

The Butter and the Milk

*This story is adapted from the book "The Monkeys and the Mango Tree" (by Harish Johari), which is a collection of tales drawn from the great Indian epics - the Puranas, the Upanishads, and the Mahabharata.

A young spiritual seeker went to see an old hermit, a spiritual master, who lived beside a river in a small hut. The seeker sat in silence with the master, and felt peace. When it was time to leave, the young spiritual seeker asked the old teacher a question.

"Of course, you may ask a question," said the teacher.

"Where can I find God?"

The teacher smiled: "That is not an easy question to answer. Allow me to dwell on it. Come again tomorrow and I will answer it. Also, please bring a glass of milk."

The young spiritual seeker agreed and went home, excited that the question would be answered the next day. However, the young seeker found it odd that the master requested a glass of milk. But since it was a simple request to fulfill, the next day the young seeker returned with a glass of milk.

The old master thanked the student for the milk and then the master poured the milk into the begging bowl. Then the master put their fingers into the milk and lifted them up. But when the milk ran through their fingers, the master frowned and repeated the gesture with the same result.

The young student watched and was puzzled by the master's actions, but remained silent. The student wished the teacher would finish up with this foolishness and get on to the question that they had brought up.

However, the old master continued to dip their fingers into the milk, stirring the milk, then occasionally lifting their hand out and staring into their palm. But when the master found their palm empty, the old sage would then return to stirring their fingers through the milk, as though looking for something.

Finally, the young student lost their patience and said, "Teacher, what are you looking for?"

"I have heard that there is butter in milk," the old master said. "I am searching for butter."

The young student then cackled and laughed loudly, and said: "It's not like that. Teacher, the butter is not separate from the milk - it is part of it. You have to convert the milk into yogurt, and then churn it to make the butter come out."

"Aah, very good!" said the old master. "I believe you have the answer to your question." Then the master drank the milk in one gulp, and then said: "Now go and churn the milk of your soul until you have found God."