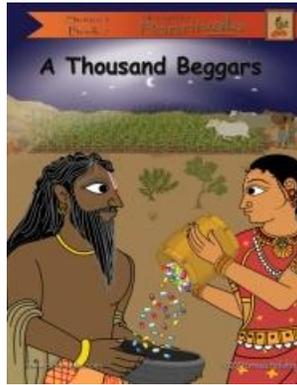


Episode 7 – A Thousand Beggars (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

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

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



7-a) THE RIVALS TRY ANOTHER TRICK BUT A GOD COUNTERS THIS EFFORT

The hopeful farmer now begins to check his newly-planted field once a week. After the second week there is nothing, not even a sprout. After the third there are some strong green shoots and after the fourth the field is full of young tender stalks. The rival clansmen see this and are worried that a harvest might be possible after all. So they send their cows in to devour the growing plants. But Lord Vishnu, with a little magic, sees to it that no permanent damage is done. After the tender shoots have been well bent down the clansmen drive the animal herd back to their own lands. The husband soon inspects the field. He is shocked by the trampled stalks but there is no serious harm.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Can you compare the clansmen's two mean tricks? How are they different? (Some possible answers are: human/animal, achieved inside/achieved outside, organized by one person/organized by a group, done at home/done on another family's land, (almost) invisible result/visible result).

COMMENTARY: This is another "mean trick" story (see also 6-c), but this time Lord Vishnu intervenes early and prevents any serious problems from developing. Again the hero is naïve. He does not recognize his rival's handiwork when he discovers the damage done to his tender plants.

7-b) THE INSIGHTFUL WIFE FINDS MAGICAL WEALTH

The next week there are many buds but none have opened. The wife becomes anxious. Unlike her husband she wades deep into the crop and then pinches a bud with her fingernail. Inside she finds a pearl! So she pinches another one. There she finds another jewel. She becomes excited and calls her husband. Together they discover that their planted field has sprouted gems of all kinds!

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: How does the heroine's behavior differ from that of her husband? Why does she see jewels inside the plants while her husband sees nothing?

COMMENTARY: This sub-story provides further confirmation of the difference in the personalities of these two key characters. One is timid and accepting of "superficial" realities. The other is insightful,

questioning and unafraid. One holds back and the other takes the initiative to “wade in” and look carefully. However, at a deeper level these differences are most certainly “gender related.” The women in the story (particular in the second and third generations) have unusual powers of insight. They can “see” realities that others can not. These special powers are related to the depth of their devotion to Lord Vishnu and to their willingness to place their faith in God’s beneficence. In the next sub-story (just below) we also see that the wife is far more generous than her husband, when it comes to giving her wealth to the poor.

7-c) BOUNTIFUL WEALTH ACQUIRED.... UNEXPECTEDLY

The couple now call in laborers to help harvest their field but they only allow these men to cut down the stalks. When the laborers leave the husband calls on Lord Vishnu to help the two of them privately cut each bud from its stalk and break it open. Again Lord Vishnu helps and soon they have filled their harvest baskets with beautiful jewels. They store these baskets inside their home and measure out their new found wealth.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: This couple’s new wealth comes to them very suddenly. It is as if they have “won the lottery.” Find some stories about sudden wealth. Develop a story about what would you do if something like this happened to you.

COMMENTARY: Winning sudden wealth is very common in folktales, but very rare in real life. You could compare this sub-story, for example, with Aesop’s Fable “The goose that laid the golden egg.” What happens in that story? Will something similar happen here? The next sub-story gives this magical event much added depth and also answers this question.

7-d) A DOUBTING HUSBAND AND A SAINTLY WIFE

Vishnu is watching their actions and wants to test the couple’s generosity. So he turns a hundred shepherds who are grazing animals nearby into beggars. He sends these “holy men” to the couple’s home to ask for alms. The husband is upset and demands that they be sent away. But the heroine ignores him and starts generously giving the jewels away to the beggars. Somewhat dismayed, the husband decides to go to visit their overlord, the great Chola king, and to take him a token gift. When he returns from this trip the door of the house is stuck shut. Together he and his wife manage to open it. Now to their surprise, they find that their stash of jewels has been replenished. The heroine recognizes Lord Vishnu’s hand in this beneficence. Together they decide to spend their new-found wealth building a fine palace.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Read (or tell) Aesop’s Fable about the Goose That Laid The Golden Egg. How does this story differ from that one?

COMMENTARY: After telling (or watching) this sub-story a comparison with Aesop’s “Golden Goose” fable becomes interesting. The Ponnivala couple have worked hard to obtain their wealth, and suffered along the way (background information missing in Aesop’s Tale). Furthermore, an important contrast between the husband’s and the wife’s reactions develops. This is missing in Aesop’s account. Consistent with what we already know of our heroine’s personality, she is quite ready to give all away.

This woman is saintly and concerned for the welfare of others, while her husband is far less generous. Finally, when the new wealth is given away (similar to killing the goose) a god steps in to “reward” the generosity by replenishing the treasure. This doesn’t happen in the Golden Goose story.

Lord Vishnu is also “playing” with the couple. Again (as in 6-d) the god’s focus is mainly on the heroine. He is “flirting with her.” However, she passes his tests and proves her sincerity as his devotee. This is a common theme in the Hindu mythology surrounding Lord Vishnu. Finally, one can mention that the husband’s trip to see the neighboring Chola king is a kind of “tribute” visit. He is sharing a small token of his new abundance with that overlord. The gift is a token of his respect, and also of submission to the great monarch’s superior political power.