

YUDHIṢṬHIRA AND THE ŚVAPACA VALMĪKA SĀDHU

Adapted from the Bhakta-mālā

This story is said to be originally from the Jaimini Mahābhārata.

After finishing the *Rājasūya-yajña*, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira arranged that he would give various gifts to all the *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas*. Then he asked Lord Kṛṣṇa how he would know if all the *brāhmaṇas* and *vaiṣṇavas* were satisfied by his service. The merciful Lord put his conchshell in one place and said that if all the guests became happy then it would automatically blow. With great care, Yudhiṣṭhira served the *brāhmaṇa* and *vaiṣṇava* guests, but when he finished, the conch did not blow. The king wanted to know what was wrong, so he requested Kṛṣṇa's help. Kṛṣṇa told him that there was a very humble devotee who was staying just outside of the city named Śvapaca Valmīka. He was an untouchable person who was not properly treated at the *Rājasūya-yajña*. Immediately, Yudhiṣṭhira sent Bhima and Arjuna to find that devotee and invite him to the royal palace the next day. He then ordered Draupadī to make various types of *prasāda* preparations for him.

Bhima and Arjuna quickly went searching for that devotee. They found him outside the capital in the forest. He was an untouchable outcast. As soon as Śvapaca Valmīka saw the two brothers, he immediately offered his *praṇāms* to them. He prayed to them and cried, asking them why they personally came to call him to the palace when they could have sent one of their servants. He told them that it was not proper for the king's brothers to personally take the trouble to come there. Śvapaca Valmīka then worshiped the two brothers and with folded hands waited for their order.

Bhima said that as the King of Hastinapur was inviting him to come for *prasāda* to his royal palace the next day he must go without delay. Hearing Bhima's words, Śvapaca Valmīka began to cry, and said, 'How is it possible for a person like me to go to the royal palace and take *prasāda* there?' He then told them that he had been taking *prasāda* from the *Rājasūya-yajña*. He humbly explained that he had been taking the remnants from the thrown-out leaf-plates of all the *vaiṣṇavas*, *brāhmaṇas*, *munis* and *ṛṣis*. He happily expressed his satisfaction by taking such *prasāda*, and humbly requested that they not invite him into the royal palace, as he was not worthy for that. However, Bhimasen insisted that he must come the next day.

With much humility and fear, the next day the Śvapaca arrived at the palace and first offered his *praṇāms* to all the members of the royal families. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira greeted him with great respect and wanted to wash his feet. The Śvapaca *sādhu* felt very uncomfortable and rejected that idea, saying that he is not worthy of that. He then went to his most worshipable Supreme Lord Sri Kṛṣṇa and again and again offered his obeisances. After Kṛṣṇa requested the Śvapaca, Yudhiṣṭhira washed the feet of the humble *sādhu*. He was then offered a nice seat and various types of wonderful *prasāda*. Draupadī had personally cooked, and she made many, many types of preparations. They placed these in front of the Śvapaca *sādhu* for him to take. To everyone's surprise, the Śvapaca devotee mixed all the various types of *prasāda* together — the sweet, sour, pungent, etc., and then began to honor it. Seeing this, Draupadī was not very happy. She had spent the entire day preparing that *prasāda*. Seeing that the Śvapaca did not take the items separately, and instead mixed everything together and ate it, she was thinking, 'He really is a *śvapaca*, outcaste!'

After the *sādhu* finished eating, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gave him ample donations and a respectful farewell. However, after his departure the conch still did not blow. In great anxiety, Yudhiṣṭhira asked the Lord why that was. Kṛṣṇa replied that someone had made an offense to the Śvapaca. Everyone was quiet, and the five brothers said, 'We didn't commit any offense to the Śvapaca.' However, Draupadī was silent. Finally she said, 'With great labor I cooked for him, but that Śvapaca did not appreciate my cooking and he mixed everything together and ate it. Therefore in my mind I may have made some mistake.'

Kṛṣṇa said, 'Call him again and ask him why he did like that. Why didn't he eat everything separately like us?' Again they called for the Śvapaca *sādhu*.

Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja asked him, 'Why did you mix all the *prasāda* together and eat it? Is there any

purport to your behavior?’

With folded hands the Śvapaca told them, ‘*Prasāda* means the mercy of the Lord. It has already been enjoyed by the Lord. He is the enjoyer, not I. I am his servant; I have to honor his remnants with respect and be careful not to commit any offense. I should not enjoy his remnants with feelings of like and dislike — ‘If I don’t like the chutney I won’t eat it, whereas if I like the sweet rice very much I will eat a lot of it.’ Please tell me, have I made any mistake?’ His devotional reply opened the eyes of the Pāṇḍavas. Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja along with Draupadī begged forgiveness for their offense. Right after that, the conch began to blow very loudly, confirming that the king’s sacrifice was now a complete success.

— Translated by Pradyumna Das, from Goswami Sri Nabhajikrit’s Śrī *Bhakta-māla*, volume one. Sri Ramananda Pustakalaya. Sudama Kutī. Vrindavan. No date. Hindi. Page 419.