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## The Spirit of Bholaram

Hari Shankar Parsai

Translated by: Anushree Thareja

Since times immemorial, places have been allotted to the innumerable deceased by *Dharamraj*, in heaven or hell, depending upon their deeds in the mortal world and based on recommendations. But, an instance such as this hadn't occurred before.

*Chitragupt* was wiping his glasses over and over again, turning the pages of the register by wetting the tip of his finger. He carefully went through each page multiple times but in vain. The mistake could not be found. Frustrated, he closed the register so hard that a fly was caught between its pages. Taking out the lifeless fly out of the register, *Chitragupt* said, "My Lord! The records are all right. The spirit of *Bholaram* left his body five days back and departed for this world with one of your messengers. But, he hasn't reached here yet."

"Where is the messenger?" asked *Dharmraj*.

"My Lord, he too is missing!"

Just then the doors opened, and a messenger of the Lord of Death entered, completely baffled and tired. The trouble he had undergone and the fear in his heart enhanced his disfigured appearance. On seeing him, *Chitragupt* screamed, "Where were you all these days? And, where is the spirit of *Bholaram*?"

The messenger entreated with joined hands, "Oh merciful Lord! How do I tell you what has happened. I have never been deceived before, but for this time... Five days ago, when the spirit of *Bholaram* had left his body, I held it and began the journey to this world. On the outskirts of the town, just when I was about to set sail on a gust of wind, to leave the world of mortals, the spirit escaped my grasp and vanished into thin air. In the last five days, I have searched every part of the universe, but no trace of *Bholaram*'s spirit was found."

To this, *Dharamraj* angrily replied, "Fool! You have grown old doing this job of bring spirits, then how did the spirit of an ordinary man manage to dupe you?"

The messenger of the Lord of Death bowed his head and answered, "My Lord! I was very careful. Not even clever lawyers have managed to escape from my seasoned hands. But this time... it must have been some sort of a trick."

*Chitragupt* intervened and said, "This is becoming a common practice on Earth. People send fruits to their friends in distant cities through trains. These fruits are seized and consumed by the railway authorities. These people open the hosiery parcels and pull the socks out of them for

their own use. In goods train the boxes are cut open in the middle of the journey. And, one more practice has become prevalent... leaders of political parties abduct the leaders of other political parties and hide them somewhere. Is it possible that *Bholaram's* disappearance has something to do with such people?"

*Dharamraj* looked at *Chitragupt*, and in voice laden with sarcasm replied, "Well, even your time to retire is approaching! Why will someone bother about a poor man like *Bholaram*?"

At that moment, *Narada Muni* appeared from somewhere. He looked at the upset *Dharamraj* and asked, "What is it that makes you worried? Does the problem of space in hell still remain unresolved?"

"That problem has been solved already. In the last few years we have had some really skilled workers in hell. There have been building contractors who have supervised some awful buildings. There are engineers who together with these contractors have fed on the money allocated by the five-year plans for the country's development. There are supervisors who have taken money in the name of wages for those workers who never came on duty. These people have made some really fine buildings in a very short time. So that problem has been solved. However, a confusing situation has cropped up. A man named *Bholaram* died five days ago. His spirit was being brought here by one of my messengers. But, the spirit managed to dupe the messenger and escape. He has searched every spot in the universe, but could not find the spirit of *Bholaram*. If such instances persist, the distinction between good and evil would fade away."

*Narada Muni* asked, "Is it possible that the Income tax authorities have detained him on the earth, for not paying his tax?"

To this *Chitragupt* replied, "This is out of question; for there wasn't any substantial income. He was an impoverished man."

*Narada Muni* said, "This is an interesting situation. Give me his name and address. I will go on the earth and find out."

*Chitragupt* looked into the register and gave the details:

"His name was *Bholaram*. He lived in a dilapidated house near a huge drain in the *Ghamapur* colony of *Jabalpur*. His family comprised of his wife, two sons and one daughter. He was around 60 years of age; was a government employee who had retired from service five years ago. He hadn't paid his house rent from past one year and so the landlord wanted to throw him out. Before the landlord could take an action, *Bholaram* left the world of mortals. It has been four days since he died. There are significant chances that if the landlord truly belongs to his creed, he must have evicted *Bholaram's* family from the house after his death. So, you will have to wander in search of the family."

Narad Muni immediately identified the house by the sound of mother and daughter wailing that emanated from it.

On reaching the entrance, he called, “Narayan, Narayan!” The daughter looked out and said, “Please let us be...”

Narad Muni replied, “Daughter, I am not here for alms. Instead, I wish to enquire about Bholaram. Please send your mother.”

Bholaram’s wife came out. Narad Muni asked her, “Respected mother, what was it that ailed Bholaram?”

“What should I say about it? The ailment was poverty. It has been five years since his retirement. However, he did not receive his pension. He filed a request every 10-15 days but never received an answer. Once in a while, if they responded, they said that the matter was under consideration. In the last five years, we sold all our jewelry to feed our selves. Then, we had to sell the utensils. Now, nothing is left. He finally died of anxiety and hunger”

“What can you do, mother? He was destined to live till this age.”

“Don’t say so! He could have lived longer. If he would have received his pension of 50-60 rupees a month, he would have managed well by supplementing it with income from something else. But, what can be done? It’s been five years since his retirement and we haven’t received a penny.”

*Narad Muni* didn’t have enough time to hear their sad tale. He came to the point, “Mother, was he particularly attached to someone or something?”

*Bholaram’s* wife replied, “One is only attached to one’s children.”

“One can be also attached to someone outside the family. Perhaps, a woman?”

The woman looked furiously towards *Narad Muni*. She said, “Don’t talk nonsense! You are a sage, not a scoundrel. He never even looked at another woman.”

*Narad* smiled and answered, “Yes, you are right if you believe so. This illusion is the foundation of a happy home. Alright, I will take your leave.”

The inability of the lady to comprehend sarcasm saved *Narad* from her ire.

She said, “You are a sage, a holy man. Can’t you do something that will enable us to get his pension? Can’t you help in some way so that the children can be fed?”

The learned sage felt pity for them. He said, “Who will listen to a sage? I don’t even have my own religious establishment. Still I will visit the government office and try to do something.”

He left Bholaram's place and went to the government office. He first spoke to a clerk regarding Bholaram's case. The clerk looked at him intently and said, "Bholaram had sent his requests but didn't add weight to them. So, they might have just blown away."

To this Narad replied, "You have paperweights right here... you didn't place one on them?"

The clerk laughed, "You are an ascetic, you don't understand the ways of the world. You don't need a paperweight to add weight to a request. Let it be... You should speak to the clerk in the other room."

He went to that clerk. He asked him to go to a third fellow who further sent him to the fourth one and this fourth sent him to a fifth. After dealing with around 25-30 clerks and officers he came across a peon who said, "Sir, why are you getting embroiled into all this... Even after struggling for on whole year, you won't be able to get your job done. You should directly meet the head. If you are able to appease him, your job will be done right now."

Narad reached the head's room. The peons on duty outside his office were dozing off, so he didn't disturb them. The head felt quite offended on seeing the visitor come without prior permission. He remarked, "What do you think this place to be- a temple or a mosque? Just walking in like that! Why didn't you send a slip before?"

Narad Muni answered, "How could I when the peon was sleeping?"

"What do you want?" the head asked in a domineering manner.

The sage Narad gave an account of the 'Bholaram pension case.'

The man in-charge stated, "You are an ascetic. Therefore, you are not acquainted with the culture in the offices. The fact is that Bholaram made a mistake. This place is also a temple. Here too you have to make an offering. You seem to be quite close to the late Bholaram. His requests for his pension are being blown away; add some weight to them."

He further added, "Brother, it is a matter of government's money. These cases concerning pension involve various departments and offices. They are very time-consuming. You have to state one thing a thousand times to get your job done. You can get your task done quickly, if..."

"If?" Narad promptly asked.

The government officer slyly replied, "If you add the desired weight on you application."

Narad Muni was again confronted with the problem of weight!

"Perhaps you didn't get my point. You have this beautiful veena with you... it has the potential to add weight to Bholaram's pension application. My daughter is training in music. I will give

this to her. The music produced by the veena of holy men will be more sweet and melodious. If she learns her music fast, we will be able to get her married quickly.”

The thought of separation from the veena disturbed the holy man. Yet, regaining his composure, he placed his instrument on the table and said, “You can have it. Now, kindly release his pension orders without any further delay.”

The officer was pleased with this gesture and offered Naarad Muni a seat. He kept the veena in a corner and called for the office boy. He ordered him to bring Bholaram’s case file.

The file was on his table in a short while. It had all the concerned papers and documents. The sahib looked at the name on the file, and in order to confirm, asked:

“What was the name of the person?”

Narad inferred that this fellow had some problem with his hearing. So, he loudly stated the name of the person in question, “BHOLARAM.”

Suddenly, a sound was heard. Someone called from inside the file, “Is someone asking for me? Is it a postman? Is it the order for my pension?”

The officer fell from his seat in fright. Narad Muni was also startled. However, it didn’t take him long to comprehend the situation. He responded to the voice from the file, “Bholaram, Are you the spirit of Bholaram?”

The voice replied in the affirmative.

The divine sage said, “I am Narad. I am here to fetch you. Come, for they are waiting for you in heaven.”

The spirit of Bholaram answered, “I won’t come. I am stuck in these pension applications. All my concerns lie here. I can’t leave these applications and go.”