

T HE SNAKE KALIYA SUBDUED BY LORD KRISHNA

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The Lord Krishna was an incarnation of the God Vishnu. He had descended to earth to remove all negative elements from the world. Krishna's divine deeds are described in many Hindu scripts and books. One of the tales of his life tells about the snake Kaliya, who made the place he dwelled in uninhabitable with his poison.

In a lake along the river Yamuna, lived the large black snake Kaliya. His poison had so contaminated the lake that poisonous fumes constantly arose and even killed birds that flew over it. The grass and the trees on the banks were totally desiccated. The whole area now looked dead. For the inhabitants of the village Vrindavan this made it impossible to fetch water and to let the cows drink.

Kaliya, with his tongue gushing poison, was always on the lookout and almost everyone was afraid of him. Except for Krishna, who was still only a boy, but knew no fear due to his divine nature. When the boys that herded the cows and their animals had drunk the poisoned water of the river Yamuna, Krishna revived them with his merciful gaze. Then, as if it were a game, he jumped into the waves of the river to punish the snake Kaliya and thereby to purify the water.

When Krishna jumped into the water he made a lot of noise on purpose, so that the snake could hear him. Kaliya could not stand this, especially because he realised his domain was being attacked. Immediately he reared up in front of Krishna and furiously threw his coils around him. The earth shook, meteors fell from the sky and the people shivered. For two hours Krishna, who acted as if he

was a helpless boy, was caught in the coils of Kaliya. Suddenly he broke free by expanding his body with force. The pressure weakened the grip of the snake, which could do nothing but release him.

Kaliya, who had many heads, was now even further enraged and inflated all his crests. Poisonous fumes came from his nostrils and his eyes shot fire and from his mouth came flames. For a moment the snake held still, while he regarded Krishna and licked his lips with his forked tongue. Then Krishna threw himself on Kaliya, like a bird of prey throws himself on a cobra. In the battle that ensued Kaliya tried to fatally bite him, but they kept on circling each other.

Gradually the snake lost its strength. Krishna then jumped on one of the hundreds of crests and started to dance. His feet stomped on the heads of Kaliya, who found this unbearable. All the poison came out of his body and furiously he fought for his life.

Then, completely exhausted, Kaliya started spitting blood instead of poison. Now it started to dawn on him that Krishna was not an ordinary boy, but an incarnation of the god Vishnu.

The wives of the snake, the Nagapatnis, saw their husband being defeated by the feet of the Lord, whom they now wanted to worship. They understood that this punishment of Kaliya was actually a blessing, absolving the sins of the snake. 'O Lord, although he was born in this life form, with the most horrible of natures in creation, this King of serpents has achieved a rare thing. Living beings can only receive the highest blessing through Your mercy.'



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After the Nagapatni's had thus prayed, Krishna gave Kaliya no further punishment. When he regained consciousness he started to pray humbly to the Lord. There upon Krishna released him to swim to the ocean, together with all his children and wives. 'Do not poison the water of the Yamuna anymore, so that all can drink from it unhindered'. His order to Kaliya had to be announced everywhere, so that none would have to fear him again.

LITERATUUR

The Srimad Bhagavatam and The Krishna Book,
The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust 1981.

Translated from Dutch by Ron Winkler
Corrections by Lawrence Smith



Lord Krishna, dancing with Seven-Headed Cobra. From: Nissenon & Jonas, page 47.