

Exercise Sheet (Homework): “Bhrigu’s Footprint”

One day on Maharloka, a planet beyond the pole star, many mystic saints gathered together. They happily discussed the mysteries of life – talking about the soul, reincarnation and the law of karma. However, they couldn’t agree on who was the greatest person in the whole cosmos. Some said, ‘it must be Brahma, because he is the creator.’ Others disagreed, ‘No, Vishnu, the preserver, is the greatest.’ Still others maintained, ‘Shiva must be the Supreme, since he destroys everything.’ This debate continued at length until Bhrigu Muni came up with the idea. ‘I propose that I visit all three great personalities – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. I will test them in such a way that we can understand who is the greatest.’ Everyone agreed.

And so, using his mystic powers of travel, Bhrigu went first to the planet of his father, the four-headed Brahma. Entering the palace, he walked straight up to his father without showing the slightest respect. He stood there, staring at him as if to challenge his authority. Brahma’s body shook in anger. His eyebrows knitted together, his nostrils flared and his eyes turned copper-red. It was evident that it was only with the greatest effort that he was able to contain his anger. So Bhrigu excused himself and quickly left.

He next visited Mount Kailash in the Himalayas, the home of his brother, Lord Shiva. Shiva greeted him with open arms. ‘Bhrigu, what a nice surprise! It has been so long!’ Bhrigu, however, shrank back in disgust. ‘Don’t dare touch me. You are so dirty. You wear snakes around your neck and arms, and you smear your body with ash from the crematorium. Keep away from me’. Shiva seized his trident and screamed, ‘how dare you insult me! For that you will die!’ He started dancing wildly and beating his drum, just as he does at the time of universal destruction. Just as Shiva was about to release his deadly trident, his wife Parvati stepped in. ‘Oh please, my Lord, forgive him. He is both your brother and a brahmin. You will spoil your good name if you kill him.’ Shiva was pacified by her gentle soothing words. Though still breathing heavily, he put his trident down, allowing Bhrigu to leave alive.

On his way to Vishnuloka, Bhrigu considered, ‘I have offended my father with bad manners and my brother with cruel words. I shall have to do something even worse when I see Vishnu.’ Lord Vishnu and his queen, Lakshmi, were joking and smiling with each other. They didn’t appear to even notice their uninvited guest approaching. Pretending to be upset, Bhrigu strode up to Vishnu and planted a very hard kick on his chest. He shouted, ‘How dare you ignore me!’

As if mildly surprised, Vishnu looked up. He merely smiled, ‘Please forgive me, Bhrigu. Has your dedicate foot become bruised after touching my hard chest?’ He took Bhrigu’s foot in his hands, ‘Please let me massage it for you.’ Lakshmi, however, was not so forgiving. She said, ‘Personally, I will tolerate an insult. But I will never tolerate one against my lord. I curse you that from this day on all brahmanas, such as yourself, will be penniless.’ Bhrigu considered that the goal of life was simply to please Vishnu, and he knew that love for money can often be the root of evil. So he took the curse to be a blessing. And so, with the Lord’s permission, Bhrigu left Vishnuloka feeling great satisfaction.

Upon his return, the other saints listened spellbound as he related what had happened. They all agreed that Vishnu was full of tolerance, mercy and all other virtues. He was therefore the greatest person of all.

Why did all the saints agree that Vishnu is the greatest person in the universe? Write a brief answer in your exercise book.

Find out about another story that claims someone else, and not Vishnu, is the Supreme Person. Write a brief summary of the story in your exercise book.