



The Story of Krishna and Sudama

*Retold from The Mahabharata and Srimad Bhagavat Purana by
Swami Jyotirmayananda*

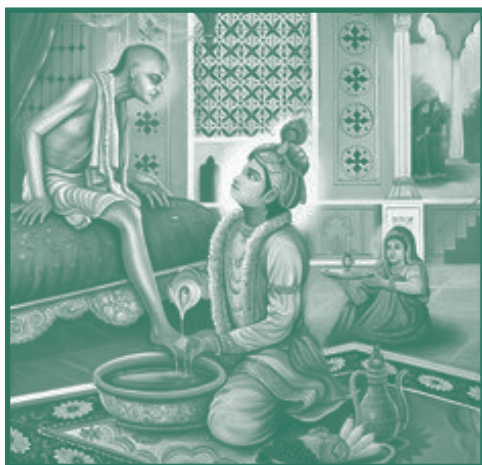
When Sri Krishna was a young student in the *gurukula* (ashram forest school) of Sage Sandipani, he had a friend whose name was Sudama. After the passage of years, Krishna had become the emperor of emperors in Dwaraka, yet Sudama had remained an extremely poor *brahmin*, struggling along with his virtuous wife for the basic necessities of life. Despite all their sincere efforts and honest dealings, despite all their knowledge of the sacred scriptures and skill in the priesthood, they could not gather sufficient means to meet the barest demands of their life.

One day Sudama's wife recalled how her husband had again and again described the close friendship he had shared with Krishna as a boy. Thus, she asked Sudama to visit Krishna, who would surely remember him and compassionately give him aid to relieve their abject poverty. Sudama was reluctant to go to Dwaraka; however, when his wife urged him

again and again, Sudama agreed—if only to behold the Lord in His glory.

“Is there any little thing that I can bring to Krishna as a present?” Sudama asked his wife. In response she obtained some handfuls of rice by begging; and made a preparation of fried, flattened rice (*Chiwda*), which she then packed in a little, raggedy cloth. Sudama, barefoot and wearing only his tattered clothes, took the package lovingly in his hands and set out to visit Krishna.

It took Sudama a long time to reach Dwaraka. Finally, however, he found his way to Krishna's palace. Seeing Sudama from afar, Krishna sprang up from his couch and embraced his old friend joyfully, with tears filling his eyes. Krishna then bathed Sudama's feet and anointed him with sandal paste. Krishna's queen, Rukmini, then fanned Sudama as he and Krishna recalled with delight their childhood experiences under the guidance of their Guru.



In particular, Krishna reminded Sudama about a particular incident in which they had gone to the forest to get firewood for their guru. Suddenly they found themselves caught in a terrible winter storm with fierce winds and torrential rains.



Holding hands they wandered in all directions, finally finding shelter in the hollow of a huge banyan tree. It was not until the morning that they were found by Sage Sandipani, who rescued them and bestowed his blessings upon them.



There is an interesting legend about that adventure when Krishna and Sudama shared the stormy night at the *gurukula*. According to that legend, when the two shivering boys found shelter in the banyan tree, Sudama felt terribly hungry. He then slyly moved away from Krishna and began nibbling on some parched rice that he had been keeping in his pockets. Hearing the sound of Sudama's teeth crunching the rice, Krishna eagerly asked, "O Sudama, what are you eating? Can I have a little of it?" Overcome by boyish ignorance, Sudama really did not want to share his food with Krishna. To hide his selfishness, Sudama murmured slowly, "O Krishna, I am not eating anything. Rather, the cold has penetrated my body and made my teeth chatter out of control." Of course Krishna knew that His friend was hiding something from Him, but did not want to embarrass him by saying anything further.

Now, many years later in Dwaraka, when Krishna was the royal monarch and Sudama had come from poverty to behold him, Krishna recalled that episode from their childhood. With the recollection, Krishna suddenly looked at Sudama with twinkling eyes and asked, "What present have you brought me from home, dear friend?" Too ashamed to bring forth that humble bag of parched rice, Sudama merely sat with head bowed. Without hesitating, Krishna then snatched from Sudama's hiding place in his clothing the little bag of rice and exclaimed, "Ah, this is what I have always loved more than anything." Krishna then quickly ate up a handful with the greatest delight.

After his warm welcome by Krishna, Sudama remained at the royal palace for a few days, enjoying all the tender care and attention, and then he departed. He was so overwhelmed by all the love that had been showered upon him that he did not wish to ask Krishna for

anything more for himself or his wife. Just having had the *darshan* of Krishna was worth more than anything in this world.

But when Sudama returned home, he found that his entire village had become completely transformed. Wonderful roads and multicolored gardens abounded where once there had been abject poverty. His own home was now a magnificent palace and his wife appeared before him adorned like a queen.



Sri Krishna, the Knower of all hearts, had known all along that Sudama had come to Dwaraka at his wife's request to ask for assistance. Thus Krishna had arranged this transformation of Sudama's village in a very short time, without ever hinting to his friend that such unimaginable abundance would be waiting for him at home. From then on Sudama and his wife lived a life of great prosperity with increasing surrender and devotion to God until they attained Enlightenment.

Mystic Meaning

This is the story of the soul (Sudama) in its process of realizing its Divine Friend, the Supreme Self (Krishna). The fried rice Sudama declined to share with Krishna represents the inability to give up worldly desires. Led by karmas the *jiva* or individual soul must confront the torrential rains of the world-process.

Due to ignorance, one cannot surrender to the Divine Being, his own inner Reality abiding in his very heart. Due to ignorance, he refrains from sharing with the Divine Being i.e. he lacks the understanding that "It is God who works through me in all that I accomplish; I am only an instrument in His Divine Hands." This lack of understanding that allows importance to the ego causes the soul to experience poverty, to become like that ragged Sudama with tattered clothes, begging for some happiness in the realm of the body, mind and senses.

But there comes a time in the course of one's evolution when you begin to "share" with God with profound devotion and ego begins to fade. Purified intellect or *buddhi*—the wife of Sudama—sends out a clarion call to the soul that God is ever present and ready to support you. However, you must journey through the process of *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) to reach the palace within your heart where the Divine Presence ever abides.

The moment you listen to that voice of reason, you realize that there was no reason to be miserable or poor. You had a vast treasure hidden right within your room—a secret door with a view to eternity!

At first treading the spiritual path seems difficult, fraught with painful discipline and struggle. However, once you experience the awakening of Divine Love and the door opens through meditation and *samadhi* (super-consciousness, the culmination of meditation), you realize that being in communion with God is the simplest state of existence. During the state of *samadhi*, an aspirant finds himself in the presence of Divine grandeur, where the burden of misery is lifted and one is united with his eternal friend, the Divine Self.

Krishna's eager welcoming of Sudama is indicative of how Divine love flows towards the aspirant who has sincerely opened

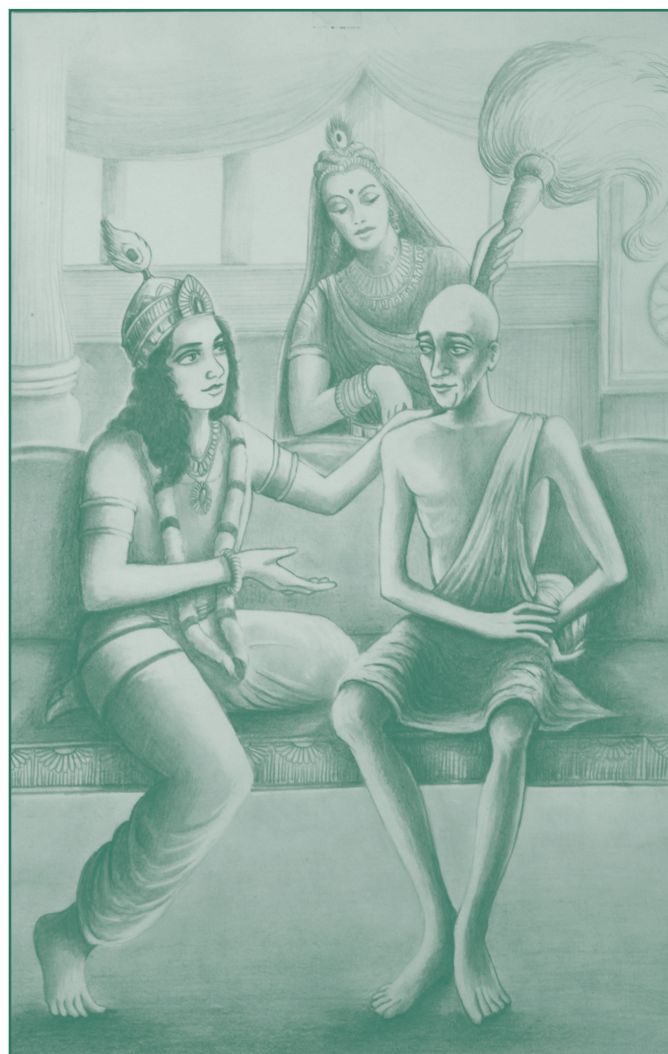
his heart. If you come to meet God in a spirit of surrender, God runs to you. He puts down His crown of eternity and yellow garment of infinity—all the Divine attributes that transcend human mind. From that transcendental realm He comes to the devotee and showers His blessings upon him.

The gift of parched rice was accepted by the Lord, even forcibly as it were. Any offering given with profound devotion, no matter how little, is delightful to God. Further, Krishna's eager consumption of the food is symbolic of how quickly all karmas or impressions of selfish actions are destroyed by the knowledge of the Self that arises in *samadhi*

When Sudama left Krishna he felt no desire to ask his Divine friend for material assistance. In the experience of Divine Communion, all material desires are suspended, all fascination for objects transcended.

The amazing changes in his village that greet Sudama on his return home from Krishna's presence is symbolic of the transformation that takes place in the life of an aspirant through the experience of *samadhi*. In that state of super-consciousness, the unconscious is overhauled and impure impressions (*ashubbha samskaras*) are replaced by pure impressions (*shubbha samskaras*).

When the aspirant returns to normal consciousness again and again from the practice of profound meditation, he finds that all that was once little and limited in his life has undergone a tremendous transformation. Every experience becomes a mirror reflecting the eternity and infinity of existence. His intellect blooms into intuition. The lover and the Beloved have become one—the Soul has become United with God. This is indeed the blessed Goal of life: Self-realization!



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