

The Judgment Of Indra

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[TIME: *The Fifteenth Century.*]

[PLACE: *A Monastery on one of the foothills of Himalaya.*]

[SCENE: *In the foreground is the outer court of a Monastery. In the center of the court is a sacred plant, growing out of a small altar of earth about two feet square. On the left of the court is a sheer precipice, adown which a flight of stone steps--only a few of which are visible--connects the Monastery with the village in the valley below.*

To the right are the temple and the adobe walls and the roof of the monastery cells. There is a little space between the temple and the adobe walls, which is the passage leading to the inner recesses of the monastery. Several steps lead to the doors of the temple, which give on the court. In the distance, rear, are the snowy peaks of the Himalayas, glowing under the emerald sky of an Indian afternoon. To the left, the distances stretch into vast spaces of wooded hills. Long bars of light glimmer and die as the vast clouds, with edges of crimson, golden and silver, spread portentously over the hills and forest.

A roll of thunder in the distance, accompanies the rise of the curtain.]

SHANTA. [*He is reading a palm-leaf manuscript near the Sacred Plant. He looks up at the sky.*] It forbodes a calamity.

[*Suddenly the Temple doors open. Shukra stands framed in the doorway. Seeing that Shanta is alone, Shukra walks down the steps toward him.*]

SHUKRA. Are you able to make out the words?

SHANTA. Aye, Master.

SHUKRA. Where is Kanada?

SHANTA. He will be here presently. Listen, master: it sayeth: "Only a hair's breadth divides the true from the false. Upon him who by thought, word or deed confuses the two, will descend the Judgment of Indra."

SHUKRA. The thunder of Indra is just. It will strike the erring and the unrighteous no matter where they hide themselves; in the heart of the forest or in the silence of the cloisters, Indra's Judgment will descend on them. Even the erring heart that knows not that it is erring will be smitten and chastised by Indra. [*Thunder rumbles in the distance.*]

SHANTA. Master, when you speak, you not only fill the heart with ecstasy, but also the soul with the beauty of truth.

SHUKRA. To praise is good. But why praise me, who have yet to find God and,--[*Shakes his head sadly.*]

SHANTA. You will find Him soon; your time is nigh.

SHUKRA. I wish it were true.

SHANTA. Master, if there be anything that I can do for you. If I could only lighten your burden a little,--

SHUKRA. Thou hast done that already. All the cares of the monastery thou hast taken from me. Thou hast bound me to thee by bonds of gratitude that can never break. [*Enter Kanada.*] Ah, Kanada, how be it with you to-day? [*Coming to him.*]

KANADA. [*He is a lad of twenty and two.*] By your blessing I am well and at peace. Have you finished your meditation?

SHUKRA. [*Sadly.*] Nine hours have I meditated, but--I shall say the prayers now. [*Enters the temple and shuts the door.*]

KANADA. He seems not to be himself.

SHANTA. When he is in meditation for a long time, he becomes another being.

KANADA. There is sadness in his eyes.

SHANTA. How can he be sad,--he who has risen above joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, hate and love?

KANADA. Above love, too?

SHANTA. Yea, hate and love being opposite, are Maya, illusion!

KANADA. Yet we must love the world.

SHANTA. Yea, that we do to help the world.

KANADA. The Master is tender to the villagers even if they lead the worldly life.

SHANTA. We be monks. We have broken all the ties of the world, even those of family, so that we can bestow our thoughts, care and love upon all the children of God. Our love is impartial. [*The thunder growls in the distance.*]

KANADA. Yea, that is the truth. Yet I think the Master loves thee more than any other.

SHANTA. Nay, brother. He loves no one more than another. I have been with him ten years; that makes him depend on me. But if the truth were known,--he loves none. For he loves all. Indra, be my witness: the Master loveth no one more than another.

KANADA. Ah, noble-souled Master! Yet I feel happy to think that he loveth thee more than any.

SHANTA. He loves each living creature. He is not as the worldly ones who love by comparison--this one more, the other less. Last night, as the rain wailed without like a heart-broken woman, how his voice rose in song of light and love! He is one of God's prophets, and a true singer of His praise.

KANADA. I can hear him yet.

SHANTA. I will never forget the ineffable joy that glowed in his words. Only he who has renounced all ties, can speak with such deep and undying love. No anxiety--

KANADA. It was that of which I would speak to thee. Dost thou not see sadness and anxiety in the Master's face?

SHANTA. He is deep in thought--naught else.

KANADA. Ever since that message was brought him the other day, he has seemed heavy hearted. It was melancholy tidings.

SHANTA. Nay, that message had naught to do with him. [*Thunder growls. The Temple doors open. Shukra comes out of the Temple and shuts the doors behind him. Then he stands still in front of the Temple.*]

SHUKRA. [*Calling.*] Kanada.

KANADA. Yea, Master. [*He goes up to Shukra, who gives him some directions. Kanada exits; Shukra stands looking at the sky.*]

SHANTA. How wonderful a vision he is! As he stands at the threshold of the temple he seems like a new God, another divinity come down to earth to lead the righteous on to the realms celestial. Ah, Master, how grateful am I to have thee as my teacher! I thank Brahma for giving thee to me.

[*Enter Kanada. Shukra then walks to Shanta, with Kanada following him.*]

KANADA. Master, all is ready.

SHUKRA. Go ye to the village; ask them if all be well with them. When the heavens are unkind--ah, if it rains another day all the crops will be destroyed. What will they live on? No, no, it cannot be. Go ye

both down to them and take them my blessings: Tell them we will make another offering to Indra to-night. It must not rain any more.

SHANTA. Bring out begging bowls, Kanada.

KANADA. Shall I bring the torches, too? [*Crossing.*]

SHUKRA. The clouds may hide the moon; yea, the torches, too. [*Kanada exits R.*]

SHUKRA. Yea. [*Thunder growls above head.*] The storm grows apace. I hope thou wilt find shelter ere it breaks. [*A short silence.*] The world is growing darker and darker each day. Sin and Vice are gathering around it like a vast coiling Serpent. We monks be the only ones that can save it and set it free. Shanta, be steadfast; strengthen me. Help me to bring the light to the world. Thou art not only my disciple, but my friend and brother. [*He embraces Shanta.*] Save me from the world.

KANADA. [*Entering.*] Here be--[*Stops in surprise.*]

SHUKRA. [*Releasing Shanta.*] Come to me, Kanada. [*The latter does so, Shukra putting an arm around Kanada's neck.*] Little Brother--

KANADA. [*Radiantly.*] Master--

SHUKRA. Be brave and free--free from the delusions of this world, Sansara. Go yet to the village; take them our blessings! Hari be with them all! May ye return hither safely. [*Thunder and lightning.*] Ah, Lord Indra!--Look, it is raining yonder. Go, hasten--

SHANTA. [*Taking a begging bowl and torch from Kanada.*] Come!

SHUKRA. [*Putting his hands on their heads.*] I bless ye both. May Indra protect ye--[*the rest of his words are drowned by the lightning flash and peal of thunder*].

[*The two disciples intone: "OM Shanti OM." They go down the steps.*]

SHUKRA. May this storm pass. OM Shiva. Shiva love you, my Shanta. For ten long years he has been with me; he has greatly helped me in my search after Him who is the only living Reality. To-day I am nearer God--I stand at the threshold of realization. I seem to feel that it will not be long before the Veil will be lifted and I shall press my heart against the heart of the ultimate mystery--Who comes there? [*Listens attentively*]. They cannot have gone and come back so soon. Ha! another illusion! These days I am beset by endless illusions. Perhaps that betokens the end of my search, as the gloom is always thickest ere the dawn. Yea, after this will come the Light; I will see God! [*Hears a noise; listens attentively.*] Are they already returning? [*Calling.*] Shanta! [*He crosses and looks down. Thunder rolls very loudly now. He does not heed that. Suddenly he recoils in agitation. Footsteps are heard from below, rising higher and higher. Shukra rubs his eyes to make sure that he has really seen something that is not an illusion. He goes forward a few steps. The head of an old man rises into view, Shukra is stupefied; walks backwards until his back touches the Sacred plant. He stands still. The old man at last climbs the last step. He has not noticed Shukra. He looks at the Himalayas in the rear. Then his eyes travel over the monastery walls--Now suddenly they catch sight of Shukra.*]

SHUKRA. What seek ye here?

OLD MAN [*eyeing him carefully*]. Ah, Shukra! dost thou not recognize thine aged father? [*He goes to Shukra with outstretched arms.*]

SHUKRA. I have no father.

OLD MAN. But I am thy father. Did not my messenger come the other day? [*Silence.*] Did he lie to me? Dost thou not know thy mother is--

SHUKRA. Thy messenger came.

OLD MAN. Then come thou home at once. There is not time to be lost. Come, my son, ere thy mother leaves this earth.

SHUKRA. I cannot go.

OLD MAN. Thou canst not go? Dost thou not know that thy mother is on her death-bed?

SHUKRA. I have renounced the world. For twelve years I have had no father, nor mother.

OLD MAN. Thou didst leave us, but we did not renounce thee. And now thou shouldst come.

SHUKRA. I told thy messenger that I have no father nor mother,--I cannot come.

OLD MAN. I heard it all. If you art born of us, thou canst not have a heart of stone? Come, my son: I, thy father, implore thee.

SHUKRA. Nay, nay; God alone is my father.

OLD MAN. Hath it not been said in the scriptures that thy parents are thy God? Thy father should be obeyed.

SHUKRA. That was said by one who had not seen the Truth, the Light.

OLD MAN. I command thee in the name of the Scriptures.

SHUKRA. God alone can command me.

OLD MAN. Vishnu protect me! Art thou dreaming, my child? Yonder lies thy mother, fighting death,--

SHUKRA. I have heard it all.

OLD MAN. And yet thou wilt not go?

SHUKRA. Nay, father, I cannot go. The day I took the vow of a monk, that day I cut the bond that binds me to you all. I must be free of all ties. I must love none for myself that I may love all for God. Here I must remain where God has placed me, until He calls me elsewhere.

OLD MAN. But thy mother lies, fighting with each breath. She wishes to see thee.

SHUKRA. I cannot come.

OLD MAN. But thou must.

SHUKRA. I would if I could; but my life is in the hands of God.

OLD MAN [*mocking*]. God! Thy life belongs to God? Who gave thee life? Not God, but she who lies there dying; what ingratitude! This, indeed, is the age of darkness; sons are turning against their fathers,-- and killing their own mother.

SHUKRA [*quietly*]. I may not love one more than another; my steps, as my heart, go whither God guides them.

OLD MAN [*mocking*]. Truth is thy witness?

SHUKRA. May Indra himself punish me if I love one more than another. Hear me, Indra. [*The roll of thunder above.*]

OLD MAN [*in desperation*]. Come, my son, in the name of thine own God I pray to thee, come to thy mother. I kneel at thy feet and beg for this boon. [*He does so.*]

SHUKRA [*raising him to his feet. He puts his own head down on the old man's feet.*]

OLD MAN. Then thou comest? [*Shukra rises to his feet.*]

SHUKRA [*hesitating*]. There is a law in the Sacred books that says an ascetic should see the place of his birth every twelfth year.

OLD MAN. And it is twelve years now since thou didst renounce us! Ah! blessed be the law.

SHUKRA. Yet, father, if I go, I go not in obedience to the law, but since the desire to see my mother is uppermost in me, I who dreamt

not of the law hitherto--yea, now I hasten to abide by the law. Ah, what mockery! It is not the letter of the law, but the spirit in us that judges us sinners or saints. Now if I go with thee to obey the law, that would be betraying the law.

OLD MAN. Betraying the law!

SHUKRA. Thought alone is the measure of our innocence. He who thinks evil is a doer of evil indeed. Nay, nay, tempt me not with the law. I must remain here. I must keep my vow. [*He looks up to heaven; it is covered with enormous black clouds.*]

OLD MAN. The law is not written in the heavens. It is inscribed in the heart of man. Obey the dictates of thy heart.

SHUKRA. God alone shall be obeyed. I cannot betray His command. I, who am an ascetic, must not yield to the desire to see my mother--Nay! God--

OLD MAN. What manner of God is He that deprives a dying mother of her son? Such a God never was known in Hindu life. No such God lives, nor breathes. [*Thunder and lightning.*]

SHUKRA. Erring Soul, do not blaspheme your creator. He is the God of Truth--God of Love.

OLD MAN [*disdainfully*]. God of Love,-- How can He be God of Love if He dries up the stream of thy heart and blinds thy reason as the clouds blind the eyes of the Sun? Nay, thou liest. It is not the God of Love, but the God of thine insane self--self-love that makes thee rob thy mother of her only joy in life. I--yea, I will answer to God for thee. If, by coming to see thy mother, thou sinnest, I ask God to make me pay for thy sin. Come, obey thy father,--I will take the burden of thy sin, if sin it be.

SHUKRA. Nay, each man pays for his sins as each man reaps the harvest of his own good deeds. None can atone for another. Ah, God! cursed be the hour when I was born. Cursed,--

OLD MAN [*angrily*]. Thou cursest thy birth?

SHUKRA. Yea, to be born in this world of woe is a curse indeed.

OLD MAN. Then curse thy tormented mind and thy desolate heart;
curse not,--

SHUKRA. Nay, I curse the hour that saw me come to this earth of
delusion and Maya. I do curse,--

OLD MAN. Thou dost dare curse the hour when thou wert born! Ah,
vile sinner! To curse the hour of thy birth when thy mother is dying!
God be my witness, he has incurred his father's wrath. Now,--no God
can save thee.

SHUKRA. Nay, nay,--

OLD MAN. Shukra. I, thy father, thy God in life, curse thee. Thou
hast deprived thy mother of her child, and her death of its solace.
Thou hast incurred the wrath of the Spirits of all thy departed
ancestors.

SHUKRA [*cries out*]. Not thus; not thus. [*Thunder and lightning, the
whole sky is swept by the clouds.*]

OLD MAN. Not thus? Thus alone shall it be. Cursed be thou at night;
cursed be thou by day; cursed be thou going; cursed be thou coming.
Thou art cursed by the spirit of the race, by the spirit of God.
[*Continued thunder and lightning.*]

SHUKRA [*falling at his father's feet*]. I beseech thee, my father,--

OLD MAN [*shrinking away*]. Touch me not. [*Going left.*] Cursed art
thou in Life and Death forever.

SHUKRA. God!--Father, go not thus.

OLD MAN. I am not thy father. [*Deafening and blinding thunder and
lightning.*]

SHUKRA. Father--

OLD MAN [*going down the steps*]. Pollute not my hearing by calling me thy father. May the judgment of Indra be upon thee! [*He totters down out of sight, left, in anger and horror.*]

SHUKRA. Father, hear, oh hear! [*The rain comes down in a deluge; thunder and lightning. The rain blots everything out of sight. It pours in deep, dark sheets, through which the chains and sheets of lightning burn and run. After raining awhile, the sky clears. In the pale moonlight, Shukra is seen crouching near the Sacred plant. He is wet and disheveled. He slowly rises, swaying in exhaustion. Voices are heard below.*]

SHUKRA. Can it be that it is over? Has Indra judged me and found me free of error? Yea, were I in error, the lightning would have struck me. I lay there blinded by rain awaiting my death. It did not come. Yea, Indra has judged! [*Noises below; he does not hear.*] O, thou shadowy world, I am free of thee at last. Free of love and loving, free of all bondage. I have no earthly ties,--I lean on God alone. At last, I am bound to no earthly being, not even--[*strange pause*]--not even,--Shanta. [*He becomes conscious of the noise of approaching footsteps and the light of the torches from below.*] Who is that? [*He goes forward a few steps. Enter Kanada, torch in hand.*]

KANADA. Master, Master.

SHUKRA. Kanada, thou,--[*a pause, very brief but poignant*]. Why this agitation? Shanta, where is Shanta?

KANADA. Shanta is--

SHUKRA [*seeing the other torches rising suddenly*]. Speak! Who comes hither?

KANADA. They bring a dead man.

SHUKRA. Who is he? [*As a premonition of the truth comes over him.*] Where is Shanta?

KANADA [*blurts out*]. At the foot of the hill the lightning struck him.

SHUKRA [*with a terrible cry*]. Shanta,--my Shanta! [*Two men carrying torches with one hand, and dragging something white with the other, come up the steps. This vision silences Shukra. A pause follows. Another torch is seen rising behind them.*]

SHUKRA [*slowly*], Shanta,--gone. [*Pause again, looking into the starry heavens.*] This is the Judgment of Indra!

[*Curtain.*]