

The story of Gopala

A Hindu Story

Key ideas: overcoming fear, trust and faithfulness, faith

Gopala was a little Indian boy who had very kind and good parents. His father and mother were poor but they put all their trust in the divine child Krishna. They loved Krishna so much that they named their son 'Gopala' which means 'cowherd', for Krishna had once lived in this world as a simple cowherd.

Gopala's mother prayed to Krishna every day. She also burnt incense before his picture and decorated it with flowers and garlands. She taught her little boy many songs and stories about the divine child.

One day, the time had come for Gopala to start school. As his mother had much work to do and the way to school was not very far, she sent Gopala off on his own. But he had to go through some woods and Gopala was a little frightened to be all by himself. On coming home, he said to his mother that he did not want to go to school again. So his mother told him a little story. She said: 'You know, I have another son called Gopala. He looks after the cows near the woods. So next time when you go to school and you are frightened again, you only need to call him: 'O brother cowherd, come with me to school' and he will come and take care of you'.

Gopala believed his mother. The next time when he went to school and felt frightened, Gopala called out for the cowherd as his mother had told him. He was filled with wonder when he suddenly saw an older boy appear. He wore a little golden crown with a peacock's feather in it. The boy played with little Gopala and made all his fear disappear. He left him at the entrance of the school and asked Gopala to call out for him again on his way back home.

This Gopala did, and when he told his mother what had happened, she was not in the least surprised that the child Krishna, whom she worshipped and loved so much, should take care of her son. Gopala now met the cowherd every day and grew fonder and fonder of his companion who was always full of fun but at the same time so kind and gentle.

When one day the school was having a party and everybody had to bring a present. Gopala asked his cowherd friend to help him as his own mother was too poor to give him something. The cowherd had nothing but a little pot of soured milk, some curds which people always like because they make a refreshing drink. But of course, it was only a small gift for a party.

Gopala took the pot of curd to school. But when the teacher poured the curd from the little pot into a larger vessel, he was surprised to see the little pot filling up again. He emptied it a second time, and again the pot was full. It happened again and again and everybody asked with surprise where the curd had come from. Gopala replied that it came from his brother, the cowherd in the forest, and for the first time he began to realise that this cowherd was Krishna himself who had come to help him.

The teacher was curious to see this wonderful cowherd. But when Gopala took him to the woods and called out for his friend, nobody appeared. He called out once more and a voice replied from far: 'O Gopala, I cannot come any more. My face remains hidden from all those who do not believe and trust me as your mother and you do'.