

Churning the Cosmic Ocean

Once Indra, the king of gods, came across a sage named Druvasa who offered him a sacred garland. Indra was riding on an elephant and so carelessly put the garland, a symbol of success, on the trunk of the elephant. The elephant was irritated by the smell and threw it on the ground. The enraged sage cursed Indra and all the devas or gods to be bereft of fortune, strength and energy, as the garland was a dwelling of Sri or Lakshmi.

The devas (gods) and asuras (semi-divine beings) were constantly at war in the whole of the cosmos. Following this incident, the devas were defeated and the asuras gained control of the universe. The asuras desired the nectar of immortality but could not obtain it without the help of the defeated gods.

The churning of the Ocean of milk, was an elaborate process. Mount Meru was used as churning rod and Vasuki, the King of Serpents, became the churning rope. The gods held the tail of the snake while the asuras held the head end of the snake and they pulled on it alternately causing the mountain to rotate which in turn churned the ocean. However, once the mountain was placed on the ocean, it began to sink but Akupara, the king of tortoises came to their rescue and supported the mountain on his shell back.

The churn twisted and turned, the ocean frothed and fumed, waves roared and spewed foam in every direction. Eons passed. Nothing emerged. But the gods and demons continued to churn the great ocean.

Pleased by their efforts, the goddess finally emerged as Lakshmi the desirable one, in all her splendor.

Ranvir

Seated on a dew drenched Lotus, dressed in red silk, bedecked in gold, she was the very embodiment of affluence, abundance and auspiciousness.

As she rose, *rasa*, life giving sap, began flowing in every direction. The gods saluted her; the asuras sang songs to her glory.

Key #2

Effort is needed to obtain Prosperity and Success.

One cannot sit around and expect the universe to do all for us. We must act properly at the right time. Success comes to those who have prepared for it.

The Rise and Fall of Bali

The *devas*, gods, admired the beauty of Lakshmi while the *asuras* or semi-divine beings, craved her wealth. They fought many a battle over who should possess her. Finally, under the leadership of Bali, the *asuras* emerged triumphant.

Impressed by Bali's strength, the goddess Lakshmi came to him as Shreedevi and crowned him king of the earth, for she was also Bhoodevi or the Goddess of Earth. She offered him a throne, a footstool and held a parasol over his head.

Shreedevi's sacred white elephants turned into clouds and sprinkled life-bestowing rain upon the earth, watering fields and pastures so that crops grew abundantly and cows gave plenty of milk. Everyone was happy with Bali as their king.

Power made Bali arrogant. He declared, "The earth belongs to me; I can give anyone anything he desires." He took over rulership of heaven as well because the *devas* had no power to oppose him.

Indra, leader of the *devas*, meanwhile, bereft of Shreedevi's grace had been reduced to poverty. He approached the Lord Vishnu and asked for his help. The Lord told Indra to be patient and that he had a plan and will help them when the time came.

As time went by, Bali's pride and arrogance knew no bounds and he began to treat Shreedevi as his right and possession which disturbed the goddess and she began to withdraw from him.

In due time, Indra was told by Vishnu to approach Bali and supplicate the king for some land. To mock him, Bali pointed to Vamana the dwarf and said, "I shall give you as much land as this little one can cover in three strides."

Ranvir

Unfortunately for Bali, Vamana was no ordinary dwarf but rather an incarnation of Vishnu. As soon as Bali said this, Vishnu began to grow in size, turning into a giant who strode across and claimed all of Bali's kingdom in two steps. With his third step Vishnu shoved Bali into the nether region.

Vishnu thus wrested control of the earth for the gods and Indra was restored to his throne in heaven.

Key #3

Strength & Power initially attract Success

Pride and arrogance chase away Success

Wealth and Power Corrupt