

# The Churning of the Ocean of Milk story



The gods grew weak because of a curse. Even their palaces began to lose their shine and their gardens withered and died.

The asuras, the evil heavenly beings, saw a chance to take over while the gods were weak and frail. The gods fled from the asuras and hid as they tried to decide what could be done to get back their power and strength. In desperation, the gods sought the advice of Vishnu.

‘What you must do,’ said Vishnu, ‘is drink the elixir of immortality. However, it will be difficult, for the elixir is deep within the Ocean of Milk and to get at it you must churn the ocean. Only by drinking the elixir will you once again be greater than the asuras.’

‘How do we churn the ocean?’ puzzled the gods. ‘And won’t the asuras also benefit from drinking the elixir?’

‘You must make peace with the asuras,’ said Vishnu, ‘and even promise them a sip of the elixir because you will need their help!’

‘But if they do drink the elixir, we will be defeated!’ wailed the gods.

‘You must make sure they don’t!’ warned Vishnu. He then began to explain how to churn the ocean of Milk, ‘First,’ he said, ‘move Mount Manthara into the ocean to use as the pivot. Secondly, use Vasuki, the serpent-lord, as a rope. Thirdly, churn the ocean until the elixir emerges.’

Vishnu had made the churning of the Ocean of Milk sound simple, but it was a task of great difficulty. The gods were so weak they were unable to move the mountain, so Vishnu’s eagle, Garuda, moved it for them. Vasuki, the serpent god, was also too heavy to carry so Garuda carried him as well.

Eventually, everything was ready. The mountain was in place and Vasuki was tightly wrapped around it so the churning began. At first, the asuras had the tail end of the serpent and the gods had the head but the asuras complained bitterly so a swap was made. Now the gods were at the tail end of the serpent and the asuras were at the head. After a while, Vasuki, the serpent god, started spitting poisonous venom, so the asuras complained again.

The Ocean of Milk was churned for a thousand years until Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, emerged holding the elixir of immortality in her hand. With great excitement, the gods drank the elixir and gradually regained their power. The asuras then demanded their fair share of the elixir but because the gods now had their strength back they were easily fought off and roundly defeated.



Mount Manthara was put back from where it was taken, Vasuki was taken home and the gods returned to their heavens, never to become weak again.

And the elixir? The elixir was flown away to a secret place where it is still to this day guarded by serpents who never sleep, to keep it from being drunk by the asuras.

However, while the elixir was being flown away, a single drop was spilt in four places: Haridwar, Allahabad, Nasik and Ujjain. Many Hindus today believe that the water in the rivers at these places turns into the elixir of immortality during each Kumbh Mela pilgrimage.