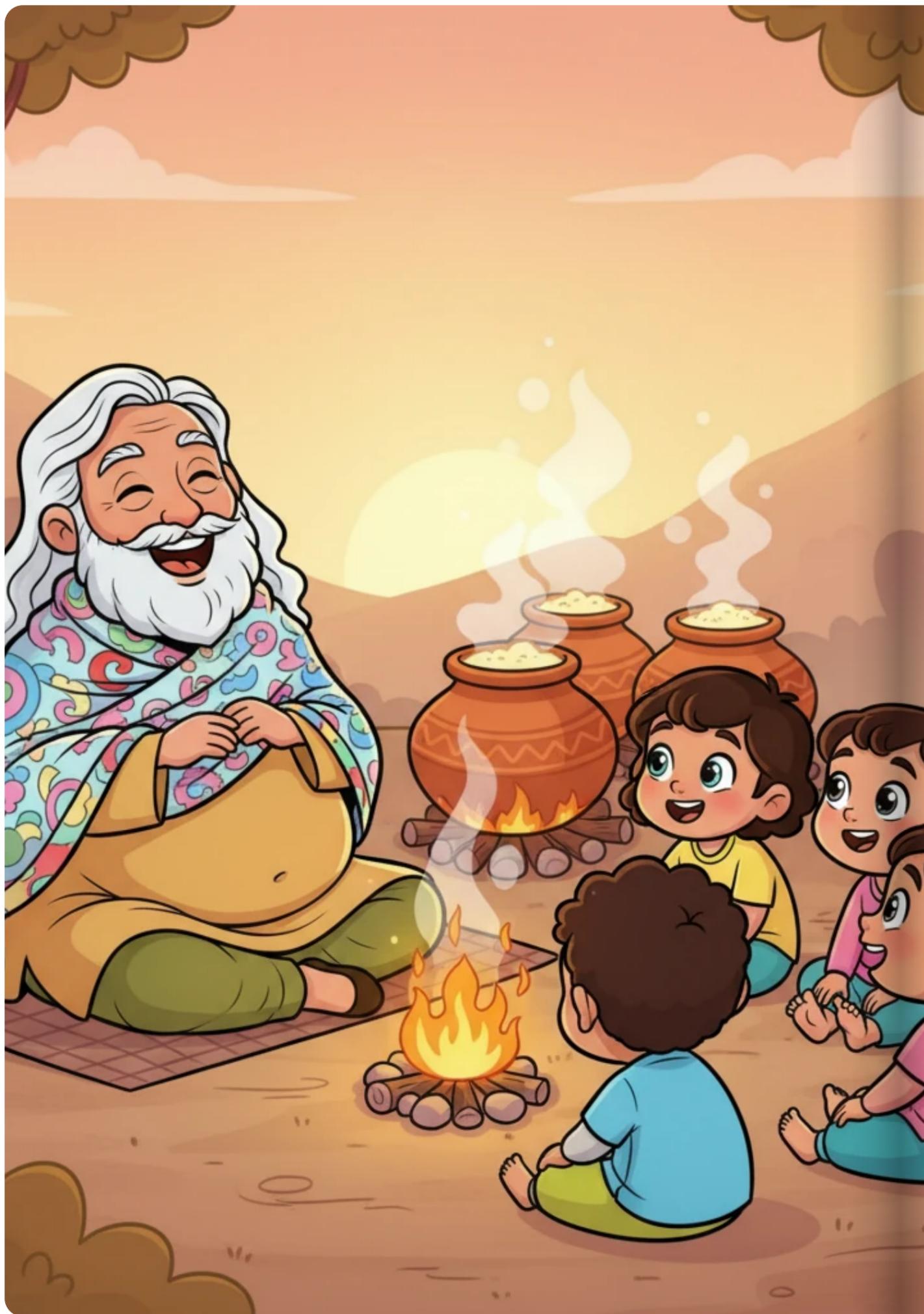




Aavya and the Slow Secrets of Light

Tulsi Mathur



Kailash Baba, with a big, round belly and a kind, wrinkled face, sits cross-legged by a crackling fire. His long, flowing shawl is draped around him as he chuckles warmly. A row of chubby-cheeked toddlers, with wide, curious eyes and wiggling toes, lean forward eagerly, mesmerized by his storytelling. Giant, bubbly pots of sweet kheer steam gently in the background, making the air smell delicious. He begins the enchanting tale of Aavya.



Under a cozy, patterned blanket, little Aavya, with big, expressive eyes, peeks out, a tiny frown on her face. The moon outside her window is a perfect, glowing circle, like a giant, sweet rasgulla. Inside her chest, where a bright sun usually shines, she feels a tiny, tired firefly flickering, almost winking out with a tiny "Hiccup!"



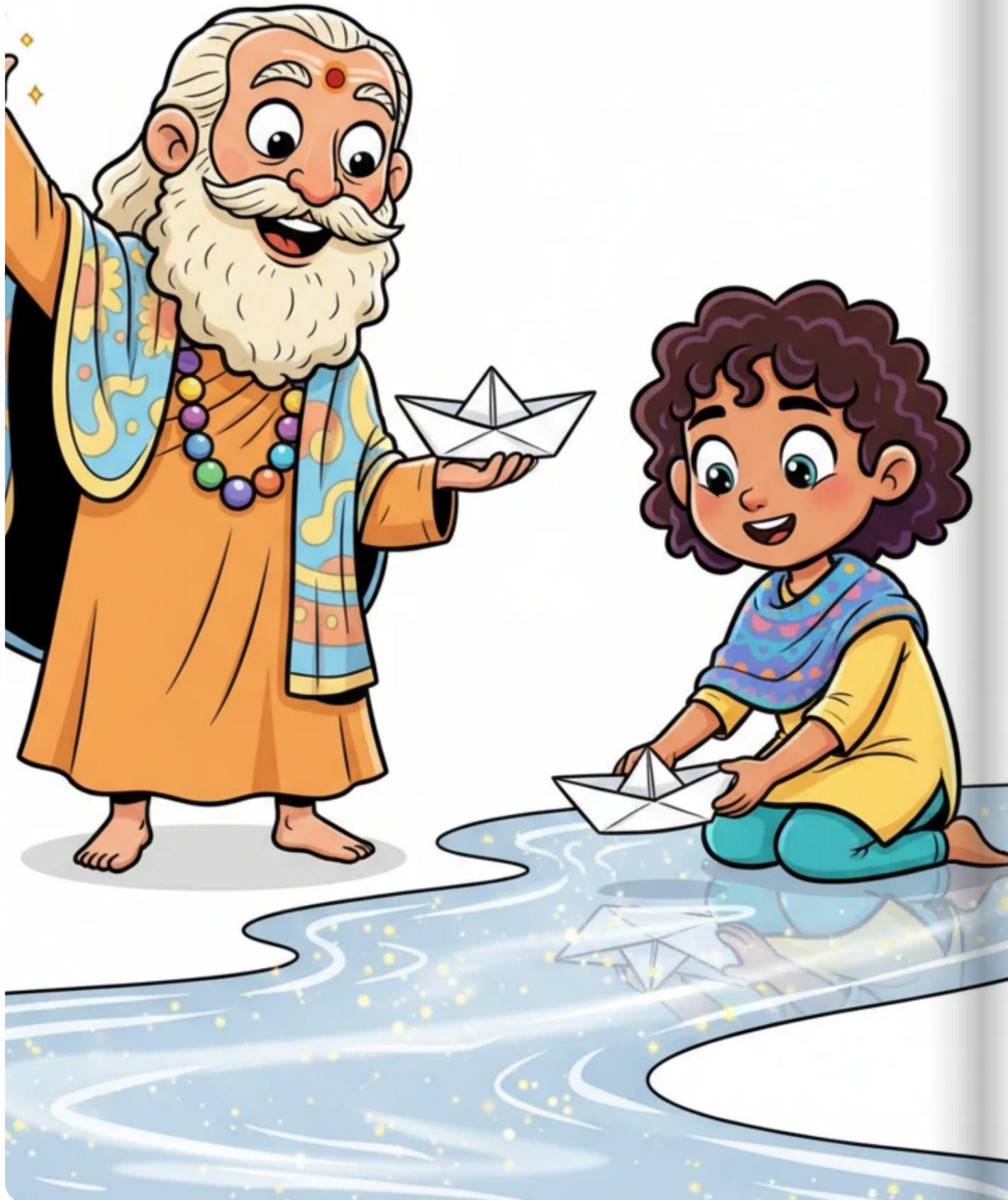
Suddenly, the air around Aavya's bed sparkles with golden dust! From a swirl of fragrant incense smoke, a tiny, cheerful Yogi Baba appears, no taller than a water jug. He has a fluffy silver beard that floats like clouds and eyes that twinkle mischievously like tiny stars, holding a lotus staff.



Yogi Baba, with a playful grin, leads Aavya to a miniature, whimsical garden, where flowers bloom in rainbow colors. In the center sits a beautiful blue hibiscus, its petals tightly folded like a sleepy fist. Aavya, with an impatient pout, tries to poke it, but Yogi Baba gently puts a finger to his lips, "Shhh," teaching her to wait.



Aavya and Yogi Baba watch patiently as the blue hibiscus slowly, gently unfurls its petals with a soft "POP!" Inside, it glows with a warm, golden light that dances and twinkles. This golden glow playfully zips out and lands right on Aavya's chest, making her tiny firefly grow into a shiny, happy gold coin.



With a joyful wave of Yogi Baba's hand, Aavya's cozy blue rug magically transforms into a shimmering, wavy silver river, sparkling with little light dots. He hands her a small, delicately folded paper boat, which she carefully places on the glassy surface, watching it wobble but not yet move.



Aavya sits very still, her eyes wide with wonder, as the silver river begins to hum a soft tune. The tiny paper boat slowly, gracefully glides around her little slippers, making gentle ripples. It then drifts back to her hand, carrying a sparkling drop of blue river-light, which Aavya tenderly tucks into her heart, making her inner glow as big and round as a juicy orange.



The ceiling above Aavya's room playfully rolls away like a stage curtain, revealing the vast, starry night sky. A big, friendly Moon, with a soft, crescent smile, reaches down a shimmering ladder made of silver threads. Aavya, with an excited gasp, climbs up, up, up into the magical night.



On the soft, dusty surface of the Moon, Aavya discovers a tiny, shiny silver drum, sparkling under the moonbeams. She gently puts her ear to it, listening intently. At first, she hears nothing, but because she learned patience, she waits, and soon, she hears a soft, steady "Boom... boom... boom..." – the sound of her own happy heart!



The friendly Moon catches Aavya's heartbeat sound, magically shaping it into a glowing silver ball. This radiant ball gently tucks itself under Aavya's chin, then melts softly into her chest. With a magnificent "Flash!" her orange light bursts into a glorious, radiant sun, filling her whole body with bright, happy energy and a wide, joyful smile.