra was pleased with his valor. He told Raghu - "Leaving this horse, ask for anything else, and you will have it."

## ***Dileepa***

Raghu, who had such great piety, said: "O Lord Indra, if you do not wish to return the horse for the sacrifice, please grant this. My father king Dileepa is still committed to performing the sacrifice. So please ordain that he gets the merit as for having performed the sacrifice in the prescribed manner. And you must send this information to him in the sacrificial hall through your servants."

Devendra agreed to Raghu's request, and his charioteer Matali to Dileepa. Learning of all that had happened through Matali, Dileepa felt happy that he had completed the sacrifice. He admired his son's valor.

Dileepa did not wish to continue as king any longer. He had ruled over his people for many years. He had punished the wicked and protected the virtuous. So he now decided to hand over the reigns of the kingdom to his youthful son and occupy his own mind with thoughts of God. When the kings of olden days became old, they crowned their sons and went away to the forest to lead ascetic lives like sages. So Dileepa arranged for the coronation of Raghu who was the crown prince and who had already won the hearts of the subjects. And then on a day he went away with his queen Sudakshina to a hermitage.

Dileepa was a very heroic emperor. He amply showed by his actual conduct that, those who rule over others and have the authority to do so should use their power for the welfare of others. As he became old he gladly gave over the throne to his young son and went away for meditation. In the work that he had accepted, he showed unequalled loyalty and was ready to lay down his life to save

## ***Dileepa***

Nandini. Born an emperor's son, he became a great emperor. More than that, he acquired great fame with his humility, dutifulness and spirit of sacrifice. With his virtues he won the hearts of all. Is this not greatness?

Not only did Dileepa show by his own conduct how men in high positions should be in their lives, but also he became an example as a person of ideal qualities. He became a great man memorable for all time.

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