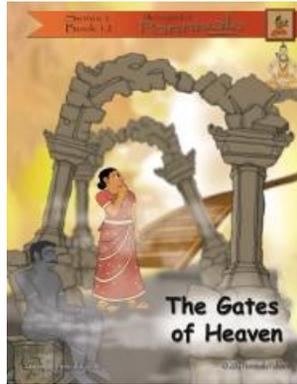


Episode 12 – The Gates of Heaven (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)
Resource Materials: Graphic comic books, ipad books, + videos)
VISIT our SHOP: Choose the retelling that works best for you



12-a) A Great Insult & Its Consequences

The king and queen set off on their long journey. But they have gone only a short distance when a large sow blocks their path. It is the same she-boar that the queen had earlier purchased and raised on her lands, in hopes of its bearing offspring. The heroine is impatient now. She is eager to get on with her travel plans and feels that the boar is being rude. So she kicks it with her right foot. The boar takes this as an insult. The huge animal now acts as a soothsayer who can see the future. She predicts that the queen will eventually bear two sons and one daughter in return for her good deeds. But the mother boar also says that she will bear a son too, an extraordinarily large huge male who will kill the queen's sons. With this curse spoken, the mother-boar jumps off the path and runs away. Next a little palace dog, appears. She is the queen's personal pet. It too wants a boon, and it knows what has just transpired. So it asks for a pup that will have poison in its teeth. Her plan is that once born, her tiny daughter will become the one to actually kill that great black boar.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: This sub-story features a threat and then a counter threat. Arguments and even major feuds often start like this. Can you find a story about how a small insult gradually escalated into a major confrontation in just this kind of way?

COMMENTARY: This seemingly small "pig-kicking" incident lays the ground work for the entire second half of the story. Most of what is threatened comes true, and all the actors who address the queen as she leaves on her pilgrimage become important characters at a later point. This little sub-story, then, can be used to illustrate how a great story is knitted together. Everything is connected and the significance of the tiniest details will become significant in hindsight. Good novelists and story writers all make sure that their story cloth is "well woven" and that every detail has a purpose and a place within the larger whole.

It is also interesting to note that the queen has been collecting a long list of others' requests and promising to work for their fulfillment. This is much like a politician running a political campaign. At this point the role of "leader of the region" has subtly shifted from her husband's hands to hers!

12-b) The King Falters but His Queen Comes to the Rescue

With a long list of requested gifts on their mind, the couple now set out for the abode of the gods. Soon the husband begins to tire and

the queen has to urge him on. She coaxes him, then carries him on her back, up the steep path. Lord Vishnu is watching and teases her at several points, making the journey even more difficult. Finally the husband faints and she finds a little pond water that might revive him. Again Lord Vishnu plays with her, making the water recede. At last the god allows her to fetch a few handfuls. The water is almost magical it is so potent. The king quickly revives.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you ever sought for something that seems to repeatedly recede before your eyes? You grasp for it over and over, but it always lies just beyond your reach? Sometimes dreams are like this. Can you tell a story to illustrate the frustration you felt when this happened to you?

COMMENTARY: The queen is teased by Lord Vishnu. Here again he is testing her dedication and her fortitude. Her husband is about to expire. She has even had to carry him on her back. Now she can't even get water for him. But she passes the "test" and is finally rewarded. She has been selfless and persistent. And so the god allows her greatest asset, her husband, to be revived. "Tests," directed at either the hero or the heroine are the standard building blocks used in folk tales. Sometimes they are referred to as a "lack" which the key character experiences.... such that eventually that "lack" is remedied or fulfilled. The above story fits the classic pattern.

12-c) **There Are Many Challenges Along The Pilgrims' Path**
Next the pilgrims face a huge mountain cliff. Vishnu helps by lifting the two over the worst spots. Next they cross rivers of stone, of thorns, of butter oil and finally of fire. When these feats are complete the couple face yet another threat. This time they are confronted with a forest full of cobras. One cobra asks the queen for a son, someone who can later assist her in a time of need. The queen agrees to carry this special request with her as well.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The queen and her husband have to face many challenges. They struggle a lot. Can you think of another story where someone struggles against overwhelming obstacles and finally succeeds?

COMMENTARY: The obstacles the couple face have a mythic "feel." Try discussing what climbing a mountain cliff could represent in human terms. Similarly, try talking about passing across stones, stumbling through thorns or walking across a fire could be used as metaphors for difficult human experiences. Another direction that might interest students is to take this as a "description" of the strange geography and typography the couple encounter on their way to the god's domain. Their journey takes them through a no-man's land, a land of the imagination. It can be compared with medieval European ideas of what lies between earth and heaven. One could collect and compare a variety of artist's impressions of such "liminal" landscapes (using internet sources).

12-d) **The King Drops Into a Deep Sleep
But The Queen Reaches Her Destination**

Finally the king and queen reach a flight of steps leading to heaven. Vishnu tells the queen that only she will do the penance. Her husband is tired and will wait there for them. He falls into a deep sleep and Lord Vishnu puts his life in a little protective box. As the Lord and the queen climb the steps they see visions of people being tortured in hell. Vishnu instructs her not to be frightened. Finally they

reach the place where the queen will sit in deep meditation. Lord Vishnu builds a special pillar, made of sharp needles, for her to sit on.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you have an example of a team where one person was “sidelined” and the other had to carry full responsibility for the mission under way?

COMMENTARY: It now becomes clear that the king lacks the stamina and special powers his queen is endowed with. One can also “suspect” that Vishnu is behind this separation. He wants the queen alone to make it to the special spot where she will perform her twenty one years of penance. This is a way of getting the king moved gently out of the picture before her years of near-death “testing” begin.