"Woooon... Woooon... Wooosh..." the leaves on the peepal tree outside Rupa’s window rustled and she ran to hug her grandmother. "I am scared now. There are ghosts on the tree outside", she said pointing to the huge Peepal tree in her grandma’s courtyard. Grandma smiled and said, "Oh! so, did you actually see any ghost? What was it doing? Did you say hello to him?" "Naniiiiii...., don’t scare me more, moma told me that ghosts reside in this tree, that’s why I am saying so", said Rupa in a defensive tone.

"Ok dear, there is nothing of such sort, these are all idle rumors, in fact, this peepal or the Bo tree is considered to be one of the most sacred trees in our country. Bantu, where are you, please come and enlighten these kids about this important tree taught, I am going off to sleep", said grandma. Bantu mama who was working on his computer in the adjoining room came inside and was more than happy to share his thoughts on this “Tree of Knowledge”.

Bantu mama started, "Ok, Rupa and Manu, I will throw some light on how peepal tree is so important to us”. Rupa and Manu huddled close to him and sat down to listen intently. "This is the same tree under which Gautam Buddha meditated and attained his enlightenment. That is why it is called the Bodhi or the Bo tree. The four trees: Peepal, Gular, Banyan, and Pakad are called to be the storehouses of Sun’s rays. The wood of these trees is considered very auspicious for Havans in Indian scriptures. Peepal tree has been given the prime importance among all these trees and worshipped even today. The reason is right from the root to its leaves; the tree contains the medicinal values and cures many diseases. That was the reason our ancient sages recognized the importance of this tree and dedicated Peepal tree is the place to Gods and Goddesses. The tree should never be touched by our Trinity, Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh make their home on this sacred tree. In Bhagvad Gita, Lord Krishna called Peepal tree his own image - ‘Ashvathah Sarvrikshanam’, informed Bantu mama.

"Now, I will tell you more about the medicinal properties of this amazing tree; if the leaves of the tree are boiled with any oil for some time and applied on the wound, the wound heals very fast", said Bantu mama. "Oh that’s nice, I will tell all my friends about this new band aid", said Manu. Bantu mama smiled and continued, “the most important value of this wonderful tree is that, a person dying with snake bite can be cured and can get life. In our village, the villagers get all the information about the snake, its size, its species, place and reason of biting with the wood of this tree. They call it ‘Peepal Jadi’.

"Peepal Jadi works wonderfully in the situation when a person is bitten by the snake and poison spreads all over his body, no medicine works and the person is about to die. In this condition without telling anyone (secrecy should be maintained) take two twigs of peepal tree (of 4 fingers length) peel them with a knife and put these twigs near the ears of the patient of both sides, keep holding them tightly, because the poison in patient’s body pulls the Jadi and Jadi pulls the poison. If the hold is not tight the Jadi may go inside the skin or in the ear of the patient and with the mere touch of Jadi the patient will start crying. When all the poison is sucked by the Jadi it stops working. Peepal Jadi can be kept for long by drying it up in the sun light and can be used in the time of need" informed Bantu mama.

"Peepal is a big tree and cannot be grown in the house but this is sure that the roots, wood, branches, twigs, green leaves, dry leaves, every part of the tree is useful and helps to cure one or the other diseases. And it is all because that ghosts live in peepal trees”, said Bantu mama. Rupa and Manu nodded their heads in unison, while Rupa heaved a big sigh of relief. Turn overleaf to know more.....
THE SACRED FIG TREE: PEEPAL

The Sacred Fig (Bodhi) Tree provides an amazing yoga experience in an environment that is peaceful, soothing and relaxed!!!

Botanical Name: *Ficus religiosa*
Family: *Moraceae*

Sanskrit name: Ashwatha, Bodhidruma, Pippala
English Name: Sacred fig
Common Names: Bodhi Tree, Peepal Tree, Sacred Tree

What are my Vernacular names?

- Gujarati: Jari, Pipers, Pipal
- Marathi: Pimpala
- Malayalam: Arayal
- Kannada: Arali, Ashvatha
- Hindi: Pipal, Pipali
- Tamil: Aracu
- Telugu: Bodhi-drumamu
- Bengali: Asbattha

*Ficus* is the Latin word for 'Fig', the fruit of the tree. *Religiosa* refers to 'religion' because the tree is sacred in both Hinduism and Buddhism and is very frequently planted in temples and shrines of both faiths. It is said that Gautam Buddha meditated and achieved enlightenment under a particular *Ficus religiosa* tree in Bodh Gaya, India, which is now known as the Bodhi Tree. Although the original tree is gone, in 288 BC, a cutting was taken from it and planted in a temple in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, and this sacred fig is still alive today. For Hindus, the species is also sacred and regarded as the female counterpart to the banyan tree; it is a sin to harm the tree. People tie threads of white, red and yellow silk around it to pray for progeny and rewarding parenthood. Hindus regard it as the tree beneath which Lord Vishnu was born.

'Bodhi' or its short form 'Bo' means 'supreme knowledge' or 'awakening' in the old Indian languages. 'Peepal' relates to the same ancient roots which give rise to English words like 'Peep' and 'Apple' and therefore mean something like 'fruit-bearing tree'. 'Ashwartha' and 'Ashvattha' come from an ancient Indian root word "Shwa" means 'morning' or 'tomorrow'. This refers to the fact that Ashwatha is the mythical Hindu world tree, both indestructible and yet ever-changing: the same tree will not be there tomorrow.

Where am I found?

I am grown throughout India, mainly grown in states of Haryana, Bihar, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh. I am also found in the Ranthambore National Park in India.
How do I look?

I am a large, fast growing deciduous tree. My leaves are heart shaped. A medium sized tree, I have a large crown with the wonderful wide spreading branches. I shed my leaves in the month of March and April. My fruits are hidden with the figs. The figs ripen in the month of May. The figs which contain the flowers grow in pairs just below the leaves and look like the berries. My bark is light gray and peels in patches. My fruit is purple in colour and I am one of the longest living trees.

Plant part used: Bark, Leaves, Tender Shoots, Latex, Seeds, Fruits

What are my Uses?

Nearly every part of the tree can be used as medicine. The leaves are used to feed camels and elephant, and the tree is often the home to the tiny lac insect. When the leaves are dried, they are used for decoration and often painted on. Like all the fig trees, many birds and bats love to eat the fruit, and in times when there is little food, villagers eat them as well. The wood lasts well in water and is sometimes used for buildings small boats.

My Medicinal Uses

- My leaf juice is used for the treatment of asthma, cough, diarrhoea, haematuria, earache and tooth ache, migraine, eye troubles, gastric problems and scabies.
- My leaf decoction is used as an analgesic for toothache.
- **Healing and curative**: My leaves are used as a laxative and a tonic. They relieve feverish feeling. They are also useful in arresting secretion or bleeding. In such cases, about 50 ml of raw juice of the leaves or 1 teaspoon of powdered dried leaves can be taken with water.
- **Heart diseases**: My leaves are used in the treatment of heart diseases. The leaves are infused in water at night and distilled the following morning and then stored in white bottles. About 15 ml of this infusion is administered thrice daily. It is highly effective in relieving palpitation of the heart and cardiac weakness.
- ** Constipation**: My leaves are dried in the shade and powdered. Pills are made by adding the required quantity of a solution of anise and jaggery with water. In the same way, the fruits can be dried in shade, powdered and mixed with an equal quantity of sugar. This compound in doses of 4 to 6gms, taken at bedtime with milk, ensures proper bowel movement, the following morning.
- **Mumps and boils**: My leaves are smeared with ghee, warmed over a fire and bandaged over the inflamed part (mumps) to get relief. A leaf of peepal smeared with ghee can be bandaged like worm on the boil. If there is any pus formation, it will burst, if it is in preliminary stages, the growth will subside in initial stage itself.
- **Gynaecological problems**: For many vaginal diseases, a decoction from the bark is employed to cleanse the vagina as a wash. A decoction prepared from the bark of peepal and tamarind or their freshly extracted juice, is given as a drink for patients with difficult menstruation or even absence of menstruation. For pregnant ladies who have a tendency or fear of abortion, six maashaagflof bark powder is to be given with a decoction of the rind of an orange. This is continued 3-8 times a day for a week.
- **My roots are even chewed to prevent gum diseases.**
FUN YOGA

One of the best ways to introduce yoga to children is to present it as a game they will find easy to play. The ancient rishis devised a number of asanas through their patient observations of nature. Earth, ocean and sky, sun and space, and all that could be seen or heard through common experience were contemplated by the sages who had a wealth of knowledge about human life. It is not by chance that a whole jungle of animal postures is known in hatha yoga terminology. Each posture or pose, whether for the lion, camel, cat or peacock, has a meaning of its own.

Being Trees: It is difficult for young children to stand on only one foot, since the mechanism for equilibrium is slow to develop. Why not train it in the best possible way? One of the asanas which can help develop balance is 'the pose of the tree'. Children from six to eleven will enjoy doing it in this way: (To be done under the supervision of an adult or a yoga practitioner)

1. First, all the children should stand in a circle or in lines with enough space between them so that they will not touch each other when they raise their arms sideways with elbows bent.
2. Then they should raise one foot in the way that suits them best. Initially, the correct arrangement of legs and feet as taught in the yoga manuals should not be insisted upon. In time, they will learn. First make them learn how to manage their balance somehow, while moving their trunk and arms.
3. Once they have understood and tried the process, the following instruction can be given: 'Now lift your right leg and place your right foot on top of the left foot, or just a bit above the floor, as you like. Now slowly raise your arms sideways, as if they were big branches spreading under the sky. Your fingers are the smaller twigs and branches, and your hair is the leaves. Hear the leaves rustling in the gentle breeze as the wind is passing through... Now blow out loudly, in imitation of the wind. As the wind passes by, you are swayed to and fro. See if you can close your eyes. Most will lose their balance in doing so; they've got to learn that too! You are little trees growing in the forest. When you feel tired, you can change legs... Now the wind has stopped blowing, you are motionless, calm and happy. Gently bring down your foot and lower your arms.'

Benefits: Children will imbibe a lot from this game, as firstly they will be made to feel how closely they are related to the world of plants. Man's kinship with trees has often been emphasized in various scriptures, and the pleasure that children derive from playing 'trees' proves this to be a deep instinct in the human race. It will also make them aware of their upright position in space and will develop their balance on the physical as well as the emotional plane. By observing their change of feeling when they close their eyes, older children will realize the importance of concentrating their gaze on one single point while doing this posture.