

BHAI BHOOMIYA

From 'Guru Nanak Chamatkar'

by

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Guru Nanak Dev ji undertook four long journeys to teach the people the right way to live this life and to achieve oneness with the Lord. After reforming Sajjan Thug and Noorsha, Guru ji, along with Bhai Mardana, set off for Dacca. He had received news that under the guise of doing good, evil was being perpetrated on the people.

There lived a landlord in a village near Dacca, and though he was a rich farmer, he led a gang of thieves, who robbed the people of the surrounding villages as well as the travelers on the roads. In this manner, he had collected a vast fortune. He had a firm belief that evil deeds could be countermanded by good ones, so he ran a free kitchen, round the clock. Everyone

was served food and no one was ever turned away.

This man, whose name was Bhoomiya, had made an announcement that whenever any 'sadhus', 'fakirs' and other holy men or mendicants came to the village, they were to be sent to his house. If anyone else dared to offer them hospitality, he would personally come and destroy that man's house. This misguided man believed that by offering free rations, he was canceling the evil he committed as a robber. He consoled himself with the logic that he could not run the kitchen continuously without money, so he had to rob and loot to support it!

People like Sajjan Thug knew that what they did was wrong, and used good deeds as a front to cover up their evil acts. But Bhoomiya was under the misconception that he was doing good, serving others, and the ways he adopted to this end did not matter.

Guru ji, now, arrived in this village and stood in front of one of the houses. The owner came out

and greeted Him. He wanted to invite Him inside and serve Him, for he had never seen a holy man, with such an aura of spirituality and goodness. But he was scared of Bhoomiya. Still, he bowed his head respectfully and said, "Welcome to my poor hut. Please, sit and take rest. Tell me how I can serve you? I am hesitant to offer you hospitality because the 'zamindar' of our village is a very wealthy and powerful man. He runs a free kitchen and he has made it a rule, for us ordinary villagers, not to serve anyone coming to the village but to send him to his house. We are afraid to break this rule because if we do this, he will surely come and destroy our homes. O blessed ones! Come with me and let me take you to the zamindar's house."

He heaved a deep sigh and looking towards the heavens, said in a desolate voice, "O Lord of the skies, this Bhoomiya has not only taken away our wealth, but he has also taken away the chance for us to do good! Alas, we must suffer in silence, for who is there to help us." And he

escorted Guru ji and His companion to Bhoomiya's doorway and departed.

When Bhoomiya heard that a very saintly person with a companion had come to his door, he quickly came out and greeted them with great reverence. He invited them inside and offered them comfortable seats to sit on. He felt a little tug at his heart for he had never before seen a holy man with such magnetic power and sweet serenity in His demeanour. He could not understand why he felt these emotions.

After some talk, he invited them to come and eat. Guru ji inclined His head and asked, "It is very kind of you, but tell me what work do you do?"

Bhoomiya became thoughtful, "If I tell Him that I loot and rob, then that sounds very crude, but if I tell a lie, I am sure He will know, especially if one of my enemies has already told Him about my nefarious activities, in which case, I will lose face in front of everyone. What should I do?"

While all these thoughts were coursing through Bhoomiya's mind, Guru ji kept His benign eyes trained on his face. This glance was like a laser beam, which gave him a clear view of his evil acts and they began to weigh heavily on his conscience. In the ensuing mental confusion, he blurted out the truth, "My Lord, my earnings are black, dirty. You have asked me directly, and though I am afraid to speak the truth, I must confess that I am a thief. But one thing I must tell you, I use all this loot for a good purpose. My free kitchen runs day and night and feeds each and everyone who comes here, without any bias. Sadhus and holy men have come from far and near and all have gone satisfied, saying, 'There is no one doing as much good as you!'"

Guru ji smiled and said, "May the Lord be kind to you, for you have spoken the truth!"

Bhoomiya : "Nobody has dared to ask me such a question earlier, neither have I ever admitted to my black deeds. What is it in your eyes, O Sant ji, that I have felt myself tremble for the first

time in my life and which has compelled me to speak the truth! But come now, and have something to eat."

Satguru ji : "When you, yourself are admitting that your earnings are not honourable, then how can your food be fit to be eaten by 'fakirs' and holy men?"

Bhoomiya : "When my earnings are being put to a good use, then how do they still remain tainted?"

Satguru ji : "When you attack people to rob them, they cry and feel pain. With so much suffering attached to this wealth, how do you expect the results to be good? A whole seed, when sown in the ground, can produce a plant, but not a seed which has been split (dal)!"

***Beeo beej patt laiy gaye,
Ab kyoo uggave dal***

(Asa Ki Vaar)

Bhoomiya fell into a deep reverie. His victims came alive before his eyes, injured and bloodied, crying and hurling curses at him. All this time, Guru ji kept looking at his face, seeing the changing expressions as he mulled over the innumerable sufferings he had caused. After a while, his forehead cleared and he glanced at Guru ji's feet, saying, "You are right, but I beg you to have some food so that I may reap the benefit of that. Good, saintly people also have eaten here and have showered their blessings on me. Surely those have some value? Please, grant me your grace!"

Satguru ji : "Bhai, stop this wrong-doing and follow the path of righteousness (Dharam Kirat) if you want some good to come of this life of yours. Riches which are covered in blood cannot become clean through mere blessings. Just think, only you will bear the brunt of the evil deeds you have committed, not your family nor your friends. If the king finds out and arrests you, who will then be hanged, you or all those good people you have fed?"

"Then, when your deeds are judged in the after-life, only you will face the consequences. Look deep inside yourself. You have become hard-hearted after committing so many crimes, and are incapable of feeling pity. Nor are you capable of feeling the fear of the Almighty Lord. Yes, there is still, a semblance of goodness in your heart, which has prompted you to speak the truth today. You can receive the grace of the Almighty's blessing if you give up your wrongful ways and follow the path of religious and honourable living. Earn your living through 'dharam kirat' and use part of that in the service of others. Only then will you reap the benefits of giving."

Bhoomiya again became quiet as he thought about Guru ji's words. Once in a while, he would shake his head, making murmuring sounds. Finally, he rubbed his face with his hands and said, "I don't know what to say. Your sharp gaze has pierced my insides and I am no longer sure of anything. I seem to have forgotten the ability to lie or prevaricate. You appear to me to be Truth itself, in front of which

no lies can stand. Take pity on me and forgive my sins. One thing, though, I know well, robbing and looting have become second nature to me, over which I have no control. My grandfather and my father did the same work and I have continued with it, (shaking his head vigorously), no, I cannot give this up."

Then, looking beseechingly at Guru ji, he continued, "O Godly One, you have touched some hidden core of love in my heart, hence, I beg you to have a few bites of the food, even if it makes you uncomfortable." (Then, he paused, thinking, and said) "I have a plot of land on which I grow wheat and I have just received some. I'll get that cooked for you. Please, I beg you, do have something to eat and bless me!"

Guru ji glanced at Bhai Mardana, who picked up the 'rabab' and let his fingers play on its strings for a while. Then Guru ji sang a 'Paurhi' in Raag Asa:

Saccha sahib eik tu, jin saccho sacch vartaya,

**Jis tu deh tis milaiy sacch, taa tini sacch
kamaya.
Satguru milaiy sacch paya, jinkaiy hirdaiy sacch
vasaya,
Moorakh sacch na jaanani, manmukhi janam
gavaya,
Vich duniya kahey aya.**

**(Asa Di Vaar.
Paurhi-8)**

(You are the true Lord, who has spread the True word among your followers. Only those, whom you grant the gift of Truth can receive it and live by it. The ones who have felt your presence, value this gift and keep it close to their hearts. The foolish ones do not know the Truth, thus they remain 'manmukh', i.e. those who live only to satisfy their own selfish desires. Guru ji addresses such people, 'You are wasting your life by keeping away from the Lord. This is not why you came into the world.')

Bhoomiya listened intently and realized that truth is indeed very valuable. He had seen that

Guru ji was not impressed by his account of his good deeds, but the little truth he had spoken had pleased Him greatly.

He now, said, "I can see that You love the truth. I had thought that my speaking the truth would have annoyed You. However, it is my way of serving others which has displeased You. But, I am helpless. I do not want to give You my word falsely, that I shall give up my ways and follow a virtuous path, for I see that there no place for deceit in Your abode."

Satguru ji was the complete healer. He could see that Bhoomiya had stated a fact. His ancestral heritage and his continuing the same activity for so long had become so ingrained in his nature, that mere words could not bring about a transformation. He would have to be shown a way by following which, he would gradually give up the wrongful path and turn to a life of morality and honour.

Satguru ji: "Bhoomiya, you must understand fully:

Truthfulness means speaking the truth always and letting Truth seep deep into your heart. Truthfulness means loving truth so much that even if it appears bitter, one must love it just because it is the truth."

Satguru ji continued, "If you can learn the lesson of truthful living, then the gates to the Almighty's domain shall be forever open for you. To learn this lesson, we need to remember His 'name'. But before that, we have to prepare our hearts. Like the farmer readies the earth by cleaning and tilling it, before putting in the seeds, so must we do good deeds and think good thoughts to prepare our hearts to accept the seed of God's name. This seed then, sprouts and grows and creates a serene core inside us, in which our soul resides. Here, all our sinful thoughts and weaknesses are washed clean.

"But, O Bhoomiya, the first condition to be fulfilled is to hold on tightly to Truth and to never let it go! Yes! It will transform you and

the Lord's grace will fall on your head, provided you never give up telling the truth."

Bhoomiya : "Truth? I must always tell the truth? And accept truth even when it is bitter? Can I do this? Yes, I must, because You, who I have come to love, has said so.

"How do I accept the Almighty God? You have said that He is the real Truth because He was there from the beginning of time, He is present today, and He will be for all times to come. Yes, that is the quality of Truth. Lies and falsehoods are not forever. We speak them as if they are the truth and they live as long as they are believed. But the moment a lie is exposed, it dies. It had to, because it was not the truth and lies have a short life.

"Then You have said that His name is also the Truth and this name must live in one's heart always. Yes, I can see this is so. Next, I have to prepare my heart like the fertile earth with the help of compassion, good deeds and charity. I was already doing the last two, but I never

knew compassion. Now I must learn that too, and I will. I knew of God's presence earlier, but never revered Him as You have told me to do. I have understood all this, but please, show me some simple steps by which I can walk this path successfully."

Guru ji : "Bhai, the first step is to be truthful in all that you do. Remember the name of the Divine Truth and practice it. Keep the company of people who speak the truth and lead truthful lives. Secondly, feel compassion for others, especially the poor and needy people. And finally, make it a rule never to harm anyone, whose salt you have eaten. If you follow these three steps rigorously, your spirit will become pure and all your past sins will be forgiven."

Bhoomiya : "Jio ji, let me repeat what you have said so I know that I've understood it correctly. One is to live by truth alone, second not to ill-treat the poor and thirdly, to not harm the person, whose salt I've eaten."

“The first truth I am going to speak is that I have no confidence that I can give up my evil ways, though I am determined to try my best. But I will tell the truth and recite the name of the Lord, for I have seen how valuable these are to you. After all, it was due to the truth I spoke, that you took pity on me and showed me the way to receive God’s grace and forgiveness. I will also follow the other two rules regarding the salt and not ill-treating the poor.”

As a strong wind blows away all dirty odours, as a shower of rain refreshes the country-side, and as a ray of strong light dissipates the deepest darkness, so Guru ji’s kind words brought about a transformation in the life of Bhoomiya.

Bhoomiya, now, tried hard to keep his promise to Guru ji, and spent time remembering Waheguru ji, but the Lord’s name was like a newly sprouted seedling whereas his habits had grown deep and tough roots. Hence, after a few days of inactivity, he felt compelled to go on one of his raids, but there was one difference now. Whereas earlier he used to feel triumphant at

collecting so much loot; now he began to feel some of the pain of his victims and began to question his own acts.

“Guru ji told me to give up my evil ways,” he thought. “Also, I had promised that I would be charitable and compassionate in all that I do. Breaking into peoples’ homes and forcibly taking away their valuables or robbing passers-by cannot be called so. And many of these people are poor, so I am guilty of ‘garib maar’. I must give all this up! On the other hand, how can I run the free kitchen without money? How do I pay the servants? Where to get a large enough amount for all this? Aha! I think I have found a way. I must rob the king’s palace! He is a rich man so I won’t be guilty of hurting the poor. At one stroke, I shall get enough wealth to solve all my problems. This is the best plan.”

So, the next night, Bhoomiya dressed up in rich, silken garments, with a jeweled tiara on his head. With great confidence, he entered the palace. The soldier on duty, politely asked him

who he was. Remembering his vow to speak the truth always, he announced, "I am a thief!"

The soldier paused in fear, thinking, "He must be a relative of His Highness, and that is why he was going in with such confidence. He is annoyed at my stopping him, hence his angry reply. If he complains about me, I shall lose my job." Bowing politely, he said, "Please, pardon me for stopping you and go right in."

Bhoomiya headed straight for the strong room. He had been to the palace a number of times so, knew the layout of the place well. Working quietly and quickly, he packed a large number of jewels and gold and silverware in a bag he had brought with him. As he turned to leave, he spotted a beautifully carved golden platter on a table. He picked it up without realizing that there was some powdery stuff in it, which stuck to his fingers. Automatically, he put the finger to his mouth and tasted a salty mixture. Stunned, he realized that he had eaten the king's salt. He remembered his vow to Guru ji. How to steal from the king, then?

He cudgeled his brain to find a way out of this predicament, but his given word always came in the way. Finally, he decided that it was more important to keep true to Guru ji's conditions as only then he could hope for redemption. For collecting money for the free kitchen, he would find another king's palace to loot. Leaving the bundle on the ground, Bhoomiya quietly left the palace by a back passage.

The next morning, the king was informed about the bundle lying outside the treasury. He and his wife checked and found that all the items were intact – nothing was missing! It was baffling why a thief would rob such a large treasure and then leave it behind. The king was also furious that the security of the palace could be breached so easily. He called all the guards and had them thoroughly questioned. One of them revealed that a richly attired man had

entered at a late hour and when questioned, had angrily replied that he was a thief! Being new, the guard allowed him entry, thinking that he was a prince.

The king was intrigued at the boldness of the unknown robber and was eager to have him caught at the earliest. He ordered his police force to spread out in all directions and catch the scoundrel. A country-wide search was launched, and when days passed without any information, the police began to harshly interrogate the poor villagers for information.

Bhoomiya heard about the search and also that innocent people were being beaten up by the police for a crime that he had committed. He again, heard Guru ji's words, "Don't let the poor suffer through your acts." He realized that others were suffering because of him and he must take responsibility for it.

"I must go and confess to the king and face whatever punishment he metes out to me. At least, in this way I will not betray the oath I had

taken and can still hope for forgiveness from Guru ji," he thought.

Dressed in rich clothes, Bhoomiya entered the palace and finding an opportunity, he went up to the king, bowed his head and with folded hands said, "O King, I am your thief. I had come to steal your riches and then left it all behind. Please, tell your police to release all these poor people for they are all innocent. I am the criminal you have been looking for and I am ready for any punishment that you may give me."

The king and his courtiers were taken aback. They had never seen or heard of such a thief. With what audacity he had committed the theft and then left everything behind! Now, he walks in and shows such compassion for the suffering of the poor public! Is he a sinner or a saint?

The king asked Bhoomiya, "Why did you leave the stolen stuff behind? Did someone wake up or startle you?"

Bhoomiya: "No, your highness. I was not afraid of being caught, but I have recently met a Guru, who appears to have descended straight from Heaven. He had given me three guide-lines to follow and one was never to harm anyone whose salt I ate. When I was leaving after the theft, I happened to touch a plate full of a salty powder and I licked my finger to see what it was. Your salt was in my mouth. How could I now, harm you?"

King: "How is it that without any suspicion falling on you, you yourself have come and confessed to your crime? Aren't you afraid of the severe punishment you could receive?"

Bhoomiya: "I had promised my Guru to always speak the truth and to see that no poor person suffers at my hand. Because of your inquiry into the robbery, innocent people are being beaten up. I have come to stop this injustice. If Bhoomiya does wrong then Bhoomiya must face the consequences – no one else."

The king looked at him in astonishment and exclaimed, "You are Bhoomiya? You are a thief? You are known all over the land as a pious man, always doing good deeds."

Bhoomiya: "Yes, your Honour. Even I thought that I was a righteous person. Whatever wealth I stole, I used in the service of others and so considered myself a good man, a charitable man, till the day He came – a saint with the divine light in Him! He refused to eat my food, because, He said, 'It is tainted by your sinful acts.' I tried my hardest to convince Him that I was a holy man, serving the poor and needy by filling their stomachs with free food. But He kept repeating, 'No, all that you do is filled with the pain and suffering of others.'

"Finally, I gave in, but I also told Him that the crimes I committed were so ingrained in my nature that I could not give them up. Casting a pitying look at me, He said, 'Well, if you want the grace of the Lord to descend on you and be forgiven for your sins, then you must make three vows and try, body and soul, to live by

them.’ After He left, I have tried to live by these three conditions :

- **Speak the truth always**
- **Don’t do harm to the poor**
- **Don’t steal from someone whose salt you have eaten.**

I am ready now, to face any punishment you may give me.”

The king was deeply impressed and filled with reverence for the Guru, whose wisdom had wrought such a remarkable change in a hardened criminal. He smiled and asked, “Where is your Guru now?”

Bhoomiya: “I don’t know. He left long ago.”

King: “What was His name?”

Bhoomiya: “I could not ask Him His name. Later, someone told me that He was Guru Nanak Dev ji and had come from Lahore.”

The king closed his eyes and with longing in his voice said, "Oh, that was Guru Nanak Dev ji? He passed this way and I could not even meet Him, to have His 'darshan'? Alas! My ill-fortune!"

Then, turning towards Bhoomiya, the king said, "You have confessed to a crime, so as per law I must sentence you. However, I believe that real justice is to reform the criminal. After listening to you, I feel that a higher judge than I, has not only punished you but put you on the path of reforming yourself.

"You, who were known for your good deeds, have lost your reputation today and earned the title of a criminal – and that is your punishment. By making you promise to follow the three principles, He has assured that you will not go back to your sinful ways. I must congratulate you that you have tried to keep these vows, even at the cost of endangering your life. I believe that you have the strength and self-discipline to continue on the path of truth, hence, I grant you pardon. You are free to go,

but remember, I shall be keeping an eye on you to see that you are following Guru ji's path."

Time passed and Bhai Bhoomiya truly became a saintly person. One day, the king himself came and said, "I want you to be my Guru and show me the way to a spiritual life."

Bhoomiya: "O King, I am not even a Sikh yet. He is the Guru, who removed a sinner like me, from the mire of evil and blessed me with a life of grace. Become His disciple."

King: "But where is He?"

Bhoomiya: "He has gone to a distant land, but I know that He hears the voice of love of His followers and appears to them. Build a 'dharamsal', a place where 'kirtan' of Guru ji's 'gurbani' is sung and you too come and listen to it.

"I closed down my kitchen long ago, but from what I can afford, I run 'Guru ka Langar' for all those in need of food."

The king built a large 'dharamsal' and also made provisions for the 'Langar'. He would come and listen to the 'kirtan' sung by the villagers, who now, called themselves Sikhs, and pray for the day when Guru Nanak Dev ji would come and bless him with His 'darshan'.