



*"Granny, I have been reading our 48th Imam, Mowlana Sultan Mohamed Shah (alayhi salam)'s holy farmans and very often, I have come across the word **himmat**. According to the Imam, it is vital for a true mom'in to have **himmat**. So one must have **courage** if one wants to be counted as a true mom'in. I have thought about this a lot but have not quite been able to exactly work out the inferences contained within this one simple sentence in the Imam's holy farmans. Please help me out by sharing with me your thoughts about this."*

In conclusion to her ideas (already expressed in Part One: <http://wp.me/p1Z38-eRH>), my grandmother's final directive on this subject was very simple: "Go back in history and know the story of **Sudama**. Everything will fall into place."

I thus decided to research on this story and in this article, which represents the second part of my grandmother's thoughts on the subject of **himmat** (courage), I share with you the story of Sudama – the childhood friend of Lord Shri Krishna. I have used several sources to compile this story and I beg deference if some parts of the story may appear plagiarised from known popular sources. I would like to deeply express my gratitude to my grandmother for pointing me in the direction of this greatly courageous man whose life and choices will form a source of great inspiration to myself and, I hope, to all those who make the time to read his story via this article.

THE STORY OF SUDAMA



Sudama was from a poor family, the son of Matuka and Roka-Devi. He met the royal princes, Krishna and Balram, in the Gurukul of the great sage Sandipani. Soon after the meeting, the young Krishna extended a hand of friendship towards Sudama. "Friends must help each other in situations of peril and danger. If I am ever in peril, You will be able to help me out of it, but God forbid, if You are ever in trouble, how will an impoverished Brahmin like myself ever be able to help You?" Thus, Sudama was at first quite hesitant to accept Krishna's offer of friendship. But, upon insistence by the latter and assurance that they would remain true friends forever, Sudama acquiesced and throughout their Gurukul years, the two remained as close as two peas in a pod; fast friends, completely inseparable. Once their education was complete, Krishna and Balram returned to Mathura and thereafter to Dwarika where Krishna's fame rose, day by day, as a valiant military leader and just and loving king. Sudama, on the other hand, returned to his village, a moneyless Samwadi Brahmin, spending his days chanting the name divine and, day by day, elevating his

spiritual knowledge and status. The two friends lost contact for many, many years.

Whilst his spiritual knowledge and status reached great heights, Sudama's worldly conditions were truly appalling, deteriorating daily. Each day, Sudama would beg for alms from five – and only five – houses and distribute these amongst his four children and wife Vasundhara, taking care to keep a share for the Lord Krishna as well. This left hardly anything for himself and he became physically weaker and weaker. But he completely refused to compromise his principles, break his faith and beg from more than five houses. Instead, he pushed on, taking strength from his immovable faith in Lord Shri Krishna. The alms became more and more meagre and there were often long periods of time when the family would barely have enough for even one complete meal. During such times, after taking out Lord Krishna's share, Sudama and Vasundhara would give all of the remaining morsels to their children, retiring to bed with only a swig of water for themselves. It was a heartrending situation and when the children started crying from hunger and begging their parents for more food, Vasundhara would burst into tears and beg Sudama to go and see his childhood friend, Krishna, the rich king of Dwarka. Sudama, however, remained adamant and steadfastly refused to do so, feeling that this would be taking advantage of Krishna's friendship.

"The Lord Krishna is all-knowing and loves us and cares for us. If we are going through tough times now, that is due to our own past karma and we have to accept and bow down to the will of the Lord." – This was always his standard response to his wife's entreaties and she soon gave up any hope of Sudama ever taking help from his childhood friend.

Lord Krishna was, of course, well aware of the trying times Sudama and his family were going through and when Sudama's days were very tough, Lord Krishna would refuse to eat anything Himself. Instead, He would sit and play soulful, lachrymose tunes on His renowned flute. Sad and upset at seeing their Master in this condition, Rukmini, Lord Krishna's first wife (believed to be the incarnate of Lakshmi), was deployed by Krishna's other wives to humbly request the Lord to reveal the reason behind His loss of appetite and His melancholy mood. In a sombre tone, Krishna explained to Rukmini the situation concerning His friend, Sudama. Rukmini was horrified and urged the Lord to help His friend by sending food, money and elevating the family out of their impoverished condition.

"He is your friend and You have to help him," she pleaded.

The Lord's response was stoical. "Of course I know he is My friend and nothing would make Me happier than to bestow him with the best bounties, but the time is not right. Sudama and his family have as yet to complete payment of their past karma. Once the account is settled, I will surely do the needful."

Many months passed by, with no change in Sudama and his family's plight. But Sudama remained imperturbable, spending his days smilingly singing praises of the Lord and meditating on His name. His wife, on the other hand, was not a happy person at all. She hated seeing her children so frail, weak and hungry. She would sit for hours entreating Lord Krishna to help them just for the sake of her children. And so the days passed.

One day, Chakradhar, a friend of Sudama's came to visit and begged Vasundhara to force Sudama to join him in singing praises of the King at the palace. He said Sudama was very learned and could write even better poetry than him. He also had a more beautiful singing voice.

"If we join forces, the King will be very happy and extremely generous. You will never have to go hungry in your life again."

Sudama was all set to flatly turn down this offer. "The true Brahmin writes poetry and sings songs only for the Lord Krishna and not for a mere mortal like the King, who is not even worthy of any praises. That would be wrong and against the Brahmin's faith."

Vasundhara asked Sudama to take a good look at his children and notice the despair and hunger on their faces. The guilt was too much for Sudama to bear. Thus he agreed to accompany Chakradhar to the King's court the next day.

The King had imbibed more than usual and was happy that a second person had come to sing more praises of him.

"Make me happy and sing me a poem describing how brave and great a king I am, how merciful and loving I am to my subjects and how benevolent, generous and praiseworthy I am," he commanded.

Sudama looked up, puffed out his chest and invoked a beautiful poem in praise of Lord Shri Krishna. In his poem, he cautioned the King to climb off his pedestal of arrogance and to bow down and touch the feet of the Lord, or else catastrophe would befall him. Only those under the protection of the Lord Krishna would survive and be saved from the eternal damnation of hellfire.

There was a stunned silence in the entire court. Chakradhar was shaking and shivering to his very core, a terrified man. But Sudama stood unmoved, his face lit up with a beatific smile as he remembered the happy times he had spent with his friend in the Gurukul. True to form, the King ordered both Sudama and Chakradhar to be put to death immediately. Chakradhar fell at the King's feet, snivelling and begging for mercy. "Sudama has not eaten a proper meal for so many days and this has made him go crazy. He is not in his right mind."

The King ordered the guards to beat up Sudama good and proper and throw him out of the palace.

Crawling home some time later, Sudama fell at Vasundhara's feet, oozing blood everywhere. Vasundhara, shocked and horrified, made him lie down and then cried to Lord Krishna for help. "Oh Lord, You know our condition. How will I obtain medicine to heal my husband? Is this Your friendship? Is this the fate of his devotion?" Thereafter, she fell into a troubled sleep.

When she awoke the next morning, she found her husband sitting up on his bed, gazing wonderingly at his arms and feet. Not a single scratch was visible on his entire body. All wounds had miraculously disappeared over the night and all swellings and bruises had healed completely. Vasundhara laughed in delight and fell at her husband's feet, praising Lord Krishna loudly. Her gaze then fell upon a heavy silver bowl under the bed, half full of ointment. "Look! He was really here. He was really here Himself!" She thrust the bowl towards her husband and both of them looked at each other with amazement. They then fell at the feet of the Lord's *murti*, weeping with joy and gratitude. But then Sudama quietened down and his face became sad. He turned to Vasundhara and reprimanded her for troubling the Lord. "How could you make Him come here for a small person like me? He has to look after the whole world and He had to leave everything and come rushing to my aid! I have sinned! And it is all because of you."

He then looked resolutely at Vasundhara and declared that he would have to go physically now to Dwarika to thank Krishna for this wonderful miracle and to apologise for having troubled Him so much. He immediately got up and started walking towards the door.

"Wait! Wait! Surely, you can't go to see your old friend empty-handed."

With that, Vasundhara rushed to her neighbour's house and returned with a handful of puffed rice (*sattu*). "This is all she could spare." With that, she bid him goodbye and a safe journey. Sudama cautioned her that he was not going to Krishna to ask for anything. His only purpose was to thank his friend and apologise. And thus began Sudama's memorable journey to Dwarika.



In His private chamber at Dwarika, Krishna was on top of the world. He twirled Rukmini round and round, laughing with joy. "Finally, he is coming! He is coming! He is coming!"

Rukmini was overjoyed to hear about this. "But how will he get here? Such a frail and weak man, hungry for days, barefooted and sparsely clothed. Surely, you don't expect him to walk all the way here? Let me send a special chariot for him."

Krishna stopped her from rushing off. "Sudama is coming to see ME. And I am no ordinary person. He will have to endure difficulties if he wishes to have my *darshan*. I am the Lord of the Worlds and to see Me is a rare and unique opportunity for any ordinary human being. But don't worry, I will be with him every step of the way, look after him and make sure he gets here safely and fulfils his purpose."

The sun was blazing hot, the earth dry and cracked and Sudama's every step sent shocks of pain through his body. Still, he hobbled on, determined in his purpose. Sometime later, as he flopped under the blessed shade of a tree to rest for a few minutes, he heard the melodious tunes of a flute. Looking around, he spotted a young man sitting across from him, playing the flute. Sudama hobbled towards him. "You play the flute so well, young man. Your tunes are a soothing balm to my troubled spirit."

The young man smiled at Sudama and motioned to him to sit down next to him. The youth was of course none other than Krishna Himself (in disguise). He continued playing the flute for some time and smiled when He saw that Sudama had fallen into a contented sleep. He gently shook Sudama awake. "It is time for lunch. You must be very hungry." Laughing, He opened His lunch sack. "My wife has the habit of sending me off with enough food to feed an army. I am sure there will be more than enough for you and I to have a proper meal. Come on, join me."

The hungry faces of his children and wife flashing before him, Sudama did not move from his spot. "You go ahead and eat your lunch. I am fine. Don't worry about me."

Krishna knew of course why Sudama was refusing to eat and secretly raised His hand.

Immediately, a chariot appeared and drew up alongside them. The driver of the chariot asked the two men whether they had eaten. "My master's daughter is getting married and he has taken it upon himself to feed all the people from ten villages for the next fifteen days. Which village do you

hail from?" he asked.

Krishna furtively looked at Sudama to make sure he was paying attention and then asked the charioteer the names of the ten villages. One of the villages named was Sudama's. Upon hearing it, Sudama asked excitedly if everybody in that village had been fed.

"Oh yes! I remember that village so well!" exclaimed the charioteer. "It was especially gratifying to feed the people of this village as they all seemed so hungry."

Handing them some plates of food, the charioteer drove on. Sudama had tears in his eyes, thanking the Lord under his breath for looking after his family and taking away his worries for the next fifteen days. He then ate heartily with the youth, enjoying every morsel. Burping contentedly, Sudama thanked the youth for his kindness and got up to continue on. The youth fell into step with him and hearing that Sudama was headed for Dwarika, informed Sudama that it would be His pleasure to accompany him to the outskirts of the city as it fell on His way.



The remainder of the journey was very pleasant. The youth [i.e. Krishna Himself] catered to Sudama's every need. Food was plentiful, cool breezes were blowing and melodious tunes from the flute simply ate up the miles. Soon, the city of Dwarika appeared in the near distance, shimmering in its glory. "There lies Dwarika," the youth pointed. "I must take your leave now. It has certainly been an immense pleasure having your company on this long journey."

Sudama hugged the youth and proceeded towards Dwarika.

Hobbling into the town square, marvelling at the beauty of Dwarika and how prosperous the people looked, he asked some young men directions to the palace. "I want to meet my friend, Krishna."

They hooted with laughter. "Krishna is YOUR friend? You must be joking!"

However, one wise old man reprimanded the youth and politely gave Sudama the directions he wanted. Upon reaching the magnificent palace gates, he informed the guard to tell Krishna that His friend, Sudama, had come to meet Him. He waited and waited and finally decided to accept the obvious. He dejectedly hobbled back towards the town square.

Meanwhile, Krishna, who was about to sit down to eat, noticed the guard hovering at the entrance. He summoned him and when the guard imparted the message, Krishna jumped up and ran towards the front gates. "Sudama! Sudama!" He shouted. His crown askew, His silk scarves trailing behind Him, His feet bare. Down the corridors, through the hallways, across the courtyard He ran, shouting Sudama's name at the top of His voice, tears flowing freely from His eyes. All guards and palace attendants watched open-mouthed as Krishna ran past them and on to the road beyond. As He rushed towards the town square, shouting and screaming Sudama's name, amazed citizens of Dwarika started following their king. Never had such a spectacle been witnessed!

Sudama, upon hearing his name, turned around. The youth who had laughed at him so derogatorily were shocked to see the king Himself flying towards Sudama. Soon, Krishna was embracing him, shedding tears of joy and clasping him tightly, unwilling to let go. The people too had tears in their eyes. They loved their king and they were overjoyed at seeing Him so happy and so emotional.

Sudama was led respectfully back to the palace. At the entrance, Rukmini and Krishna's other wives welcomed Sudama with great honour and led him to Krishna's private chambers. Krishna made Sudama sit on His own throne and then washed his feet Himself, crying tears at the sight of so many thorns and the bloody cracked heels. Sudama was overcome with emotion and could not speak at all. Not only did his friend remember him but it was obvious how much He loved him. It was all like a dream.

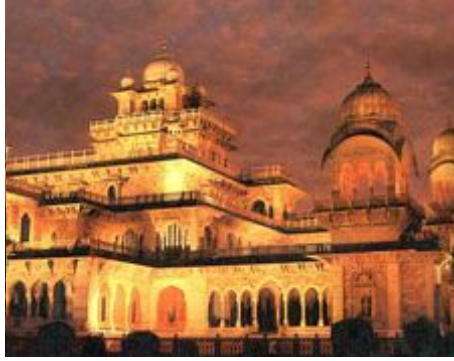


Sudama's stay at Dwarika with Krishna was heavenly. Krishna would not leave his side for even a second. He was given beautiful clothes to wear, fed with the best morsels and pampered to no extent. The two friends reminisced endlessly about their time at the Gurukul. When Krishna asked what Sudama had brought for Him, he hesitantly brought out the *sattu*. Krishna was delighted and declared this simple offering to be the most valuable gift He had ever received.

Soon, the time came for Sudama to depart. "I am a Brahmin and my religion enjoins me to accept your hospitality for only so long. I have to observe etiquette and take your leave."

Declining Krishna's entreaties to stay longer and thanking Rukmini for her excellent hospitality, he turned down the offer of a chariot and set off on foot, back to his village. Some miles out of Dwarika, he met the same youth again, riding on an ox-cart. Sudama had no problem accepting the youth's offer to join him and the two proceeded on. When Sudama described to Him Krishna's hospitality and what a wonderful time he had had in Dwarika, the youth snorted, "Then how come you are empty-handed today? And why did He not escort you personally to your home? What kind of a friend is He?"

Sudama cut Him off and pretended to fall asleep. The youth smiled to Himself and started belting out tunes on His flute. Sudama's mind was in a turmoil. The youth was right. Krishna should have sent gifts for his wife and children. Maybe He forgot in all the excitement. "But I am glad I did not listen to Vasundhara and ask for help. That would have been embarrassing." With that, not being able to bear adverse thoughts about his friend, he sank into a deep slumber. When he awoke, he was at the crossroads that led to his village. The youth bade him goodbye and rode on.



Sudama stood still for a while, wondering how he would face Vasundhara and his children with empty hands. Shaking his head, he walked home slowly. Suddenly, he was surrounded by an awesome spectacle! The place where his village used to be had transformed into an extraordinarily beautiful town with palatial houses lining the streets on each side. With his eyes popping out of his head, Sudama walked towards where his hut used to be. In its place was the most magnificent palace. "Perhaps the youth has mistakenly dropped me off somewhere else," Sudama thought. He turned to go back but then heard the voices of his children calling for him excitedly. He whipped around and saw his children rushing towards him, all dressed like princes. A lady then came out of the palace, clad in a shimmering red silk sari, decked from head to toe in gold and diamonds. As she came closer, Sudama nearly fainted. The lady was none other than Vasundhara!!!

Speechless with wonder, he listened as Vasundhara recounted how Shri Krishna had sent His special architects to transform the whole village as a gift to Sudama and his family. "And to think I was upset at being sent empty-handed? What a stupid and ignorant fool I am!"

Falling at the feet of the gold *murti* of Krishna in the huge temple room of the palace, he shed tears of remorse and shame. Just then, Lord Krishna Himself appeared and took Sudama in His arms and asked him to make a wish. Sudama looked up at his loving Lord and said, "Despite all this worldly wealth and bounties that You have bestowed upon us, I wish to remain always Your devotee. All this should not affect me and in spirit, I wish to remain an impoverished Brahmin for the rest of my life, singing Your praises and chanting Your sacred name."

The Lord smilingly raised His hand and replied, "*Tathatsu* (May it be so)."

End of Story

POINTS OF INSPIRATION

1. Sudama showed great **courage** by steadfastly keeping to the principles of the Brahmin faith. He would beg only from five houses and not from a single house more. He did not waver when his wife and children were hungry. How many of us would be able to be as resolute in keeping firmly to the principles of our faith despite all adverse circumstances?
2. It requires **courage** to accept one's conditions as payment towards past karma. This is very difficult and reminds me of Mawlana Sultan Mohamed Shah's farman: "*Whatever difficulties befall you should be accepted with joy as they help in washing away your past sins and cleansing your souls.*"
3. Sudama did not weaken at all when faced with the wrath of the King. He had the **courage** to face the King and refuse to do wrong. He also showed **courage** by fearlessly warning the King of the consequences of the King's arrogance. He was valiantly ready to accept any

punishment from the King, and when beaten up so badly, did not utter a word of complaint. Comparing him with Chakradhar, Chakradhar's cowardice shows truly how courageous a man Sudama was and this point further enhances the ideas brought out by my grandmother in Part One of this article on **Himmat**, whereby one must have the **courage** to oppose people in authority when they are in the wrong.

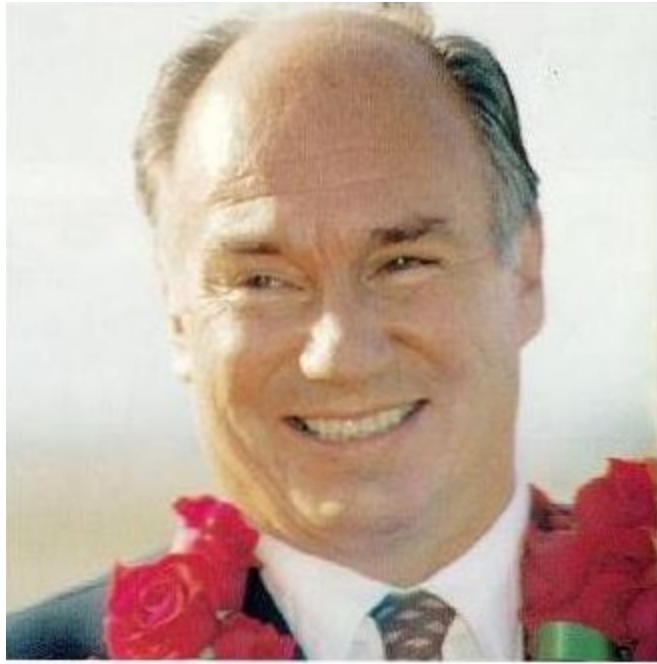
4. It was very **courageous** of Sudama not to take advantage of his friendship with the mighty Krishna and immediately seek His assistance in alleviating his family and himself from poverty.

I now more clearly understand why, according to our Imam, it is important for a *mo'min* to have **himmat**.

The story of Sudama has greatly inspired me in many other ways as well:

1. Taking out a portion of food for the Lord shows gratitude to the Lord as the provider of the said food, and also solidifies the belief that He is ever present with us and joins us in all our meals. This is a pact that I have made after reading this story -- No matter how simple the repast, I must henceforth remember to take out a share for my dearest Hazar Imam.
2. This story makes Imam Sultan Mohamed Shah's words come alive: "*Difficulties faced by any of my mo'mins make my eyes pain and my heart feels as if it has been pierced by an arrow.*" Lord Krishna Himself would not eat when Sudama's family had no food. This fact overwhelms me with how much our Imam loves us and cares for us.
3. It is no simple event to have the physical (*zaheri*) *deedar* of the Imam. Even a small glimpse of Him, anywhere, is priceless. How lucky are we that our Imam Himself comes to us for *deedar*? The Imam is the Absolute and I am reminded in several *ginans* about the difficult journeys our holy Pirs had to endure, just like Sudama, to get the *zaheri deedar* of the Imam of the time. In fact, one line from Pir Hassan Kabirdeen's *ginnan* is very relevant here; the Pir says: 'I prayed for eight hundred thousand hours. Then, and only then, was I fortunate enough to get a glimpse of the face of my Imam.'

I shall never take opportunities of *zaheri deedar* for granted ever again. I am small and sinful and the fact that my Imam comes Himself so often to my town, and gives opportunities to me of having glimpses of Him in so many places is indeed a sure sign of His love and mercy. Otherwise, do I really deserve such great beneficence? Surely, I need to show my gratitude by doing good deeds, helping others selflessly, observing my faith regularly, keeping the **courage** to do the right thing at all times and above all, making my Imam my best friend. For it is only He who can truly love me and be the most loyal and most perfect friend, taking care of me and being with me every step of the way through my journey through these difficult times and through the distracting temptations of this world, just as Lord Krishna was with Sudama. As Pir Shams so potently expresses in his *ginnan*: "You are the love of my life and I wish You to walk with me every step of the way. Grant me Your friendship as nothing is more important."



I AM ALWAYS WITH YOU

Earlier related Part 1 of the story: Doing Right, A Test of Courage – By Alysha Javer, <http://wp.me/p1Z38-eRH>

Also by Alysha Javer:

Selfless Giving: <http://wp.me/p1Z38-ev0>

The Best Cure: <http://wp.me/p1Z38-eCS>

Karmic Catastrophe: <http://wp.me/p1Z38-eJ5>