However, Bahubali had not lost all of his pride and ego. He realized that if he went to his father and stated his intention of renouncing the world, he would be required to bow down and be subservient to his 98 younger brothers who were senior to him in monkhood. This was unacceptable to him. Instead, Bahubali decided to seek enlightenment on his own and started meditating on the very same spot upon which he stood. He became so immersed in his meditation that he lost track of time and could not remember how long he had stood there. He was motionless for so long that creepers began to grow around his feet.

A year passed with Bahubali standing in that posture of meditation, yet he did not gain enlightenment. How could he gain it without shedding his ego? At last, Bhagwan Rishabhdev sent Brahm and Sundari to bring him to the right path. They came to the place where Bahubali was meditating. Seeing their mighty brother standing like a rock, they calmly told him, “You cannot achieve enlightenment while sitting on an elephant. You need to get off the elephant.” As their familiar voices reached Bahubali’s ears, he opened his eyes in amazement and looked around but did not find himself on an elephant. He then realized that the elephant they were referring to was his ego. He immediately dissolved his ego and decided to go to Bhagwan Rishabhdev and was ready to bow to his 98 brothers.

During his long penance, he had overcome all other defiling passions except ego, which still remained between him and enlightenment. Now his ego was dissolved and humbleness prevailed in its place. Therefore, as he took the first step towards the Bhagwan, he achieved full enlightenment and became omniscient. (By Digambar tradition, Bahubali later became the first person to attain liberation in this era. However, Shvetambar tradition indicates that Rishabhdev’s mother, Marudevi, attained liberation first in this era.)

In memory of this event, a gigantic, 57-foot upright statue of Bahubali stands on the hill of Vindhyagiri at Shravanbelgola, near Bangalore in southern India. It is made out of a
single rock of granite and was erected about 1000 years ago. Pilgrims and visitors marvel that the statue, even under the open sky, stands spotless today.

At the same time as Bahubali was carrying out his intense meditation, Bharat had become the undisputed emperor, or Chakravarti, of the world. He was the first Chakravarti of the current time cycle of Avasarpini Ara. As a ruler, he ruled equitably and in the interest of all, and the people were happy under his administration. India was recognized as Bharatvarsha. He himself was happy in every respect and ruled for a very long time.

One day, a ring slipped off his finger while he was in his dressing room. He noticed that the finger looked rather odd without the ring. His curiosity overtook him and he removed all his rings. Seeing that his fingers were no longer beautiful, he took off his crown and other ornaments decorating his body and looked in the mirror. He realized that he did not look as handsome as he used to look.

This set off a train of thoughts. “I consider myself handsome and strong, but this entire look is merely due to the ornaments which do not belong to the body. The body itself is made up of blood and bones. Then why am I so attached to my body?” He thought further. “My body will not last forever and will decompose sooner or later. At that stage, I will have to leave everything behind. The only everlasting entity is the soul.” He realized that nothing in the world, including his body, really belonged to him, and soon came to a major decision. “Why not do away with my attachment of all the temporary things and instead focus on something that lasts forever as my father did?” Thus, he developed an acute detachment for worldly life. As per Shvetambar tradition, this reflection led to the rise of true enlightenment from within. As a result, he attained omniscience, or keval-jnan, in that very room as a layperson. According to Digambar tradition, after he attained an acute detachment of worldly life, he renounced that life and became a monk, immediately achieving keval-jnan. At the end of his life, he attained liberation.

**Moral:**

**The focus of this great story is on ego and self-realization. Ego and pride build negative karma and lead one to destructive behavior as detailed in the story. The ego also causes anger and leads to irrational behavior. Ego and superficial pride must be overcome on the path to enlightenment and omniscience. We should all strive for cultivating humility, one of the fundamental principles of Jainism.**