

The Dangerous City

A Folk Tale adapted by Swami Jyotirmayananda

Once in Andher Nagari, which literally means a city of the blind, a city of darkness, there arrived a spiritual Guru traveling with two of his disciples. That city was unique in that everything was sold at the same rate—a pound of potatoes, a pound of sweet candies, or a pound of gold. The King of that city had developed tremendous ego, asserting that he was the most righteous person in the world and

could carry out justice in a most absolute way. As a result of these peculiarities, there was a saying heard in whispers throughout the city: “This is Andher Nagari. There is no reason used here and the King is the most stupid!”

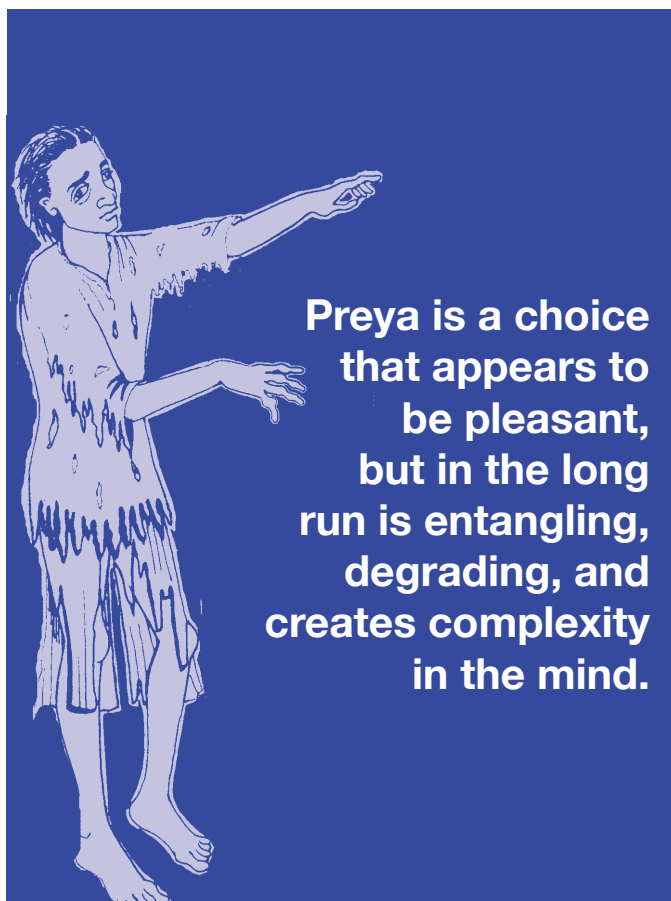
Govardhan Das, one of the disciples, was strongly drawn to that city not so much because gold was cheap there, but because sweets were cheap. At the ashram, delicious foods were seldom available and he was always hungry. Even if he went to the market, he had no money to buy sweets. So now he had found a city abounding with everything he wanted to eat. Overwhelmed, he said to his Guru, “Please let me stay here, O Guru.”

“No. This is a dangerous city,” Guru replied.

“I have never seen such a wonderful place in the whole world. Let’s all stay here and not go back to the ashram,” the disciple argued.

“No,” repeated the Guru. “We should get away as quickly as possible.” However, despite all the teacher’s arguments, Govardhan Das continued to insist, saying, “Oh Guru, please, let me have my way, at least for some time. Ultimately spiritual practice is done for freedom. If you are always trapped by disciplines, how can you enjoy freedom? I am sure that this is a wonderful place.”

After hearing these words, the Guru realized that Govardhan Das needed to have some



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experience to gain maturity. So he said, “All right, you can stay here. But when you are in deep trouble, think of me. We have a telepathic connection. I will be aware of your thoughts and come to help you.”

So Govardhan Das stayed in Andher Nagari, and day after day things were very pleasant and he enjoyed an abundance of festive foods that cost only 2 pennies. Naturally, he became obese and, in particular, his neck became very fat.

Reflecting on his apparent prosperity, Govardhan Das concluded, “My Guru was always right in the past, but this time he was certainly wrong!”

While Govardhan Das was convincing himself about his Guru’s lack of wisdom, something happened in the kingdom. A farmer came to the King, saying: “Oh King, pass your judgment, show your justice.”

The King asked, “What has happened to you?”

The farmer explained that when he was passing by with his pet goat, a wall fell and the goat was killed. As it was murder, he wanted justice to be done. The King became extremely angry that a murder had happened in his kingdom, which was such a righteous place. Thus, he commanded his minister, “Summon this wall. It must be punished.”

The minister replied, “Your majesty, the wall doesn’t know anything, and can’t be held responsible. It is wiser to get hold of the man who is the owner of the house. He is the one to be punished.”

So the King’s attendants went after the man, found him and brought him to the court. The King glared at him like a lion and said, “Your wall fell. The goat was killed. Justice has to be done. Someone has to be hung, and

Shreya is a choice that is in agreement with your reasoning, allowing you to control your senses as sattwa develops more and more.



since you are the owner of the wall, it must be you.”

The owner of the house scratched his head to find a fast answer and said, “Your majesty, how could I have known that the wall would fall? The fault lies with the workers who built the structure and mixed the concrete in a way that weakened the wall.”

“Well then,” the King said, “summon those who did the construction work.”

When they appeared before him, the King said, “You didn’t build the wall in a correct way, so it fell and the goat was killed. Someone has to pay for this death. Justice has to be done. Death for death—even if it was a goat.”

Being accustomed to this kingdom and its unique logic, the construction workers said, “While we were mixing the concrete, a lady passed by, dancing and singing. Her song swayed our minds in such a way that we couldn’t find the right proportions, so naturally the concrete was defective.”

“Bring that lady,” the King said, “since it is clearly her fault.”

That lady was brought, and the King asked, “Why did you distract these people with your song so that the concrete wasn’t mixed in a correct way, and the wall wasn’t built properly, and the innocent goat—the dear pet of the farmer—was killed? How could you do that?”

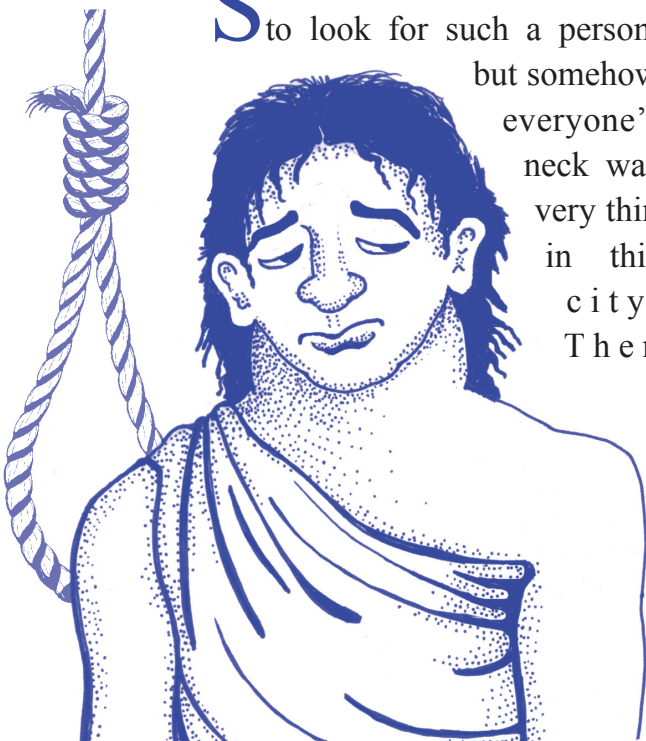
The lady’s mind became devoid of all thoughts. She was so absolutely stunned that she was unable to say anything in her defense as the others before her had done.

The King immediately passed judgment: “Take this lady and hang her. Put the noose on her neck.”

However, when the noose was put in place, it became apparent that her neck was too thin, and she slipped out of it. The hangman tried three or four times, but each time she slipped out.

The King started getting angry, so he shouted, “Hurry, this is the royal court. You must solve this little problem right away. Just find anyone whose neck can fit into the noose!”

So now the soldiers went out to look for such a person, but somehow everyone’s neck was very thin in this city. Then



they spied Govardhan Das, the only man with heavy muscles and a neck that was fat and strong enough for the noose. He was dragged to the royal palace and the King said, “Excellent! Hang him!” And then the King spoke to the surprised young man, saying, “This farmer’s beautiful goat, dearest among his possessions, was killed by a falling wall because that lady started singing and dancing. Her neck has to pay for this crime, but it doesn’t fit the noose—and yours does. Justice is justice. There must be a death for a death. It doesn’t matter whether you committed the crime or not.”

Now, the disciple thought sadly about all the good food he had eaten that had fattened his neck. Then he remembered his Guru’s words: “This is a dangerous city, where values are the same for everything—for potatoes, for gold, and for sweets. Higher culture requires that one recognize the proper value of things.”

Reflecting
On this,

Govardhan Das remembered the Guru’s last words before he left him in Andher N a g a r i :

“When you are in deep trouble, think of me and I will come to help

you!” So, Govardhan Das asked the King to give him a few minutes to meditate before the sentence was carried out, and the King agreed. Then Govardhan Das mentally invoked his Guru, who immediately appeared on the scene.

“Your majesty,” said the Guru, “may I see Govardhan Das before you hang him. He has



been my disciple and I have been instructing him to always turn away from doing bad things. I want to know why he has committed this deed.”

“All right,” the King agreed.

The clever Guru then whispered something into his disciple’s ear. As a result, both Guru and disciple began to take turns shouting, “Hang me first. I want to be first!”

The King became very interested in this unexpected behavior and asked, “Why are you foolish people competing to be hanged?”

The Guru explained, “Astrologically, it is a very special time. Anyone who is hanged at this time will go straight to heaven. We have been practicing yoga sadhana for attaining heaven and now the exact time has come. This disciple is extremely selfish and wants to go to heaven before me, his Guru. But the Guru should have the honor of going first!”

The King then shouted angrily, “Do you both think that I am a dull wit? I deserve to go to heaven before either of you. I am the King here, and I should have the honor of being hanged first and, thus, going to heaven first.”

Eagerly, the hangman complied with the King’s wishes, and that was the end of the King. As might be expected, all his subjects were delighted to see him gone, along with his absurd system of justice!

As this story leads us to understand, if intellect is not used in a rational and pure way, you are living in Andher Nagari. Life has to be governed, day by day, hour after hour, by an intellect that helps you to understand what is right and wrong. Real intellect guides you on a righteous path, and allows you to listen to the voice

of your conscience. It teaches you how to control your senses, how to allow your mind to come closer to God, and how to attain Enlightenment during life. At its highest level of purity, such discriminative intellect is known as *viveka*.

In all things, there are always two choices before you. The first, known as *preya*, is a choice that appears to be pleasant, but in the long run is entangling, degrading and creates complexity in the mind. The second, known as *shreya*, is a choice that is in agreement with your reasoning. You are treading the path of *shreya* when you begin to control your senses and mind while allowing *sattwa* (purity) to develop more and more.

In Yoga philosophy, if you enhance *sattwa* day by day, your mind draws positive impressions into the unconscious. *Sattwa* is increased by spiritual practice, repetition of mantra (*japa*), good association (*satsanga*), and righteous actions in service of humanity.

On the other hand, if your mind is dominated by *tamas* (inertia and dullness), it sticks to things that are negative (anger, hatred, greed). As *rajas* (externalization, restlessness) and *tamas* increase in your mind, your intellect becomes dull and purity of intellect fades away. If, like the disciple and the King, you are not guided by discriminative intellect (*viveka*), you live in Andher Nagari, a state of restlessness, agony, and shallowness. In that state of dull intellect, you cannot acquire anything profound, nor recognize what is of real value in your life.