

He was a naked fakir, but he was loved by all real seekers. A queen was also deeply in love with Nagarjuna. She asked him one day to come to the palace, to be a guest in the palace. Nagarjuna went. The queen asked him a favour.

Nagarjuna said, "What do you want?"

The queen said, "I want your begging bowl."

Nagarjuna gave it -- that was the only thing he had -- his begging bowl. And the queen brought a golden begging bowl, studded with diamonds and gave it to Nagarjuna. She said, "Now you keep this. I will worship the begging bowl that you have carried for years -- it has some of your vibe. It will become my temple. And a man like you should not carry an ordinary wooden begging bowl -- keep this golden one. I have had it made specially for you."

It was really precious. If Nagarjuna had been an ordinary mystic he would have said, "I cannot touch it. I have renounced the world." But for him it was all the same, so he took the bowl.

When he left the palace, a thief saw him. He could not believe his eyes: "A naked man with such a precious thing! How long can he protect it?" So the thief followed...

Nagarjuna was staying outside the town in a ruined ancient temple -- no doors, no windows. It was just a ruin. The thief was very happy: "Soon Nagarjuna will have to go to sleep and there will be no difficulty -- I will get the bowl."

The thief was hiding behind a wall just outside the door -- Nagarjuna threw the bowl outside the door. The thief could not believe what had happened. Nagarjuna threw it because he had watched the thief coming behind him, and he knew perfectly well that he was not coming for him -- he was coming for the bowl, "So why unnecessarily let him wait? Be finished with it so he can go, and I can also rest."

"Such a precious thing! And Nagarjuna has thrown it so easily." The thief could not go without thanking him. He knew perfectly well that it had been thrown for him. He peeked in and he said, "Sir, accept my thanks. But you are a rare being -- I cannot believe my eyes. And a great desire has arisen in me. I am wasting my life by being a thief -- and there are people like you too? Can I come in and touch your feet?"

Nagarjuna laughed and he said, "Yes, that's why I threw the bowl outside -- so that you could come inside."

The thief was trapped. The thief came in, touched the feet... and at that moment the thief was very open because he had seen that this man was no ordinary man. He was very vulnerable, open, receptive, grateful, mystified, stunned. When he touched the feet, for the first time in his life he felt the presence of the divine.

He asked Nagarjuna, "How many lives will it take for me to become like you?"

Nagarjuna said, "How many lives? -- it can happen today, it can happen now!"

The thief said, "You must be kidding. How can it happen now? I am a thief, a well-known thief. The whole town knows me, although they have not yet been able to catch hold of me. Even the king is afraid of me, because thrice I have entered and stolen from the treasury. They know it, but they have no proof. I am a master thief -- you may not know about me because you are a stranger in these parts. How can I be transformed right now?"

And Nagarjuna said, "If in an old house for centuries there has been darkness and you bring a candle, can the darkness say, 'For centuries and centuries I have been here -- I cannot go out just because you have brought a candle in. I have lived so long'? Can the darkness give resistance? Will it make any difference whether the darkness is one day old or millions of years old."

The thief could see the point: darkness cannot resist light; when light comes, darkness disappears. Nagarjuna said, "You may have been in darkness for millions of lives -- that doesn't matter -- but I can give you a secret, you can light a candle in your being."

And the thief said, "What about my profession? Have I to leave it?"

Nagarjuna said, "That is for you to decide. I am not concerned with you and your profession. I can only give you the secret of how to kindle a light within your being, and then it is up to you."

The thief said, "But whenever I have gone to any saints, they always say, 'First stop stealing -- then only can you be initiated.'"

It is said that Nagarjuna laughed and said, "You must have gone to thieves, not to saints. They know nothing. You just watch your breath -- the ancient method of Buddha -- just watch your breath coming in, going out. Whenever you remember, watch your breath. Even when you go to steal, when you enter into somebody's house in the night, go on watching your breath. When you have opened the treasure and the diamonds are there, go on watching your breath, and do whatsoever you want to do -- but don't forget watching the breath."

The thief said, "This seems to be simple. No morality? No character needed? No other requirement?"

Nagarjuna said, "Absolutely none -- just watch your breath."

And after fifteen days the thief was back, but he was a totally different man. He fell at the feet of Nagarjuna and he said, "You trapped me, and you trapped me so beautifully that I was not even able to suspect. I tried for these fifteen days -- it is impossible. If I watch my breath, I cannot steal. If I steal, I cannot watch my breath. Watching the breath, I become so silent, so alert, so aware, so conscious, that even diamonds look like pebbles. You have created a difficulty for me, a dilemma. Now what am I supposed to do?"

Nagarjuna said, "Get lost! -- whatsoever you want to do. If you want that silence, that peace, that bliss, that arises in you when you watch your breath, then choose that. If you think all those diamonds and gold and silver is more valuable, then choose that. That is for you to choose! Who am I to interfere in your life?"

The man said, "I cannot choose to be unconscious again. I have never known such moments. Accept me as one of your disciples, initiate me."

Nagarjuna said, "I have initiated you already."

Inspirational Stories :

Religion is based not in morality but in meditation. Religion is rooted not in character but in consciousness.