



Emperor Akbar or Akbar the Great is known as one of the greatest rulers in the world – not just because he had a vast empire, a very strong army, untold wealth, but because he was a good human being. He cared for his subjects. He had great respect for scholars, writers, poets and artists belonging to different religions. He was a patron of art and culture. The nine gems or ‘nav-ratnas’ in his court were famous. Many people believe that of these nine gems, Birbal was the closest to the Emperor’s heart. Akbar loved to pose interesting questions or problems in his court, and Birbal never failed to come up with an equally interesting answer.

We don’t know whether all the Akbar and Birbal stories that we hear today have any basis in history. They have been handed down over generations mainly by word of mouth. Here are two of them :

One day, the Emperor entered the court with a very serious expression on his face. As soon as he was seated, he said, “I have a question for all of you. What should be the punishment for someone who pulls my moustache?”



The court was stunned !
Pull the Emperor’s
moustache ! It was unheard
of!

“Flog him! Give him
fifty lashes of the whip!”
exclaimed one nobleman.

“That’s not enough.
Put him in jail without food
and water,” said another.



“Whip him!”
“Beat him up!” “Hang him!” “Cut off his offending hands.” The agitated courtiers began to cry out. Only Birbal was silent. He was even smiling a little.

“What do you say, Birbal? What is your opinion?”

“In my opinion, O Giver of Peace to the World, the offender should be given his favourite sweetmeats.”



“Raja Birbal, are you out of your mind? Give sweetmeats for such a grave offence?” The courtiers began to say. Birbal smiled and offered an explanation: “Yes, who would be so bold as to pull the Emperor’s moustache? Only his own grandson!”

When Akbar heard this, he burst out laughing because that is exactly what had happened in the morning!

On another occasion, Akbar was relaxing with some of his courtiers. A few of them thought this was a good opportunity to shower praise on the Emperor and get some favours from him. They began to compete with each other in praising Akbar.

“You are the greatest of the kings!”

“You are the greatest of the kings or emperors that ever lived on the earth!”

“You are the greatest of all the people in heaven or earth!”

“You are as great as God Almighty!”

“You are greater than the God Almighty!”

Now, Akbar was no fool. He did not care for false praise. He stopped the courtiers and asked, “Do you all believe so?”

“Yes!” they answered in one voice.

“All right, then, prove it to me. Tell me at least one thing that I can do but God Almighty will not be able to do. Otherwise, you will all incur our royal displeasure! You have till tomorrow morning to prove it!”

Akbar then left the place without another look at the courtiers. They were in a proper fix. They thought and thought but couldn't think of any such thing. In the end, they went to Birbal. When Birbal heard their story, he told them not to worry.

The next morning, the court was full. Everyone was curious to see what would happen next.

“Well,” said the Emperor, “Have you found a good answer to my question? Or are you ready to leave the court forever?”

Just then Birbal stepped forward and bowed low. “Please don't be angry with those who think you are the greatest. There's certainly at least one thing that you can do, but the God Almighty cannot!”

Akbar looked at Birbal thoughtfully, “And what is that one thing?”

“When you want to punish someone, you can banish that person – you can throw him out of your kingdom. But God's kingdom extends everywhere. The Almighty cannot banish anyone from his kingdom.”

Akbar's face was lit up with a smile, “That was very clever, Birbal! While showing how I have an advantage,

you have also shown that God is greater. I believe you.”

Akbar was so pleased with the answer that he forgave the courtiers for their stupidity.

- **patron of art and culture:** a person who appreciates, supports and encourages art and culture
- **flog:** beat someone hard, especially with a whip
- **agitated:** disturbed
- **incur our displeasure:** make me angry
- **in a proper fix:** in a tight corner, in a difficult situation

POINTERS

1. Listen to the stories carefully, as your teacher reads them aloud. Note down the new words, ideas or concepts. Discuss them in the class.
2. Guess the meaning of the following words and phrases :
untold wealth, closest to the Emperor’s heart, grave offence, banish.
3. Say with reasons, whether the following statements are true or false.
(a) Akbar wanted to punish the person who pulled his moustache.
(b) Akbar thought he was greater than God.
(c) Birbal thought Akbar was greater than God.
4. Write a sentence each about three of your friends. Each time you should say what your friend cannot do, and yet, pay a compliment to your friend.
5. Write a short note on Emperor Akbar.
6. Convert the stories into dialogues and read the dialogues aloud in the class.
7. Form pairs and make a ‘pair presentation’ of any one of the two stories. To do so, each person presents only one sentence at a time, and the next one is immediately presented by the partner. Thus, each person in the pair presents alternate sentences without breaking the flow of the narration.
8. Find at least five other Akbar and Birbal stories and share them with your friends. Make a list of the stories collected by the entire class. Put your list in alphabetical order.
9. Visit a library : Find the stories of ● Mulla Nasiruddin ● Gopal Bhand and ● Tenali Raman. Share them in the class.

