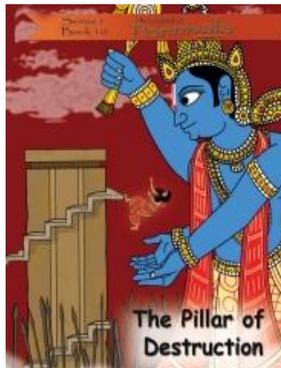


## Episode 10 – Pillar of Destruction

(Sub Stories a, b, c, d and e)

**Resource Materials: Graphic comic books, ipad books, + videos)**

**VISIT our SHOP: Choose the retelling that works best for you**



### 10-a) TWO BROTHERS BEG FORGIVENESS

While the bruised and dejected heroine stands before the goddess a priest of this temple happens by. He asks who beat her and why. Upon learning the story he makes the excuse that he has forgotten something and then runs to her brother's home. There he talks with the two brothers and begs them to go to the temple and ask their sister's forgiveness. Only then will their children be brought back to life. The two men reluctantly go and fall at their sister's feet. She does not want to look at them but the goddess advises her to forgive them and then to enter the home where she was born.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Does the goddess give the right advice to the queen? Do you think she will forgive her brothers?**

**COMMENTARY:** The story is pretty clear in its moral judgement here. The goddess Kali confirms that the heroine's brothers have erred in not welcoming their sister back. At the same time she is encouraged to forgive them when they lower themselves before her and beg for an apology (which she does grant them). The ambiguity remains, however, and the "feud" continues. The heroine announces that now .... she never wants to see them again.

### 10-b) MANY CHILDREN MIRACULOUSLY REVIVED

The queen forgives her brothers, but demands that they run off, out of sight. They do this and she proceeds to visit her natal home with the temple priest as her escort. Inside she finds the dead bodies of her brothers' fourteen children. The priest tells her she has special powers and begs her to revive them all. The heroine bargains and asks permission to take two of the female children for her own purposes. The priest allows this and all the children are brought back to life using a golden wand sent to the sister by Lord Shiva himself.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Was the sister right to tell her brothers to run away so that she would never have to see them again? Why do you think she wants to "take" two of the female children with her?**

**COMMENTARY:** The story clearly states that the queen has special powers and is able to bring children back to life (even though she cannot give birth to any herself, for now). One could say, in a slightly more modern reading, that she never really killed her brothers' children to begin with, but rather

that they just became “frozen” by fear. This interpretation is strengthened by an explanation of what she is going to do with the two girls she now asks for (see below).

#### 10-c) **TWO BRIDES-TO-BE BECOME STONES TO AWAIT THEIR GROOMS**

The heroine takes two girls of her choosing from the palace, dragging them against their will to a spot near the village (Ganesh) temple. There she magically turns them into two upright stones. Calling on Lord Vishnu, she asks that these girls be guarded by beetles and wasps until such time as she can bring her own (as yet unborn) twin sons back to that very spot to marry them. Finally, satisfied with her accomplishments, the queen gathers her servants and start out on the path back to her own palace.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES:** Can you find another story or situation where women are somehow “reserved” for their husbands-to-be, many years in advance?

**COMMENTARY:** As a woman with special powers the queen believes her curse will one day be lifted and that she will then bear twin sons. According to a very powerful local custom, she has the right to demand that her brothers provide (their own daughters) as brides for these sons. This kind of cousin-to-cousin marriage is an old, old tradition in the area this story come from. So the heroine wants to “freeze” two girls in time and keep them ready for her own sons’ marriages. Turning women to stone is a familiar theme in Indian mythology. It appears in other contexts as well.

#### 10-d) **THE QUEEN IS BANISHED FROM THE PALACE BY AN ANGRY KING**

Now back at home, the king finds his queen asleep and exhausted. He suspects trouble because she has covered her whole body with her sari. Asking to see her arms and legs he soon knows the real truth about her terrible beating. He banishes her from the palace. She plans on suicide and calls in the stone masons to build her a 60 foot tower from which she will jump to her death.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES:** What would you do if you were a queen and were thrown out of your own palace? Might you have suicidal thoughts and why? Can you find a story or do you know someone close to you where something like this actually happened?

**COMMENTARY:** This very common theme, where a husband throws a wife out of the house, can be found in many stories. The queen’s suicidal thoughts are also not surprising. Many women think this way when they are forced out of their home and believe they have nowhere to turn.

#### 10-e) **THE QUEEN CONTEMPLATES SUICIDE BUT IS SAVED FROM DEATH AT THE LAST MOMENT**

When it is completed she climbs up and then calls on Lord Vishnu, asking that he assure her that when she jumps her body will be broken into many pieces. Vishnu dissuades her with his cunning and exhorts the couple to perform a long list of good works instead. Vishnu implies that when these many fine deeds are complete, that they will be granted a child.

**SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES:** Heroines are also associated with high towers in some European folk stories. Can you find (and then tell) a story that combines a fine woman and a tower?

**COMMENTARY:** Climbing a tower (or a pillar) is something the queen will do again in this legend. In the next generation her daughter and another saintly woman also sit on top of a pillar while praying. It is as if the person climbing the tower is getting closer to god, making his or her conversation with a divine being easier and more focused. And in a sense this strategy works for our heroine too. Lord Vishnu does respond to her pleas, and then succeeds in “converting her” from thoughts of suicide to a plan that will have her help others. He also teases her repeatedly, testing her to see if she is deserving of his help (as in episode 7-d). Lord Vishnu’s rescue efforts in this traditional legend could be discussed and compared to modern day women’s shelters, or to the efforts of others who work with refugees, the poor and so forth.