

The Wisdom of Ganesha

Arthur Keyser





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THE WISDOM OF GANESHA

by

Arthur Keyser

CAST

SADHU: In his sixties, the High Priest of the Temple of Shri Kirti Gorkali.

YOGI: A younger man. The disciple of Sadhu.

SARAH: In her mid-sixties, she is the widow of a wealthy retail store owner in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Place

The city of Kirtipur, Nepal in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains.

Time

The present. Midafternoon.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

If a statue of the elephant headed god Ganesha is not available, a painting could substitute. The dialogue can be adjusted as needed.

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Setting: A sitting room, known as the Welcome Room, of a Hindu Temple. In a corner, a sculpture of Ganesha, a Hindu god with the head of an elephant, sits on a chest, which has a small drawer.

At Rise: At Center, facing downstage, SADHU sits on a pillow in a lotus position. From upstage Left, SARAH and YOGI watch Sadhu. His head bowed, he seems to be unaware of the other two.

SARAH: Sadhu's hair is growing longer.

YOGI: You are very observant.

SARAH: Women notice these things. Last year, he was totally bald.

YOGI: He still is. He ordered several hairpieces from a remarkable hair weaver in the city of Guangzhou, China. The hair is from teen-aged girls living in Brazil. They are the finest pieces made from human hair throughout the world.

SARAH: They sound very expensive.

YOGI: They are. And as you know, he is sworn to a vow of poverty. But because of the generosity of faithful students like you, he is able to cover his head in reverence to the Hindu gods to whom he prays.

SARAH: I'm so thankful. After Morris died, I lost all interest in everything. Then, like a miracle, I met my teacher.

YOGI: I remember the sadness in your face, when you first came. Sadhu's sole purpose in life is to show those who follow him a path to true happiness.

SARAH: He is such a giving person. Not like so many people I know at home.

YOGI: The master will wake from his meditative state in a moment. I suggest that you wait in the Purification Chamber. When he is ready, I will bring you back. Do you remember the instructions?

SARAH: As well as I know my children's names. Remember, I've been coming here for three months every year for the past five years. I am to change into my white robe, recline on one of the large devotion pillows in the Purification Chamber, and recite my mantra while I'm waiting for Sadhu to see me.

(Yogi escorts Sarah to a door, downstage Right, and opens it. She exits. Yogi returns to Sadhu, who lifts his head.)

SADHU: Is everything ready for her?

YOGI: Yes, master.

SADHU: And the drawer in the table below Ganesha?

YOGI: The new mantra is in there.

SADHU: I do not wish to test her patience. You may bring her in now.

(Yogi leaves the Welcome Room. Sadhu, reaching under his robe, takes out a liquor flask, unscrews the top, and takes a quick drink. Yogi returns with Sarah.)

SADHU: Blessed sister Sarah! Your face is ablaze with a smile. You give the appearance of one who has just consummated a spiritual coupling with the god Shiva.

SARAH: You're making me blush.

SADHU: You need not be embarrassed. Although Shiva, in the parables that have been passed down through the ages, would have one believe that he was obsessed with acts of male domination, he has always been a god of pure thoughts.

SARAH: I'll remember to control myself while meditating.

SADHU: Yogi. You may attend to your duties.

(Yogi departs. Sadhu turns to Sarah. Placing his hands in front of him, palm touching palm, he bows slightly.)

SADHU: May Krishna, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Durga and...excuse me...*(He pauses removes a small book from under his robe, and thumbs through the book until he finds what he is searching for.)* Ah! Now I remember. Saraiwati, Aiyappa, Shiva, and Ganesha direct their countenances and clothe your holy body and spirit with their most potent blessings.

SARAH: I don't know what to say. I've never been blessed by so many gods.

SADHU: You are not alone. Our people here in Nepal are looked over by many gods, most of whom dwell in the sacred Himalayan Mountains to the north.

SARAH: I don't want to hurt any god's feelings, but my favorite is Ganesha. And I love the adorable little statue you have here. But why does he look like an elephant?

SADHU: Wise men have debated your question for centuries. You and I will have many discussions about that as you continue your studies with me. You must be patient, as it will take us many years.

SARAH: I'll do whatever you say. I'm so sorry that my Morris didn't live to meet you.

SADHU: You must understand that Morris passed on to the next world for a reason. If he had not, we would have never met. And he will return in another form.

SARAH: But how am I going to find him?

SADHU: Together, over the years, you and I will search for him. That is another reason you must return every year. It would be tragic if Morris should not be able to find you.

SARAH: Is it possible he will not come back as a person?

SADHU: That is most likely. He could return as a tiger or even a rock. I will help you to recognize him.

SARAH: I'm so lucky we met at the bazaar in Kirtipur.

SADHU: Here, in Nepal, we use the word karma. We were predestined to meet.

SARAH: I don't do enough to deserve your kindness.

SADHU: You need not be concerned. The rapture, which I see in your face when you are here, is more than enough. That is not to say that I do not appreciate your kind gifts each year. But they are of this world and small compared to my knowing that you are slowly attaining a state of grace.

SARAH: Your words are so beautiful. Maybe, next year, I can bring some of the women from my mahjongg club with me to meet you.

SADHU: That would not be wise. It could interfere with our special relationship. If you wish, you might ask if any of them want to contribute money to our humble temple. I could send them autographed photographs.

SARAH: That's a wonderful idea. I meant to tell you. I love your new hairpiece.

SADHU: It is the way I show respect for our god, Hirsuti.

SARAH: You've never mentioned him.

SADHU: He is one of our lesser gods. He isn't even known outside of the Kathmandu Valley.

SARAH: May I tell you something?

SADHU: Please do, sister Sarah.

SARAH: I noticed, when Yogi brought me through the gate, that something new has been added. A swimming pool...it's beautiful.

SADHU: It was constructed during the past year from the one hundred thousand United States dollars, which you so generously contributed last year to improve our humble temple.

SARAH: I'm not sure. But I thought I saw lots of lovely young women around the pool.

SADHU: You are not mistaken. There are nine of them, all of whom are virgins. They are readying themselves for the Kumari Festival. They are preparing to be sacrificed.

SARAH: They're going to be killed?

SADHU: Oh, no! You need not be concerned. That is just the Hindu way of saying that they will experience a loss of innocence.

SARAH: Thank heavens. Will they be introduced to handsome young men for the ceremony?

SADHU: Something like that. I am not permitted to divulge all of the details.

SARAH: Do you ever go into the swimming pool?

SADHU: Rarely. I cannot permit myself to use the pool when the Kumari virgins are there. I must live a life of devotion to the gods and never allow impure thoughts to overtake me.

SARAH: I have a confession.

SADHU: What is that, my sister?

SARAH: Sometimes, I have impure thoughts about you.

SADHU: You must exercise self-control. Increase your time set aside for meditation. You should have a statue of Ganesha in your home.

SARAH: Am I allowed to have one?

SADHU: I would not have made the suggestion if it were not appropriate. I've been thinking about it. When you return to the United States, I will ship our Ganesha to you.

SARAH: What will you have here?

SADHU: Nothing, for the moment. It is much more important that you have him in your home. Although I have had my eyes on another Ganesha in a very

expensive shop in Kirtipur, at this time, our temple does not have the money to purchase it.

SARAH: Then it doesn't make any sense to give your beautiful statue to me.

SADHU: I have decided that expanding your understanding of the role your spirit occupies in our universe must be my life's work. That will be best accomplished if you have Ganesha with you when you are meditating at home.

SARAH: How much is the one you can't afford?

SADHU: Fifteen million Nepalese Rupees.

SARAH: That sounds like a lot of money.

SADHU: It is less than you think...only one hundred and seventy thousand United States dollars.

SARAH: But why does it cost that much?

SADHU: It is the finest statue of Ganesha that one can find. It is encrusted with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies. If it could be here in this humble room it would bestow, upon our meager Temple, fame throughout all of the five sacred cities of the Kathmandu Valley.

SARAH: Then I want you to have it! If Yogi could pick me up tomorrow at my hotel and drive me to the branch of CitiBank, I'll have a check issued to the shop in Kirtipur for one hundred and seventy thousand dollars. If you could give me the name of the shop--

SADHU: That is so kind of you, sister Sarah, but unfortunately that shop is closed for five months for repairs.

SARAH: That's terrible. I have to go home in three months.

SADHU: Then we shall just have to wait for your return and hope that no one else purchases it.

SARAH: I can't let that happen. I'll give you the money before I leave. You can buy it when the shop reopens.

SADHU: You are so brilliant. You have a way to solve every problem. But why wait until you are ready to leave? If you have your checkbook with you, then you can simply issue a check in my name now.

SARAH: Not in the name of the Temple?

SADHU: I had great difficulty in using your check last year. The bank, which I use, insisted on notifying the Monk's Guild and I was required to pay ten percent of your gift to them.

SARAH: Then I'll arrange to have it made payable to you...but I don't understand. If the shop is closed, shouldn't we wait until just before I go back before I give you the check?

SADHU: That would be unwise. We might both forget.

SARAH: I never thought of that. We shouldn't wait. I do have my checkbook with me. It's in my purse in the Purification Chamber and I can write a check to you before I return to my hotel today.

SADHU: I'm pleased that we both feel the same way. Remember to call your bank branch here tomorrow morning to confirm that it may transfer the funds immediately to me before the Guild learns of the transaction.

SARAH: Heavens, there's so much to remember.

SADHU: To make certain you don't forget, I'll have Yogi call you in the morning to remind you to make that call. By the way, have you made the changes to your will, which we discussed?

SARAH: I've had my lawyer take care of it. And as you suggested, I haven't told my sons. They wouldn't understand.

SADHU: You are wise in not telling them. They might want you to give more to our Temple, and that would not be fair to them. Half of your estate is more than sufficient. It is truly fortunate for both of us that we met in the Kirtipur Bazaar five years ago. But enough talk about unimportant things like money. Are you ready for today's journey?

SARAH: I'm so excited. I am ready to open my inner self to you.

SADHU: Have you been meditating three times each day since last year?

SARAH: I haven't missed a single day.

SADHU: And have you been reciting your mantra, one hundred times each day?

SARAH: Every day. Even on holidays.

SADHU: Then you are prepared. Today you will receive your new mantra from Ganesha. Come with me.

(Sadhu takes Sarah's hand and together they walk to the statue of Ganesha. Sadhu opens the drawer beneath the statue and removes a folded slip of paper, which he hands to Sarah. She opens it.)

SARAH: *(reading from the slip of paper)* Experience joy whenever you can. It's not as common as you may imagine. *(Sarah hesitates.)* But, Sadhu, I don't understand. That was last year's mantra.

SADHU: Something is wrong. I thought I heard rumblings coming from the ground last week. They must have disrupted Ganesha's thoughts. Give the paper back to me. I will place it back in the drawer and then I will assume a prone position before Ganesha for the remainder of this day and all night, apologizing for the disturbance. By the time you arrive tomorrow, I feel certain that a new mantra will be brought forth from the inner being of Ganesha and we will find it waiting for you in the sacred drawer.

SARAH: Oh, dear. I hate making you go through all of that.

SADHU: I have no choice. I must accept the difficulties, which I have to endure. Now, I must ask Yogi to escort you back to your hotel so that I can begin my homage to Ganesha. Please return to the Purification Chamber to wait for Yogi. It will only be a few minutes.

SARAH: While I wait for Yogi, I'll write the check,

(Sarah presses her hands together in front of her, bows slightly and exits. Sadhu paces, fuming. Taking a smart phone from his robes, he presses some buttons. He does not notice Sarah re-entering from the Purification Chamber, downstage Right. She has a check in her hand and is about to speak, but stops when she hears Sadhu.)

SADHU: Yogi! You stupid son of a sheep-herder. Get in here. Now!

(Sarah freezes in place. Yogi hurries in from downstage Left. Looking terrified, he crosses to Sadhu. Sarah shrinks back into the shadows. Sadhu and Yogi do not notice her.)

YOGI: Yes, master?

SADHU: You idiot! Didn't you check the slip before placing it into the drawer? It's from last year.

YOGI: Oh, no! Oh, my!

SADHU: Drive sister Sarah back to her hotel. After that, stop at the Chinese grocery and purchase a new bag of fortune cookies so we can give that silly woman a new mantra. If we lose her because of your stupidity, I'm cutting your salary in half.

YOGI: Yes, master. It will be done.

(Sadhu stomps off downstage Left. Yogi follows him. Sarah returns to the stage, checking to make sure they are gone. Then she comes down to the statue of Ganesha. Stopping, she faces Ganesha and bows slightly.)

SARAH: Ganesha, my dear friend, Sadhu is in need of your wisdom. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but a new mantra for Sadhu should say, "Nothing is forever, and that silly woman should go back to Minneapolis." You might also add that it's time to cut Yogi's salary in half.

(Sarah opens the drawer beneath Ganesha, tears the check, which she holds in her hand into small pieces, places the torn pieces into the drawer and closes it.)

SARAH: Forget what I suggested, dear Ganesha. One torn check speaks louder than words.

BLACKOUT

CURTAIN