

STORY #15

A STORY OF FORGIVENESS

ONCE I GAVE A talk in a small town. The people loved the talk so much that they wouldn't let me leave, and I ended up staying and giving spiritual discourses there for two months.

A few weeks after I left, a man visited the town and he heard everyone talking about me. He didn't like swamis very much. He had had one or two bad experiences. But he was impressed after hearing the people talk about me, so he told a friend.

"The next time this saint comes, let me know. I would like to meet him and serve him."

About a year passed, and then I was able to visit the town again. The friend sent a letter to this man telling him of my planned visit. The man was pleased and made plans to come and see me.

It so happened that I was late. A kind conductor offered me a seat on a train and I accepted it. At the first stop everyone in our car got off except myself and one other man. He must have been lonely, because as we continued on, he moved closer and closer to me, until he was finally sitting next to me.

"Where are you from?" He asked, and I told him.

"Where are you going?" He asked, and I told him.

And then he got mad.

"You're a swami, aren't you!" He said. "And you don't work, do you! You just roam around and around!"

"Yes," I said. "That's exactly what I do."

"Why are you wasting your life like this?" He said. "Find a good saint and go and stay with him and serve him. Study, and make something of yourself. I'm on my way to meet a high saint who everyone loves. Come with me and maybe he will help you."

I didn't say anything.

The train reached the small town where I was going and I got off. The man got off, too. It was evening and I needed to cross a river to get to the town so I walked quickly. The man did, too. We came to the river and I gave the boat keeper my ticket.

“Oh, look!” The man said sarcastically. “He has a ticket! He’s not traveling free!”

We both got on the small boat, and three or four people immediately bowed down to me. The man laughed and made fun of them. Indian people bow down to any swami and he was laughing at that.

Then he noticed that there was a large crowd on the other side of the river and he got quiet. He must have thought that the Mahatma was there already and he was giving darshan.

The boat came to the opposite shore and the whole town had gathered to meet me. Someone had told them in advance of my arrival, even though I was late. When everyone saw me they immediately started chanting and singing and 5 or 6 people rushed to carry me from the boat to the shore so my feet wouldn’t touch the muddy water.

“No! No!” I begged, but it didn’t make any difference. They picked me up and gently placed me on the shore and then everyone bowed down and touched my feet and offered me flowers.

The man was totally shocked. He just stood there. This was the same man who had been coming to see me. He, too, was late that day and we had met by chance. Then his friend called to him.

“Gopal!” His friend called. “You received my letter! And you’ve already had a chance to meet swami! How wonderful!”

The man burst into tears. He was ashamed of himself now. He touched my feet and said,

“Only you could bear such harsh words from me. I insulted you very much. Please forgive me.”

I embraced the man and held him with love and he was happy.