

# Shalibhadra



Once upon a time, there lived a poor woman and her son in a small village. One day, there was a festival in the village and all the kids, including the poor boy, came together to play. After playing, everyone started to eat kheer, which they brought with them. This poor boy did not have anything with him. He felt bad and ran back to his mother. He asked her if she would make him some kheer since all the other children were eating it. His mother said that she could not make kheer and told him to eat whatever she had cooked. He started crying and insisted on having kheer. His mother could not bear to see him cry. So she went to the neighbor's house and borrowed some milk, sugar, and rice to make the kheer for her son. She poured the kheer into a dish and left to fetch water from the well. As the boy was about to start eating, he heard the words, "Dharma Labha". He saw a sadhu at the door for the alms. Without any hesitation, the hungry boy invited the

sadhu in and offered him the kheer. While pouring the kheer, all of it slipped into the sadhu's pot. He was happy that he could offer this to the sadhu even though nothing was left for him to eat. His good intention brought him good karmas, and in his next life, he was born as Shalibhadra.

Shalibhadra's mother was Bhadra Shethani and his father was Gobhadra Sheth. His father had renounced the world to become a sadhu when Shalibhadra was a young boy. Shalibhadra was born a multi-millionaire. His life was like being in heaven. It was said that even the heavenly angels were jealous of his lavish lifestyle. He had 32 beautiful wives. His mother never let him out of his palace out of fear that he might become a sadhu like his father.

One day, some merchants from Nepal came to sell some very expensive saris. They went to King Shrenik's court where the King told them that he could not afford to use his citizens' money for such expensive saris. They were going back with disappointment because they had high hopes of selling saris in this city. When Bhadra Shethani came to know about this, she sent for those merchants. The merchants were reluctant to go because if the King could not buy, how could any of the residents buy such expensive items, but they went there. Bhadra Shethani asked, "What do you have?" They said they had sixteen saris. She said, "Only sixteen? I need thirty-two saris because I have thirty-two daughters-in-law." The merchants thought she was joking and would not even buy one. She said, "What are you waiting for. Take out those saris." They took out those sixteen saris. The merchants were surprised that without any second thought she bought all sixteen saris. They were further dazed to see her tearing such precious saris into two pieces in front of them and giving a piece to each of her daughters-in-laws to wipe their feet. The merchants were stunned but left with joy. The daughters-in-laws used these pieces once and threw them away.

One of the servants at Shalibhadra's palace liked the queen, so she took one piece for the queen. The queen was baffled but happy that such rich people lived in her Kingdom. She told this to King Shrenik. He also felt very proud of such rich people who uphold the good name of his Kingdom. He invited Shalibhadra to his court to honor him. When Bhadra Shethani found out, she went to the King and told him her son was very shy and invited the King to come to their palace to honor Shalibhadra. King Shrenik accepted the invitation and went to Shalibhadra's palace. When King Shrenik reached there, he realized that his own palace was nothing compared to Shalibhadra's palace. Bhadra Shethani offered him a place to sit and asked Shalibhadra to come down to see the King.

Shalibhadra did not know anything about King or Kingdom and thought that there was some sort of merchandise that his mother wanted to show him. So he said, "I do not want to see that but go ahead and buy it." His mother said, "This is not the merchandise. He is our King, our master, and you need to come down to greet and honor him." The word "master" started ringing in his ears. He wondered, "Why should I have a master over me. I should be the master of myself." While thinking like this, he came down, and paid respects to the King, but he could not stay there very long and went back.

He kept on thinking that he was not free because there was someone over him. He started to think about his father (who had become a sadhu) and the real meaning of life. He decided at that moment to become a sadhu and told his family about the decision. His mother and wives tried to convince him to spend some more time with them. But he was determined to renounce the world. But, he agreed that instead of renouncing all thirty-two wives at once, he will renounce one wife at a time and then he would definitely become a sadhu. He started to do that the very same day.

A few days passed by. One day, his sister Subhadra was giving her husband Dhanna a bath and suddenly tears rolled down from her eyes and fell on him. He looked up and saw his wife crying. He asked her why she was crying. She told him that her brother had decided to be a sadhu and he had been renouncing one wife every day. Dhanna laughed and told Subhadra, "Her brother was a coward. If he wanted to leave his wives, why wait?" Subhadra was upset to hear that, and told her husband, "It is easier said than done." This sparked awareness in Dhanna's mind, and he told her, "I am leaving all eight of you right now, and I am leaving right now to be a sadhu." Subhadra was taken by a surprise. She told him that he must have been joking. But Dhanna said, "It is too late now. I am determined to be a sadhu. If you all want to join me you are welcome." Seeing Dhanna determined, Subhadra and the rest of his seven wives also decided to become nuns.

Now, Dhanna came to his brother-in-law Shalibhadra's place and challenged him, "Hey Shalibhadra! If you really want to leave the family and become a sadhu, then what are you waiting for? Join me."

Shalibhadra heard and accepted the challenge. He told his wives, "Sorry, but I am leaving you all today." He went down to join his brother-in-law. His wives joined him too. All of them went to Lord Mahavira and accepted Diksha.

After observing the penance as sadhu, he was born as an angel in heaven. From there, he would be born in Maha-Videha Kshetra and ultimately attain liberation, Moksha.

### **Key Message:**

Selfless service always pays off. Neighbors helping neighbors reflects a caring society. The virtue of a charitable act in the life of a little boy has multiplied in the life of Shalibhadra. As a result he was able to leave everything easily. Good deeds always leave an imprint on the soul. Good deeds and practicing penance as a sadhu ultimately leads to liberation of the soul.