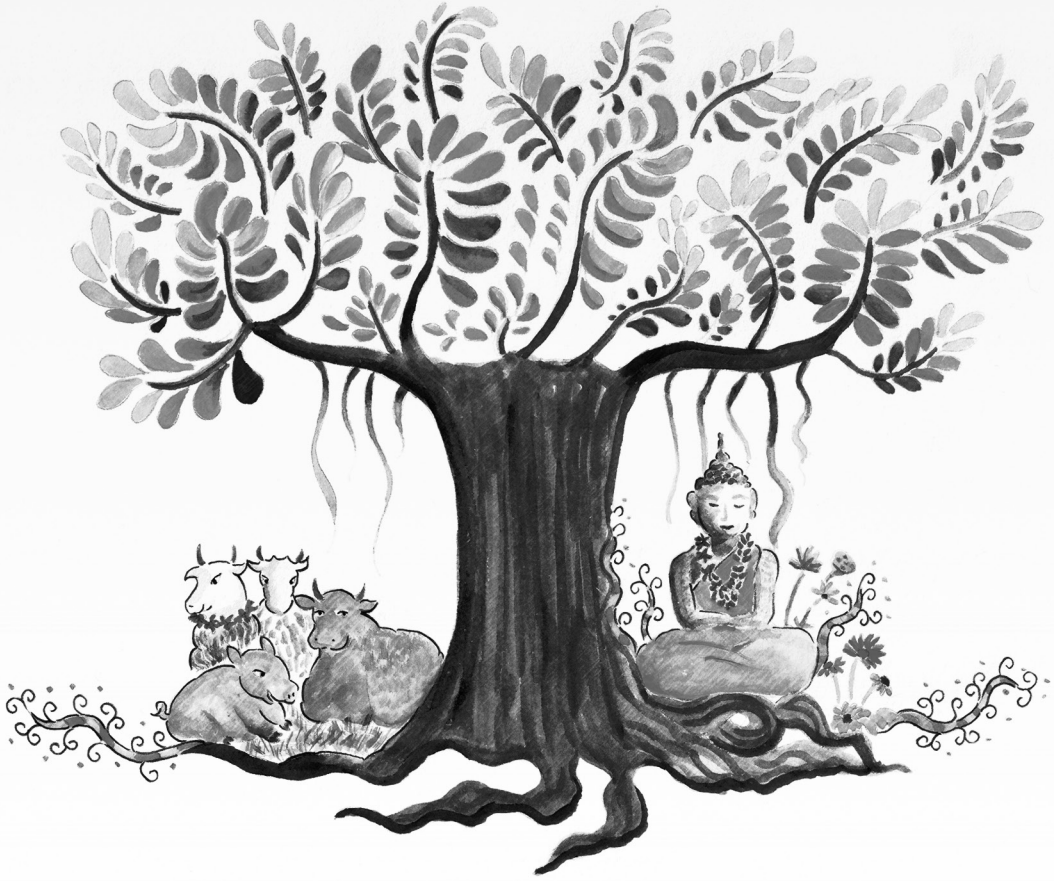
Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

Stories 1-50



Edited by Esther Thien
Illustrated by Karen Chin

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Contents

Preface vi
From the Storyteller to the Listeners ix

1. Demons in the Desert [The Correct Way of Thinking] 1
2. Finding a New Spring [Perseverance] 5
3. The Golden Plate [Greed and Honesty] 8
4. The Mouse Merchant [Diligence and Gratitude] 11
5. The Price Maker [Foolishness] 15

6. Prince Goodspeaker and the Water Demon
   [Chapter 1. Rebirth of the Bodhisattva] 19
   [Chapter 2. The Teachings of the Gods] 21

7. Little Prince No-father [The Power of Truth] 26
8. The One-hundredth Prince [Obedience to a Wise Teacher] 30
9. The King With One Grey Hair [Ordination] 34
10. The Happy Monk [Joys of the Spiritual Life] 37
11. Beauty and Grey [A Wise Leader] 41

12. King Banyan Deer
   [Chapter 1. Compassion] 44
   [Chapter 2. Teachings] 49

13. Mountain Buck and Village Doe [Infatuation] 51
14. The Wind-deer and the Honey-grass [The Craving for Sweet Taste] 55

15. The Fawn That Skipped School [Truancy] 58
16. The Fawn That Played Dead [Attendance] 60
17. The Wind and the Moon [Friendship] 63
18. The Goat That Saved the Priest [Ignorance] 65
19. The God in the Banyan Tree [A Bad Promise] 69
20. The Monkey King and the Water Demon [Attentiveness] 71
21. The Tree That Acted Like a Hunter [Impatience] 74
22. The Dog King Named Silver [Justice] 76
23, 24. The Great Horse Called Knowing-one [Courage] 81
25. Dirty Bath Water [Cleanliness] 86
26. Ladyface [Association] 89
27. Best Friends [The Power of Friendship] 93
28 The Bull Called Delightful [All Deserve Respect] 96
29. Grandma's Blackie [Loving-kindness] 100
30. Big Red, Little Red and No-squeal [Envy] 104

31. The Heaven of 33
[Chapter 1. Co-operation] 106
[Chapter 2. Compassion] 112
[Chapter 3. Merits] 114

32. The Dancing Peacock [Pride and Modesty] 117
33. The Quail King and the Hunter [Unity] 120
34. The Fortunate Fish [Desire] 123
35. The Baby Quail That Could Not Fly Away
[Power of Truth, Goodness & Compassion] 126

36. Wise Birds and Foolish Birds [Good Advice] 129
37. The Birth of a Banyan Tree [Respect for Elders] 131
38. The Crane and the Crab [Trickery] 134
39. Buried Treasure [The Arrogance of Power] 139
40. The Silent Buddha [Generosity] 142

41. The Curse of Mittavinda
[Chapter 1. Jealousy] 146
[Chapter 2. Greed] 152
[Chapter 3. Pleasure] 155

42. The Pigeon and the Crow [The Danger of Greed] 160
43. Bamboo's Father [Not Heeding Advice] 165
44, 45. Two Stupid Children [Foolishness] 168
46. Watering the Garden [Foolishness] 170
47. Salty Liquor [Foolishness] 173
48. The Magic Priest and the Kidnapper Gang [Power and Greed] 175
49. The Groom Who Lost His Bride to the Stars [Astrology] 180
50. The Prince Who Had a Plan [The Power of Superstition] 183

APPENDIX A. Who Was the Bodhisattva? 187
APPENDIX B. An Arrangement of Morals? 189

Preface

Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives originates from a collection of stories known as the Jataka Tales. The Buddha Himself used the Jataka stories to explain concepts like karma and rebirth and to emphasise the importance of certain moral values. The Jataka Tales were frequently used in Buddhist countries to develop wholesome character of their people.

The main purpose of these stories is to develop the moral and ethical values of the readers. By reading these stories, children and adults can develop their knowledge and learn how to face difficult experiences of modern life. All Jataka stories have a moral at the end on how to correct our ways and to develop virtuous conduct and good behaviour. Children and adults can learn to develop good values and qualities like patience, forbearance, tolerance and the four sublime states of mind : loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. Without wholesome values, people cannot be happy in their hearts and minds, or be at peace.

To allow readers to understand the Jataka stories in modern English, the stories are not a scholarly word-for-word translation, instead they are retold in a manner that conveys the spirit and meaning they embrace.

These stories are edited based on the collection published in:

> *Buddhist Tales For Young & Old Volume 1, stories 1-50, Prince Goodspeaker* (New York: Buddhist Literature Society Inc, 1997)
> – Interpretation of Pali Jataka stories by Kurunegoda Piyatissa Maha Thera, as told by Todd Anderson.

The sources used to counter-check when producing this book are:

1. *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Lives,* ed. E.B. Cowell (London: Pali Text Society, 1981), 6 vols., index – English translation of Pali Jataka stories.
2. *The Ten Perfections*, Ven. Narada Thera (Singapore: Evergreen Buddhist Culture Service, 2002)

The sequence numbers used for the stories are in the same order as *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Lives.*

Many of the stories indicate several morals. Only one was selected in each story for emphasis. Appendix B arranges these morals according to:

1. Greed (lobha)	generosity (dana).
2. Anger (dosa)	loving-kindness (metta).
3. Delusion (moha)	wisdom (panna).

Appendix B can serve as an alternative sequence for reading the stories.

We hope parents and teachers will narrate these stories to guide children. They can serve as examples in teaching children to use morals in their daily activities. By directing their minds to proper thinking with the morals, their thinking faculty will be developed. As Venerable Kurunegoda Piyatissa Maha Thera once expressed, this will prove invaluable when young people face difficulties, unexpected circumstances and disasters in life. They will be in a better position to deal with them without being confused.

For example, in the second story, "Finding a New Spring", the value of perseverance is reinforced. People in this day and age are so used to getting everything they want quickly and easily, and looking for instant gratification, that they give up and try something else when they encounter the slightest difficulties. Not putting in efforts to overcome the difficulties they face, their thinking ability decreases. In the end, they find themselves in a lose-lose situation and their human values decline as well.

To ensure future peace and happiness in the world, we need to preserve wholesome human qualities and values. Unfortunately, these are degenerating. That is why the world is seeing an increasing turmoil of quarrels and conflicts. One major reason for this occurrence is because society neglects the moral development of children. Children were taught moral values in the past, but these days, modern schools hardly touch on them. So where will a young child learn what is wholesome and what is not?

In "Finding a New Spring", when the caravan lost its way, the leader did not blame others or grumble, he was determined to overcome the unforeseen circumstances. In the midst of the weak thinking of the others, he was the only one who could be depended on to lead the search for water. Even when he faced an obstacle while digging, he did not give up. Finally, his perseverance bore fruits and they got the water they want. How joyful they all were!

Why do we not teach our children to follow such examples in times of unexpected difficulties? The adults who read these stories to the children must point out morals such as these and help them to develop their young, impressionable minds.

May all beings be well and happy.
May the blessings of the Triple Gem be with all always.
And may all progress well on the path of the Dharma!

Yours in the Dharma,
Sister Esther Thien
Executive Editor

Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery
Awaken Publishing & Design
Dharma Propagation Division

From the Storyteller to the Reader

When you read or listen to these very old stories, and wonder how much is really true, the Buddha gave some advice that might help. He said that when you listen to what a monk says you should test the meaning, weigh or consider it, and after observation and analysis when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.

Let us praise the Exalted,
Worthy, Fully Self-Enlightened One
and follow the Truth.

“There is no better virtue than a heart of grand compassion; there is no higher religion than the development of moral wisdom.”

— The Buddha

1

Demons in the Desert

[The Correct Way of Thinking]

Long, long ago, there were two friends who were merchants. They were about to go on a trip to sell their merchandise. After discussion, they decided not to travel together. "It will

be too crowded for us to travel together since each of us has about 500 carts, and both of us are going to the same place along the same road," said one to the other. So both agreed one of them should set off first.

The first merchant thought long and hard and decided to go first. "The road will not be rutted by the carts. The bullocks will be able to enjoy the greenest and best grass along the way, and we will find the best fruits and vegetables to eat. My people will appreciate my leadership and, in the end, I will be able to bargain for the best prices," he thought smilingly.

The second merchant, too, considered carefully. He realised there were advantages of travelling after the first had paved the way. "By travelling first, my friend's carts will have levelled the ground so we won't have to do any road work. His bullocks will have also eaten the old rough grass and new tender shoots will spring up for mine to feast. Similarly, his people will have also plucked the old fruits and vegetables and fresh ones will grow for us to enjoy. I won't have to waste my time bargaining when I can take the price already set by the market and make my profit," he thought. And so he agreed to his friend's request of travelling first. The first merchant, sure that he'd fooled his friend and gotten the best of him, merrily set out first on the journey.

But he had a troublesome time. The merchant who went first soon came to a wilderness called the "Waterless Desert", which the local people said was haunted by demons. When the caravan reached the middle of the desert, they met a large group coming from the opposite direction. They had carts that were smeared with mud and dripping with water. They also had lotuses and water lilies in their hands and carts. "Why are you carrying these heavy loads of water? In a short while, you will reach an oasis on the horizon with plenty of water to drink and dates to eat. Your bullocks are tired from pulling those heavy carts filled with extra water. Be kind to your poor, overworked animals and throw away the water!" said the headman of the group, who displayed a know-it-all attitude, to the merchant.

Even though the natives had warned him, the merchant did not realise these were really demons in disguise, and that they were in danger of being devoured by them. Confident they were helpful people, he followed their advice and had all his water emptied onto the ground.

As they continued on their way, they discovered there was no oasis in the desert. Some then realised they'd been fooled by beings who could be demons, and started to grumble and accuse the merchant. At the end of the day, all the people were worn out and exhausted. The bullocks were also too weak from lack of water to pull their heavy carts. Tired out, both humans and animals lay down in a haphazard manner and fell into a deep slumber. At dusk, the demons came in their true frightening forms and gobbled up all the weak, defenceless beings, leaving behind only bones on the ground. Not one human or animal was spared alive.

Several months later, the second merchant began his journey. When he arrived at the wilderness, he assembled all his people and said: "This place is called the 'Waterless Desert' which I heard is haunted by demons and ghosts. Therefore, do be careful at all times. Do not drink any water in the desert without asking me first." Having said that, his caravan ventured into the desert.

Like the first merchant, the second merchant and his caravan encountered the water-soaked demons in disguise halfway through the desert. The demons pulled the same trick and told them to cast away their water. Fortunately, the wise merchant saw through the demons straight away. He knew it didn't make sense to have an oasis in a place known as the "Waterless Desert". And besides, these people had bulging red eyes and a pushy attitude, so he suspected they could be demons. "We are businessmen who don't throw away good water before we know where the next is coming from," the merchant replied and then told the demons to leave them alone.

Seeing that his own people had doubts when the demons left, the merchant said: “Don’t believe what others said until we actually find water. For all we know, they may be demons, and the oasis they point to is just an illusion or a mirage. Have you ever heard of water in this “Waterless Desert”? Have you felt any rain-wind or seen any storm clouds?” They all answered “No” and he continued: “If we believe these strangers and throw our water away, we may not have any to drink or to cook with if there is no oasis. We will be weak and thirsty. It will be easy then for demons to come and rob us, or even gobble us up! Therefore, until we really find water, do not waste even a single drop! It is better for us to be safe than sorry.”

That evening, the second caravan travelled until it reached where the first had been slaughtered and devoured. They saw fully loaded carts and bones strewn everywhere. They recognised the fully loaded carts belonging to the caravan of the first merchant. Come dusk, the wise merchant appointed some as watch guards to protect the camp during the night.

The next morning, after the people had taken their breakfast and fed their bullocks well, they added to their carts the most valuable goods left behind from the first caravan. Under the wise leadership of the second merchant, the caravan managed to complete their journey successfully. They sold off all their merchandise with profits and returned home safely.

THE MORAL IS ✏ One must always be wise enough not to be fooled by tricky talk and false appearances.

2

Finding a New Spring

[Perseverance]

Once upon a time, a merchant led a caravan to another country to trade. One day, they came to the edge of a desert with sand as hot as burning coal. It was so scorching that no one, not even bullocks or camels could walk on it! Left with no choice, the caravan leader hired a desert guide - one who could read the stars - so they could travel at night when the

sand was cool. In this manner, they trekked dangerously across the desert at night.

This went on fine until one night, the guide complacently dozed off to sleep when he saw that they were reaching the end of the desert. Unattended, the bullocks gradually swerved to the side and travelled around in a big circle until they ended up at the same spot they had started from the night before!

By then, the sun had risen. When the people realised they were back at the same place they'd camped the day before, they lost heart and began complaining about their condition. They had used up all their water and were afraid that they would die of thirst. "We can't do without water," they reproached the caravan leader and the guide.

"If I do nothing but just grumble about this misfortune, we will all die here. Therefore, I must be strong and face this challenge calmly!" thought the merchant. He began pacing up and down, thinking of a plan to save them all.

Suddenly, he noticed a small clump of grass. "No plant can survive in this desert without water," he analysed. So he gathered the strongest of his fellow travellers and asked them to dig a hole on that very spot. They dug and dug, and after a while they hit a large rock. "This effort is useless. We're just wasting our time!" they complained in a blaming tone once again. But the merchant replied: "No, my friends, if we give up now, it will be the end for us and our poor animals. Let us not be discouraged!"

He got down into the hole immediately, placed his ear to the rock, and heard the sound of water flowing. Straight away, he called over a boy who had been digging and said: "If you give up, we will all perish - so take this heavy hammer and strike the rock."

The boy lifted the hammer over his head and hit the rock as hard as he could. To his surprise, the rock split open and a mighty gush of water sprang out from underneath! All

the people were overwhelmed with joy. They drank, bathed, washed their animals, cooked their food and ate heartily.

Before they left, they put up a tall banner so that other travellers could see it from afar and come to the new spring in the middle of the desert. Then, they continued on safely to the end of their journey.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Don't give up too easily. Keep on trying until you reach your goal.

3
The Golden Plate
[Greed and Honesty]

Long ago in a place called Seri, two salesmen sold pots, pans and handmade trinkets. They decided to divide the town between them. They also agreed that it was alright for the other to hawk his wares after the first had gone through his designated area.

One day, one of them was coming down a street when a poor little girl saw him and asked her grandmother to buy her a bracelet. “We are too poor. We can’t afford it,” replied the old grandmother. “Since we don’t have any money, we can exchange one with our black sooty old plate,” suggested the little girl. The old woman agreed to give it a try, and so she invited the dealer in.

Seeing that they were poor humble people who probably had no money, the salesman did not want to waste his time with them. Though the old woman pleaded with him, he said he had no bracelet that she could afford to buy. Then she asked: “We have an old plate that is useless to us, can we barter it for a bracelet?” The man took the plate and examined it. He accidentally scratched the bottom of the plate, and to his surprise, discovered gold gleaming underneath the black soot. The black sooty old plate was actually a golden plate! But he didn’t tell the old woman of his discovery. Instead, he decided to deceive her so he could get the plate for virtually nothing. “This is not worth even one bracelet. There is no value in this. I don’t want it!” he lied, and left thinking he would return later when they would accept something of a lesser value for the plate.

Meanwhile, the second salesman who had finished peddling in his appointed part of the town, came to the area where the first had been earlier. He ended up at the same house. Again, the poor little girl begged her grandmother to trade the old plate for a bracelet. Seeing that the second merchant was a nice gentle-looking man, the old woman invited him in and offered to trade the same black sooty old plate for one bracelet. When he examined it, he also noticed that it was pure gold under the grime. “All that I own, my goods and all my money, are not worth as much as this gold plate!” he exclaimed kindly to the old woman.

Of course, the woman was shocked when she heard this, but the merchant’s honesty also proved that he was indeed a good and honest fellow to her. So she said she would be happy to accept whatever he could trade for it. “I’ll give you all my pots, pans and trinkets, plus all my money, if you will let me keep just eight coins and my balancing scale, with its cover

to put the gold plate in," said the salesman. "Deal," replied the old woman. The trade was made and the second merchant went down to the river, where he used his remaining eight coins to pay the boatman to ferry him across.

Meanwhile, the greedy salesman had returned to the old woman's house, dreaming of huge imaginary profits in his head. When he met the little girl and her grandmother again, he told them he had changed his mind and was willing to offer a few cents, but not one of his bracelets, for the useless black sooty old plate. "Sir, you lied to us," replied the old woman and then she calmly told him of the trade she had just struck with the honest salesman.

Instead of being ashamed, the greedy salesman was upset that he had lost the precious plate that must be worth a hundred thousand. "Which way did he go?" asked the dishonest merchant. She told him the direction, and he promptly dropped all his things right at her doorstep and ran down to the river, thinking: "He robbed me! He robbed me! He won't make a fool out of me!"

At the riverbank, he saw the boatman ferrying the honest salesman halfway across the river. "Come back, come back!" he shouted to the boatman. But the good merchant instructed him to keep rowing, and so he continued crossing the river.

Seeing that there was nothing he could do, the greedy salesman exploded with rage. He beat his chest, and jumped up and down. He was so angry and filled with so much hatred for the honest man, who had gotten the golden plate, that he coughed out blood, had a heart attack and died on the spot!

THE MORAL IS ✏ Honesty is the best policy.

4

The Mouse Merchant

[Diligence and Gratitude]

Once upon a time, a famous adviser was on his way to a meeting with the king and other advisers when he caught sight of a dead mouse by the roadside. “Even from such small

beginnings as this dead mouse, a diligent young fellow could build a fortune. As long as he worked hard and used his intelligence, he could start a business and support a wife and family," he commented to those who were with him.

A passer-by heard the remark. Knowing that this was an important adviser of the king, he decided to follow his words. He picked up the dead mouse by the tail and went off with it. Lady Luck must be smiling at him for he hadn't even gone a block, before a shopkeeper stopped him. "My cat has been pestering me all morning. I'll give you two copper coins for that mouse," he proposed. And a deal was made.

With the two copper coins, he got some sweet cakes and water and waited by the roadside. As he expected, flower pickers were returning home from work. Hungry and thirsty, all of them agreed to exchange a bunch of flowers each for some sweet cakes and water. In the evening, the man sold the flowers in the city. He bought more sweet cakes using part of the earnings and returned the next day to trade them with the flower pickers.

This went on for a while, until one day a terrible storm blew. While walking by the king's pleasure garden, he noticed that many branches had been ripped off the trees by the storm and were lying all around. So he went to the king's gardener and offered to clear them away for him provided that he gets to keep the branches. The lazy gardener quickly agreed.

The man found some children playing in a park across the street. They were only too glad to gather all the scattered branches in exchange for one sweet cake per child.

When the children were done, the king's potter happened to walk by. He was always on the lookout for firewood for his glazing oven. When he saw the piles of wood the children had just collected, he paid the man a handsome sum of money for them. He also gave the man some of his pots.

With the profits he earned from selling flowers and firewood, the man opened a refreshment shop. One day, he treated all the local grass mowers, who were on their way to town, to some sweet cakes and drinks. They were surprised by his generosity. “What can we do for you?” they asked. He said there was nothing for them to do now, but he would let them know in the future.

A week later, he heard that a horse dealer was coming to the city with 500 horses to sell. He got in touch with the grass mowers and told each one to give him a bundle of grass. He also requested them not to sell any grass to the horse dealer until he had sold his. And so, he made another handsome profit.

Time passed until one day, some customers in his refreshment shop told him of a new foreign ship that had just docked in the harbour. He felt this was too good an opportunity to miss. He thought long and hard until he came up with a good business plan.

First, he went to a jeweller friend of his and paid a low price for a very valuable gold ring with a beautiful sparkling ruby. He knew that the ship came from a foreign country which had no rubies of its own, and where gold was expensive. Next, he gave the magnificent ring to the captain of the ship as an advance on his commission. To earn this commission, the captain agreed to send all the passengers to him. He would then take them to the finest shops in the city. In return, the man received commissions from the merchants for bringing customers to them.

The man soon became very rich after several ships had docked into port. Pleased with the scale of his success, he remembered it all started with the words of the king’s wise adviser. Grateful, he decided to give him a gift of 100,000 gold coins which was half of his entire wealth. After making the proper arrangements, he met up with the king’s adviser and gave him the present along with his humble thanks.

The adviser was amazed. "How did you earn so much money to afford such a generous gift?" he asked curiously. The man then narrated all that had happened, how it all started with the adviser's own words not so long ago about the dead mouse, which finally led to a large fortune.

After hearing his story, the royal adviser thought: "It would not be good to lose the talents of such a diligent man. I'm also very rich and my only beloved daughter is still unmarried. As this man is single, he deserves to marry her. Then he can inherit my wealth in addition to his own, and my daughter will be well cared for."

The man married the adviser's daughter, and after the wise adviser died, he became the richest man in the city. The king appointed him as the new adviser, and throughout the rest of his life, he gave generously for the happiness and well-being of many people.

THE MORAL IS ✏ With energy and ability, great wealth comes even from small insignificant beginnings.

5
The Price Maker
[Foolishness]

Long, long ago in northern India, there was a king who ruled Benares. He had a minister called the Royal Price Maker and he was a very honest man. His job was to set a fair price for anything the king wanted to buy or sell.

But there were occasions in which the king did not like his price-making. These were times when the king did not get as large a profit as he would love, had to pay more than he was willing to, or sold his merchandise for a price that he felt was too low. He decided to change the price maker.

One day, he saw a handsome young man and decided that he would make a good price maker. He dismissed his former honest price maker, and appointed the young man to be the new one. "I must make the king happy by buying at very low prices and selling at very high prices," thought the new price maker. So he charged ridiculous prices, not caring at all whether they were pegged to their actual worth. Of course, this made the king very happy as he gained a lot of money. But all the others who dealt with the new price maker, including the king's other ministers and ordinary folks, became very unhappy.

One day, a horse merchant arrived at Benares. He had 500 horses to sell. There were stallions, mares and colts. The king invited the merchant to the palace, and called upon his Royal Price Maker to set a price for all 500 horses. Thinking only of pleasing the king, the price maker replied: "The entire herd of horses is worth one cup of rice." Hearing this, the king ordered that one cup of rice be paid to the horse dealer, and all the horses were taken to the royal stables.

The merchant was very upset, but he could do nothing at that moment. Later, he heard about the former price maker, who had a reputation for being very fair and honest. He approached him and told him what had happened. He wanted to hear his opinion, in order to get a proper price from the king. "If you do as I say, the king will be convinced of the true value of the horses. Go back to the price maker and satisfy him with a valuable gift. Then ask him to state the value of one cup of rice in the presence of the king. If he agrees, come and tell me. I will go with you to the king," advised the former price maker.

Following this advice, the merchant went to the price maker and gave him a valuable gift. The gift made the price maker very happy. The young man saw that it would benefit him if he pleased the horse dealer. “I’m very happy with your previous evaluation,” said the merchant. “Can you please convince the king of the value of one cup of rice?” “Why not? I will explain the worth of one cup of rice in the presence of the king,” answered the foolish price maker.

Believing that the horse dealer was satisfied with his cup of rice, the price maker arranged for another meeting with the king, as the merchant was returning to his own country. The merchant reported back to the old price maker, and they went together to see the king.

All the king’s ministers and his full court were in the royal meeting hall. “My lord, I understand that in your country, my herd of 500 horses is worth only one cup of rice. Before I leave for home, I want to understand the value of one cup of rice in your country,” said the horse merchant to the king. The king turned to the price maker and asked: “What is the value of one cup of rice?”

Previously, to please the king, the foolish price maker had priced the herd of horses at one cup of rice. Now, after receiving a bribe from the horse dealer, and wanting to please him, he replied to the king in his most dignified manner: “Your Majesty, one cup of rice is worth the city of Benares, including even your own harem, as well as all the suburbs of the city. In other words, it is worth the whole kingdom of Benares!”

On hearing this, the royal ministers and wise men in the assembly hall started to roar with laughter, slapping their sides with their hands. “Earlier, we heard that the kingdom was priceless. Now we hear that all of Benares, with its palaces and mansions, is worth only a cup of rice! The decision of the Royal Price Maker is so strange! Where did your Highness find such a man? He is good only for pleasing a king such as you, and definitely not setting

fair prices for a merchant who sells his horses from country to country," said the ministers and wise men when they had calmed down.

Hearing the laughter of his whole court, and the words of his ministers and advisers, the king was ashamed. He reinstated his former price maker, and agreed to a new fair price for the herd of horses, as set by the honest price maker. Having learned his lesson, the king lived justly and his kingdom prospered.

THE MORAL IS ✏ A fool in high office can bring shame even to a king.

6

Prince Goodspeaker and The Water Demon

[Chapter 1. Rebirth of the Bodhisattva]

Once upon a time, there was a very righteous king. He had a lovely queen who gave birth to a beautiful baby. The king was very happy. Wanting to give his son a name that might help him later in life, he called him Prince Goodspeaker.

This prince was no ordinary baby. This was not his first life nor his first birth. Millions of years before, he had been a follower of a Buddha - a fully "Enlightened One". He had wished with all his heart to become a Buddha just like his beloved master - to gain the same enlightenment and experience of complete truth.

Lives after lives, he had been reborn - sometimes as poor animals, sometimes as long-living gods and sometimes as human beings. He always tried to learn from his mistakes and develop the "Ten Perfections", so he could purify his mind and remove the three root causes of unwholesomeness - the poisons of craving, anger and the delusion of a separate self. By using the Perfections, he would someday be able to replace the poisons with the three purities - non-attachment, loving-kindness and wisdom.

No one really knows about the millions of lives lived by this great Bodhisattva. But many stories have been told - including this one about a prince called Goodspeaker. After many more rebirths, he became the Buddha who is remembered and loved in all the world today.

[Chapter 2. The Teachings of the Gods]

Soon after, the queen gave birth to another son. He was named Prince Moon. When both children had just learnt to walk, their mother suddenly became very ill and passed away.

To help him look after his playful children, the king found a princess to become his new queen. A few years later, this queen gave birth to a beautiful bright little boy. He was named Prince Sun. Pleased with his queen and wanting to reward her for bringing up all three children, he promised to grant her one wish. “Thank you my lord, I will tell you my wish in the future,” replied the queen after careful consideration.

Days flew by, and the three princes soon grew up. The queen noticed that Prince Goodspeaker was intelligent and understanding. “If these two older princes remain in the palace, my son, Prince Sun, will never get a chance to be king. Therefore, I must do something to make him the next king,” thought the new queen.

One day, when the king was in a good mood, the queen respectfully approached him and reminded him of the one wish he had granted her. As he was in a happy mood, the king said: “Ask whatever you want!” “Oh my husband and king, grant my wish that our son, Prince Sun, will succeed you as the next king when you pass away,” she answered.

The king was shocked by her request. He became angry and said: “My first two children are like bright stars! How can I hand the throne over to my third son? My citizens will blame me. That cannot be done!” The queen kept quiet.

Even though the king was in a good mood earlier, he was now worried and anxious. He was afraid that his queen might scheme to kill his first two sons. He decided that he must do something to ensure the safety of his two older children.

The king secretly called the two princes to him. He told them of the queen's dangerous desire, and sadly bade them farewell so that they could remain safe from the queen's plotting. They should return only after their father's death to take their rightful places and rule the kingdom. The two obedient princes accepted their father's order and prepared to leave.

In a few days, they were ready. They said painful goodbyes to their father and friends, and left the palace. On their way through the royal gardens, they chanced upon Prince Sun. The youngest prince had always been very affectionate and friendly towards his two older half-brothers, and was upset to hear that they were leaving the palace. So he decided that he too would leave the kingdom. The three friendly princes departed together.

For several months they travelled, until they reached the forest of the mighty Himalayas. Weary and tired from the journey, they sat down under a tree to rest. Then the eldest brother, Prince Goodspeaker, instructed the youngest prince to fetch some water from a nearby lake using lotus leaves. "Bring them back here so we can all have a drink," he said.

But the princes did not know that the beautiful dark blue lake was possessed by a water demon! He was permitted by his demon king to eat any beings that he could convince to venture into the water. But there was one condition. He could not eat anyone who knew the answer to this question - "What are the teachings of the gods?"

When Prince Sun arrived at the lake, he was dehydrated, dirty and tired. He went straight into the water without a second thought. The water demon rose up from under the water suddenly and captured him. "What are the teachings of the gods?" demanded the demon. "I know the answer to that! The sun and the moon are the teachings of the gods," replied the prince. "You don't know the teaching of the gods, so you belong to me!" laughed the water demon and pulled Prince Sun under the water and locked him up in a deep cave.

When Prince Sun did not return after some time, Prince Goodspeaker asked his second brother, Prince Moon, to fetch the water from the lake. When he reached there, he too went

right into the water immediately. Again, the water demon appeared, grabbed him and asked: “What are the teachings of the gods?” Prince Moon’s replied: “The four directions - North, South, East and West - these are the teachings of the gods.” “You don’t know the teachings of the gods, so you belong to me!” guffawed the water demon. Then he imprisoned Prince Moon in the same underwater cave with Prince Sun.

When both his brothers did not return, Prince Goodspeaker began to worry that they might be in some danger. He went to the beautiful dark blue lake searching for them. As he was a wise and careful person, he did not step into the water immediately. Instead, he investigated and saw that there were two sets of footprints which led into the lake - but not out of it! To protect himself, he got his sword, bow and arrows ready, and began to walk around the lake.

Seeing that this prince did not go straight into the lake, the water demon appeared disguised as a humble villager and said: “My dear friend, you look tired and dirty. Why don’t you get into the water, take a bath, drink, and eat some lotus roots?”

Remembering the one-way footprints, Prince Goodspeaker demanded: “You must be some kind of demon disguised as a human! What have you done with my brothers?” Surprised at being recognised so quickly, the water demon returned to his true ferocious form. “By my rights, I have captured your brothers!”

“For what reason?” asked the prince. “So that I can gobble them up!” answered the demon. “I have permission from the demon king to feed on all who step into this lake and do not know the teachings of the gods. Only one who knows the teachings of the gods is spared.”

“Why do you need to know the teachings of the gods? What good does it do for a demon like you?” asked the prince. The water demon replied: “I know there must be some advantage to me.” “Then I will tell you what the gods teach,” said Prince Goodspeaker. “But I have a problem. Look at me. I am all covered with dust and dirt from travelling. I cannot speak about wise teachings in this condition.”

By now, the water demon realised that this prince was especially wise. He had him washed up and refreshed. He also gave him water to drink, tender lotus roots to eat and prepared a comfortable seat decorated with pretty wildflowers for him. After laying aside his sword, bow and arrows, the Bodhisattva sat on the adorned seat. The ferocious demon sat by his feet, just like a student listening to a respected teacher as he said:

"These are the teachings of the gods:

You should be ashamed to do unwholesome deeds.
You should be afraid to do unwholesome deeds.
You should always do wholesome deeds - deeds that bring happiness to others and help mankind.
Only then will you find inner peace and happiness."

The water demon was pleased with his answer. "Worthy prince, you have completely satisfied my question. You have made me so happy that I will return you one of your brothers. Which one do you choose?"

"In that case, release my youngest brother, Prince Sun," declared Prince Goodspeaker. "My lord prince and wise one, you know the teachings of the gods but you do not practise them!" replied the demon to Prince Goodspeaker's choice. "Why do you say that?" asked the prince. "Because you leave the other brother to die, saving only the youngest. You do not respect seniority!" answered the demon.

To this, the prince replied: "Oh demon, I know the teachings of the gods, and I do practise them. The three of us came to this forest because of our youngest brother. His mother wants him to be the next king. So it is for our protection that our father, the present king, sent us here. The young Prince Sun joins us out of friendship. But if we return to the court without him, and say he was eaten by a water demon who wants to know the teachings of

the gods, who would believe us? They would think we killed him because he is the cause of our danger. This would bring shame to us and unhappiness to the kingdom. Fearing such terrible consequences, I command you again to release the young Prince Sun."

The water demon was so pleased with this answer that he said: "Well done, well done, my lord. You know the true teachings of the gods, and you do practise them! I will gladly return both brothers to you!" Saying that, he descended into the lake and brought both princes up. They were wet but unharmed.

The Bodhisattva further gave helpful advice to the demon. He said: "Oh water demon, my new friend, you must have committed many unwholesome deeds in your previous lives to be born as a flesh-eating demon. If you continue your old ways, you will be trapped in a terrible state even in later lives. For unwholesome deeds only lead to shame, fear and unpleasant rebirth. But wholesome deeds pave the way to self-respect, peace and pleasant rebirth. Therefore, it would be much better for you, from now on, to do pure deeds, rather than impure deeds." Hearing this, the demon changed his ways, and the princes lived together happily under his protection.

One day, word came that the king had died. The three princes as well as their friend, the water demon, returned to the capital city. Prince Goodspeaker was crowned as king. Prince Moon became the chief minister and Prince Sun became the commander of the state's army. The water demon was awarded a safe place to live, where he was well-fed, well-cared for and entertained for the rest of his life. In this way, they all acquired wholesome meritorious thoughts leading to rebirths in the heavenly realms.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Unwholesome actions bring shame and fear, while wholesome actions bring self-respect and peace to one.

7

Little Prince No-father

[The Power of Truth]

A long time ago, the King of Benares went on a picnic in the forest. The beautiful flowers, trees and fruits made him very happy. Mesmerised by the beauty of nature, he went deep into the forest. Before long, he realised he was lost and separated from his companions.

Then he heard the sweet voice of a young woman singing. To avoid being stranded in the forest, the king followed the sound of the lovely voice. When he finally came upon the singer, he discovered that she was a beautiful fair young maiden who was collecting firewood. He fell in love with her immediately. They became very friendly and intimate, and the king even fathered her child.

Later, he explained how he had gotten lost in the forest, and convinced her that he was indeed the King of Benares. She gave him directions back to his palace, and the king gave her his valuable signet ring. “If you give birth to a baby girl, sell this ring and use the money to bring her up well. If our child turns out to be a baby boy, bring him to me along with this ring for recognition,” instructed the king. Saying that, he departed for Benares.

Months later, the fair maiden gave birth to a cute little baby boy. As she was a simple shy woman, she was afraid to take her little one to the fancy court in Benares, but she kept the king’s signet ring.

Time passed and the baby grew up. When he played with the other children in the village, they teased and mistreated him. They even picked fights with him, all because his mother was not married. “No-father! No-father! Your name should be No-father!” they yelled at him.

Of course, all this made the little boy ashamed. He felt very hurt and sad. He would often run home crying to his mother. One day, he told her the nickname the other children gave him. “Don’t be ashamed, my son. You are not just an ordinary little boy. Your father is the King of Benares!” said his mother gently.

The little boy was very surprised. “Do you have any proof of this?” he asked his mother. So she told him all about his father, his gift of a signet ring to her and his instructions that if

she had a baby boy she should bring him to Benares, along with the ring as proof. "Let's go then, mother, let's go look for my father," said the little boy. She agreed, and the next day they set off for Benares.

When they arrived at the king's palace, the gatekeeper told the king that a woman and her little son wanted to see him. The mother and son were taken into the royal assembly hall, which was packed with the king's ministers and advisers. The woman reminded the king of their time together in the forest. Finally she said: "Your Majesty, here is your son."

Ashamed in front of all the ladies and gentlemen of his court, the king denied even though deep in his heart he knew the woman spoke the truth. "He is not my son!" he said. Then the lovely young mother showed the signet ring as proof.

Again, the king fearing humiliation denied the truth. "This is not my ring!"

The poor woman thought: "I have no witness and no evidence to prove what I say. I have only my faith in the power of truth." So she replied to the king: "If I throw this little boy up into the air, and if he truly is your son, may he remain in the air without falling. If he is not your son, may he fall to the ground and die!"

Suddenly, she grabbed the boy by his foot and threw him up into the air. Lo and behold, the boy sat in the cross-legged position, suspended in mid-air, without falling. Everyone was astonished! Suspended in the air, the little boy spoke to the mighty king. "My lord, I am indeed your own flesh and blood. You take care of many people who are not related to you. You even keep and feed countless elephants, horses and other animals. And yet, you are not concerned about looking after and raising me, your own son. Please do take care of me and my mother."

The king was humbled by the truth of the little boy's powerful words. Overcoming his pride,

the king held out his arms and said: “Come to me my son, and I will take good care of you.”

Amazed by such a miracle, all the others in the court put out their arms. They too asked the levitating little boy to come to them. But he floated directly in mid-air into his father’s arms. With his son seated on his lap, the king announced that he would be the crown prince, and his mother the queen.

In this way, the king and his people learned the power of truth, and Benares became famous as a place of justice. When the king passed away, the grown-up crown prince wanted to show the people that all deserve respect, regardless of birth. He had himself crowned under the official name, “King No-father!” and went on to rule the kingdom in a generous and righteous way.

THE MORAL IS ✏ The truth is always stronger than a lie.

8

The One-hundredth Prince

[Obedience to a Wise Teacher]

A long time ago, there was a king who had one hundred sons. His youngest son, Prince Gamani, was a very energetic, patient and kind chap.

All the princes had their own teachers. And even though Prince Gamani was one-hundredth in line to the throne, he was fortunate enough to have the best teacher. Someone with the most learning and the wisest of them all. Nobody knew, but this honourable gentle teacher was actually the rebirth of a Bodhisattva. He was like a father to Prince Gamani, who adored, respected and obeyed him.

In those days, it was the custom of the country to send each educated prince to a different province, to develop it and to help the people. When Prince Gamani was old enough for this assignment, he went to his teacher and asked which province he should request. “Do not select any province. Instead, tell your father that if he sends you, his one-hundredth son, out to a province, there will be no son remaining to serve him in his home city,” advised his teacher. Prince Gamani did as he was told, and pleased his father with his kindness and loyalty.

Some time later, the prince again went to see his teacher. “How best can I serve my father and the people here in the capital city?” he asked. The wise teacher replied: “Ask the king to appoint you as the person-in-charge of fees and tax collection, and of benefits distribution to the people. If he agrees, always remember to carry out your duties honestly and fairly, with energy and kindness.”

As with the first time, the prince obeyed his teacher’s advice. Trusting his one-hundredth son, the king was glad to assign these duties to him. When the young prince carried out his duties - the difficult task of collecting fees and taxes, he was always gentle, fair and lawful. When he distributed food to the hungry, and other necessities to the needy, he was always generous, kind and sympathetic. Before long, the one-hundredth prince gained the respect and affection of all.

Eventually, the time came for the king to go. His ministers asked him, on his deathbed, who should be the next king. “All one hundred of my sons have a right to succeed me. The decision on who should be the next king lies with the citizens,” he replied.

After he died, all the citizens agreed to make the one-hundredth prince their next ruler. They crowned him King Gamani the Righteous because of his wholesome character.

When the ninety-nine older brothers heard what had happened, they felt insulted. Filled with envy and rage, they prepared for war. They sent a message to King Gamani that reads: "We are all your elders. Neighbouring countries will laugh at us if our country is ruled by the one-hundredth prince. Either you give up the kingdom or we will take it by force!"

After he received this message, King Gamani took it with him to his wise old teacher, and sought his advice.

"Tell your brothers you refuse to wage war against them. Tell them you will not help them kill innocent people you have come to know and love. Tell them that, instead, you are dividing the king's wealth among all one hundred princes. Then send each one his portion," advised the wise teacher. Again, the king obeyed his teacher.

Meanwhile, the ninety-nine older princes had brought their ninety-nine small armies to surround the royal capital. When they received the king's message and their small portions of the royal treasure, they held a meeting. They decided that each portion was so small it was almost meaningless. Therefore, they would not accept them.

But then they realised that, in the same way, if they fought with King Gamani and then with one other, the kingdom itself would be divided into many small worthless portions. When that happened, each small part of the once great kingdom would be weak in the face of any hostile country. So they sent back their portions of the royal treasure as offerings of peace, and accepted the rule of King Gamani.

The king was pleased, and invited his brothers to the palace to celebrate the peace and unity of the kingdom. He entertained them in the most perfect ways - with generosity,

pleasant conversation, providing kind instructions for their benefit, and treating all with even-handed courtesy.

The king and the ninety-nine princes became close friends. Their ties were much stronger and closer than they had been as brothers. It was also a well-known fact in all the surrounding countries that they strongly supported one another. Thus, no one dared threaten the kingdom or its people. After a few months, the ninety-nine brothers returned to their provinces.

In gratitude, King Gamani the Righteous invited his wise old teacher to live in the palace. He honoured him with great wealth and many gifts, and even held a celebration for his respected teacher, announcing to the full court: "I, the last-born among one hundred worthy princes, owe all my success to the wise advice of my generous and understanding teacher. Even the unity and strength of this kingdom are due to my beloved teacher. Likewise, all who follow their wise teachers' advice will earn prosperity and happiness."

The kingdom prospered under the remaining rule of the generous and just King Gamani the Righteous.

THE MORAL IS ✏ One is rewarded a hundred times more for following the advice of a wise teacher.

9

The King With One Grey Hair

[Ordination]

Eons ago, the people had much longer lives than those today. They lived many hundreds of thousands of years. At that time, the Bodhisattva was born as a baby named Makhadeva.

For 84,000 years, he had lived as a child and crown prince. At the time of our story, he had been a young king for 80,000 years.

One day, Makhadeva told his royal barber: “If you see any grey hair on my head, promise you will tell me immediately!” Of course, the barber gave his word to do so.

4,000 years later, on a certain fateful day, the royal barber spotted one single grey hair on the king’s head while he was cutting his raven locks. “Oh my lord, I see one grey hair on your head,” he said. “Pull it out and put it in my hand,” instructed the king. The barber got his golden tweezers, plucked out the one grey hair, and placed it in the king’s hand.

At that time when the incident happened, the king still had at least another 84,000 years to live before his time was up! But at that moment when he was looking at the one grey hair in his hand, he was terrified of dying. He felt like death was closing in on him, as if he was trapped in a burning house. He was so fearful and worried that sweat rolled down his back, and he shuddered.

“Oh foolish king, you have wasted your long life. You have made no attempt to rid yourself of your mental defilements like greed, envy, hatred, and ignorance. And now you have aged and death is closing in on you,” thought King Makhadeva.

The more he thought, the more his body sweated and burned. Until finally, he decided once and for all to give up his kingship, be ordained as a monk, and to practise meditation. He also granted the income of a whole town to the barber. This amounted to 100,000 per year.

Then the king called his eldest son to him and said: “My son, I have just found a grey hair on my head. I have aged. As I have enjoyed the worldly pleasures of great wealth and power, when I die, I want to be reborn in a heavenly world and enjoy the pleasures of the gods. I have decided to live the life of a forest monk from today onwards. You must now take over the responsibility of ruling the country.”

Hearing that the king wanted to become a monk, the royal ministers and the rest of the court rushed to see him. "Our lord, why do you suddenly want to be ordained?" they asked.

The king held up the single strand of grey hair in his hand and spoke: "My ministers and subjects, I learned a lesson from this strand of grey hair. I realised the three stages of life - youth, middle age and old age - are coming to an end. This first grey hair signifies the messenger of death sitting on my head. Grey hairs are like angels sent by the god of death. Therefore, it's time for me to be ordained."

The people wept at the news of his departure. On that very day, King Makhadeva gave up his royal life, went into the forest and was ordained as a monk. There, he practised what holy men call the 'Four Heavenly States of Mind'. The first is loving-kindness, or tender affection for all. The second is compassion, or having sympathy and pity for all those who suffer. The third is appreciative joy, or being happy when others are joyful and happy. Lastly is equanimity or experiencing a state of calmness at all times, even in the face of difficulties and troubles.

After 84,000 years of diligent practice and meditation as a monk, the Bodhisattva finally passed away. In his next life, he was reborn as a being in a high heavenly world with a lifespan of a million years!

THE MORAL IS ✏ Even a long life is too short to waste.

10

The Happy Monk

[Joys of the Spiritual Life]

Once upon a time, there was a rich man who realised that the suffering of old age afflicted both the rich and poor alike. So he gave up his wealth and upper class status to live as a humble forest monk. He practised meditation and developed his mind by freeing himself

from unwholesome thoughts. Soon he became very contented and happy. His peacefulness and friendliness gradually drew 500 followers to his side.

At that time, most monks usually looked pretty serious and stern. However, there was a peculiar monk, though dignified, who always wore a little smile. No matter what happened, he never lost this glimmer of inner happiness. He even had the broadest smile and the warmest laughter of all on happy occasions.

Monks, as well as others, would sometimes ask him why he was always so happy and smiling. "If I tell you, you wouldn't believe me! And if you think I lied, it would be a dishonour to my master," he chuckled. The wise old master knew the source of happiness that could not be erased from his face. And so, he made this happiest monk his right-hand assistant.

One year, after the rainy season, the old master and the 500 monks travelled to the city. When they were staying in the city during spring, the king permitted them to live in his pleasure garden.

The king was a good man who took his responsibilities as a ruler seriously. He tried to protect his people from danger, and increase their prosperity and welfare. Besides having to act as a mediator frequently between his own rival ministers of state, he also had to worry about hostile neighbouring kings invading his country.

Sometimes his wives fought for his attention, and for the advancement of their sons. Occasionally, dissatisfied subjects would also come threatening to kill him! And, of course, he also had to worry constantly about the finances of the kingdom. In fact, he had so much to worry about, that he never had time to be happy!

As summer approached, he learned that the monks were preparing to return to the forest. Considering the health and welfare of the old leader, the king went to him and implored him to stay. "Your reverence, you are now very old and weak. What good does it do to go back to

the forest? Why don't you send your followers back while you remain here?" he beseeched.

The chief monk then called his right-hand assistant to him and said: "I now appoint you as the deputy chief monk. All of you are to return to the forest. As I am too old and weak, I will remain here as kindly requested by the king." The 500 monks returned to their abode in the forest and the old master stayed behind.

The deputy chief monk continued his meditation practice diligently in the forest. He gained so much wisdom and peace that he became even happier than before. He missed his master and wanted to share his happiness with him. So he returned to the city for a visit.

When he arrived, he sat on a rug at the feet of the old monk. They didn't speak very much, but every so often the young monk would say: "What happiness! Oh what happiness!"

Shortly, the king came to visit. He paid his respects to the chief monk. Instead of showing proper respect by greeting the king, the young monk from the forest repeatedly uttered: "What happiness! Oh what happiness!" This disturbed the king greatly. "With all my worries, busy schedules and heavy responsibilities, I take time out for a visit and this monk here does not even respect me enough to recognise my existence. How insulting!" he thought. "Venerable sir, this monk must be indolent from overeating. That must be why he is so full of happiness. Does he lie around here so lazy all the time?" he asked the senior monk.

The chief monk replied: "Oh king, have patience and I will tell you the source of his happiness. Not many know it. He was once a king, just as rich and mighty as you! Then one day, he gave up his kingly life and was ordained a monk. Now he thinks his past happiness as a king was nothing compared to the joy and contentment he is presently experiencing!"

"He used to be surrounded by armed men to protect him. Now, sitting alone in the forest with nothing to fear, he has no need for guards. He has given up worrying about having

to protect his wealth and kingdom. Free from worries, his meditation practice advanced to such a stage of inner peace that he cannot help but say again and again: "What happiness! Oh what happiness!" His wisdom protects himself and others," continued the chief monk.

The king understood at once. Hearing the story of the happy monk made him feel at peace. He stayed for a while and received advice from both. Then he honoured them and returned to his palace.

Meanwhile, the happy monk, who had once been a king, paid respects to his master and returned to the forest. The old chief monk, on the other hand, lived till a ripe old age before passing away to be reborn in the heavenly realm.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Non-attachment to wealth and power increases one's happiness.

11

Beauty and Grey

[A Wise Leader]

A long, long time ago, there was a deer that was the herd leader of a thousand. He had two sons. The first son, Beauty, was a very slim and tall deer with bright sparkling eyes

and smooth scarlet fur. The second, Grey, was also slim and tall with handsome grey fur.

One day, when Beauty and Grey were old enough, their father said: "I am now very old, and cannot do all that is necessary to look after this large herd of deer. I wish to retire and I want the two of you, my grown-up children, to be the leaders. The two of you will share the herd, with each leading 500 deer." With that, the two young deer became leaders in their own right.

At that time in India, the deer were always in danger during the harvesting season. Rice crops were at its tallest when they were to be harvested, and the deer could not help but venture into the paddy fields to eat them. To avoid the destruction of their crops, the humans dug pits, set sharp stakes in the ground, and built stone traps to capture and kill the deer.

When the harvesting season arrived, the wise old deer called his two sons to him. He advised them to take the herds up into the mountain forest, far from the dangerous farmlands. He had used this tactic to save the deer from being wounded or killed over the years. Then he would bring them back to the lowlands after the harvest was over.

As he was too old and weak for the journey, the wise old deer chose to stay behind in hiding. After warning them to be careful, he wished them a safe trip. Beauty set out with his herd for the mountain forest, and so did Grey with his.

Knowing that this was the season the deer migrated from the low-lying farmlands to the highlands of the countryside, the villagers hid along the way and killed them as they passed by.

In his hurry to get his herd to the lush mountain forest, Grey did not heed his father's wise advice. Instead of travelling cautiously, he moved his herd constantly, during the night, at dawn and dusk, and even in broad daylight. This made the deer in Grey's herd an easy target for the humans to shoot with their bows and arrows. Many were killed and seriously

injured, only to die in great pain later on. Finally, when Grey arrived at the forest, only a paltry few deer were left in his herd.

Beauty, on the other hand, was wise enough to understand the dangers posed to his moving herd. He was very careful. He realised it was safer to stay away from the villages and from all humans. He knew it was not safe to move the herd in the daytime, or even at dawn or dusk. So he led his herd wide around the villages and moved only in the middle of the night. Due to Beauty's prudence and wisdom, all of his herd reached the mountain forest safe and sound. Not one was killed or injured.

The two herds found each other, and remained in the mountains until the harvesting season was over. Then they began to return to the low-lying farmlands for it was turning cold in the mountains.

Unfortunately, Grey had learnt nothing from his first trip. In his anxiety to return to the warmer lowlands, he was just as thoughtless and brash as before. Again, the people hid along the way and sprang an attack on the deer. All of Grey's remaining herd were killed. Only Grey himself survived the hazardous journey.

But Beauty led his herd in the same careful way as before. He brought all 500 deer back safely. Seeing the deer, the old chief said to his doe when the herd was still some distance away: "Look. Beauty has brought all his followers safely back with him, whereas Grey comes limping back alone without his whole herd of 500. Those who follow a wise leader, with good qualities, will always be safe. But those who follow a foolish leader, who is careless and thinks only of himself, will fall into troubles and be destroyed."

After some time, the old deer died and was reborn as he deserved. And as for Beauty, he became the chief of the herd and lived a long life, loved and admired by all.

THE MORAL IS ✏ A wise leader puts the safety of his followers first.

12
King Banyan Deer
[Chapter 1. Compassion]

Once upon a time, an unusual and beautiful deer was born in the forests near Benares. Although he was as big as a young colt, his mother gave birth to him without much difficulties. When he opened his eyes, they were bright and lively just like sparkling jewels.

His mouth was as crimson as the reddest forest berries, and his hooves were as black as polished coal. His little horns glistened like silver. And his body was swathed in fine fur of a golden hue, like a perfect summer's dawn. As he grew up, a herd of 500 deer gathered around him, and he became known as King Banyan Deer.

Meanwhile, not far away, another beautiful buck deer was born. He was also splendidly golden in colour just like King Banyan deer. In time, a separate herd of 500 deer came to follow him, and he was known as Branch Deer.

At that time, the King of Benares was very fond of hunting and of eating venison. He hunted regularly and killed many deers. Each time he went hunting in a different village, he would order the people there to stop what they were doing to work in his hunting party.

This disrupted the lives of the villagers for they had to stop their ploughing or harvesting whenever the king was around. They grew less crops, and soon other businesses were also affected. Desperate to change their situations, they gathered one day, discussed and decided to build a large deer park in Benares for the king. There, he could hunt by himself, without the need for the services of the villagers.

Soon, the people were hard at work. They dug ponds for the deer to drink from and planted trees and grasses for them to feed on. When the deer park was completed, they opened the gates and went out into the nearby forests looking for deer. When they saw the entire herds of Banyan and Branch deer, they surrounded them. Then, with sticks and weapons, they created a commotion and drove all of them into the deer park before locking the gates up, trapping the poor deer.

After the deer had settled down, the people went to see the king. "Our crops and incomes have suffered because of your hunting requirements. We have built a pleasant and safe deer park just for you, so that you can go hunting by yourself as and when you like. Now you can hunt as much as you want without needing our help."

Curious, the king went to the new deer park for a look. He was pleased to see vast herds of deer in the park. While observing them, his eyes caught the sight of two magnificent golden deer with large fully grown antlers. In awe of their unusual beauty, the king granted specific immunity to these two outstanding creatures. He ordered that no one was to harm or kill them, and instructed that they should be kept completely safe at all times.

Once everyday the king would come to hunt a deer for his dinner table. Sometimes, when he was too busy, he would send his royal cook to do it for him. The poor deer would then be brought to the chopping block to be butchered for the oven.

The deer would go mad whenever they caught sight of bow and arrows. Fearing for their lives, they would run around wildly, often injuring themselves in the event. Many suffered great pain because of this.

One day, King Banyan Deer called for a meeting with his herd. He also asked Branch Deer and his herd to join in this meeting. King Banyan Deer addressed them. "Although in the end, there is no escape from death, this needless suffering due to injuries and wounds can be prevented. Since the king only wishes to savour the meat of a deer each day, let one be chosen by us each day to submit himself to the chopping block. The selection would alternate between the two herds. One day from my herd, and the following day from Branch Deer's herd."

Branch Deer agreed. From that day onwards, the deer that was chosen to be sacrificed meekly surrendered himself and laid his neck on the block. And so the cook came each day, killed the waiting victim and prepared the king's meal.

One day, the turn to be slaughtered fell by chance to a pregnant doe in Branch Deer's herd. Considering the welfare of others, her own as well as her unborn child, she went to Branch Deer and pleaded: "My lord, I am pregnant. Please grant that I may live until I have delivered my fawn. Then we can take the place of two rather than just one. This will also

save a turn, and thereby a single life for one long day."

However, Branch Deer refused to accede to her request. "No, no, I cannot change the rules all of a sudden and put your turn upon another. The pregnancy is yours, and this baby is your responsibility. Now leave," he replied.

Failing to make Branch Deer see her point, the poor mother doe went to King Banyan Deer and explained her plight. "Go in peace. I will change the rules and put your turn upon another," he replied gently.

Having said that, the deer king went to the executioner's block, and laid his own golden neck down upon it.

All went hush and quiet in the deer park. Some who told this story even said that the blanket of silence also enveloped other worlds not seen from here.

Soon, the royal cook came to kill the willing victim on the block. But when he saw it was one of the two golden deer the king had ordered to spare, he was afraid to kill him. He went back and told the king.

The king was surprised to hear of this strange phenomenon, so he went to the park. He said to the golden deer, still lying on the block: "Oh king of deer, did I not promise to spare your life? Why is it that you still come here like the others?"

"Oh king of men, a pregnant doe was unfortunately chosen to be slaughtered. For the sake of others, her own as well as her unborn child, she begged me to spare her. I could not help but place myself in her shoes, and feel her suffering. And I could not help but weep, to think that the little one would never see the dawn, or ever taste the freshness of dew drops. Yet, I could not force the pain of death on another. For that would not be fair since he would be unprepared and relieved thinking it was not his turn today. So, here I am, mighty king, I offer my life willingly for the sake of the doe and her unborn fawn. Rest assured there is

no other reason," said King Banyan Deer majestically.

The King of Benares was overwhelmed. Powerful as he was, a tear rolled down his cheek. Then he said: "Oh great lord, the golden king of deer, even among human beings, I have not seen any such as you! Such great compassion, to share in the suffering of others! Such great generosity, to give your life for others! Such great kindness and tender love for all your fellow deer! Arise."

"I decree that you will never be killed by me or anyone else in my kingdom. And, so too, the doe and her fawn."

Without raising his head yet, the golden one asked: "Are we the only ones to be saved? What about the rest in the park, our friends and families?" The king said: "My lord, I cannot refuse you. I grant safety and freedom to all the deer in the park." "And what about those outside the park? Will they be killed?" asked King Banyan Deer. "No my lord, I spare all deer in my whole kingdom."

Still, the golden deer did not raise his head. He pleaded: "The deer will be safe, but what about other four-footed animals?" "My lord, from now on they will be safe in my land." "And what about the birds? They too want to live." "Yes, my lord, the birds will be safe too from premature death at the hands of men." "And what about the fishes?" "Even they will be free to live, my lord." So saying, the King of Benares granted immunity from hunting and killing of all animals in his land.

Having pleaded for the lives of all creatures, King Banyan Deer arose.

[Chapter 2. Teachings]

Out of compassion and gratitude, the Bodhisattva - King Banyan Deer, taught the King the Five Precepts. “If you give up five kinds of unwholesome actions, it will benefit you and purify your mind. These are:

- destroying life, for this is not compassion;
- taking what is not given, for this is not generosity;
- doing wrong in sexual ways, for this is not loving-kindness;
- speaking falsely, for this is not Truth;
- losing your mind from alcohol, for this leads to committing erroneous ways that go against the first four precepts.”

He further advised him to do all that was good and wholesome, for that would bring happiness in this life and beyond. Then King Banyan Deer, and both herds, returned to the forest.

Some time later, the pregnant doe, who had stayed with King Banyan Deer’s herd, gave birth to a fawn. He was as beautiful as a fresh lotus blossom given as an offering to the gods.

When the fawn had grown into a young buck deer, he began playing with Branch Deer’s herd. Seeing this, his mother said to him: “Better to die after a short life with the great compassionate one, than to live a long life with an ordinary one.” Afterwards, her son lived happily in the herd of King Banyan Deer.

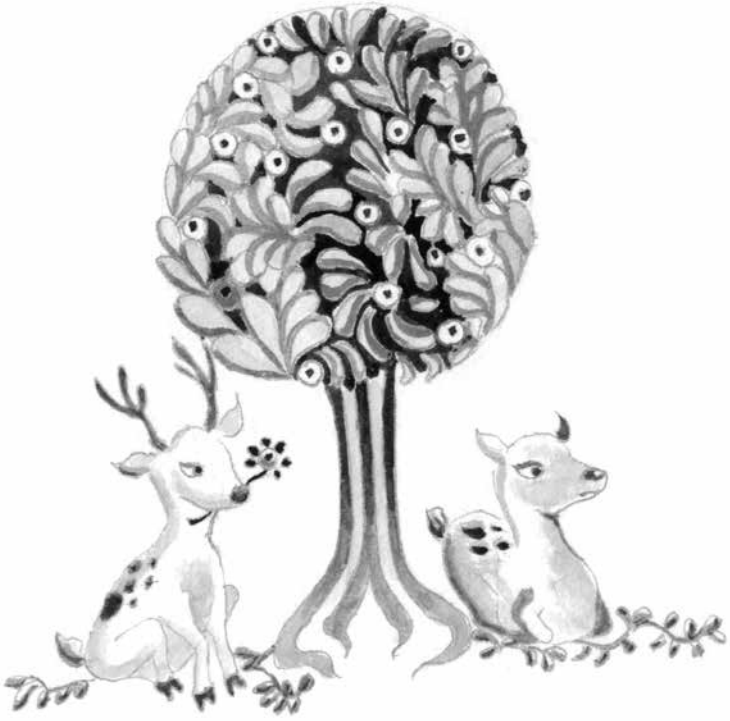
But the farmers and villagers of the kingdom were not happy. Since the king had given his orders to spare the lives of the deer and other animals, the deer began to brazenly eat the people’s crops. They even grazed in the vegetable gardens inside the villages and the city of Benares itself!

So the people complained to the king, and asked for permission to kill at least some of the deer as a warning. But the king replied: "I have given my word to King Banyan Deer that not a single animal would come to harm. I would rather give up my kingship than to break my promise to him. No one is to hurt any of them!"

When King Banyan Deer heard of this incident, he commanded all deer not to eat the crops belonging to others. Then he sent a message to the people asking them to tie up bunches of leaves as boundaries around their fields instead of making fences. To this very day, this Indian custom of marking fields with tied up leaves has protected crops from deers' grazing.

Both King Banyan Deer and the King of Benares lived out their lives in peace, died, and were reborn as they deserved.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Wherever it is found, compassion is a sign of greatness.



13

Mountain Buck and Village Doe

[Infatuation]

Long ago, in northern India, there was a herd of village deers. They were used to being near villages for they grew up there. They knew they had to be very careful around humans,

especially during harvesting time, when the crops were tall. For the farmers trapped and killed any deer who came near.

To protect themselves, the village deers would stay in the forest all day long during the harvesting season. They only ventured near the borders of the village in the middle of the night. One of these was a beautiful young doe. She had soft reddish-brown fur, a fluffy white tail and big wide bright eyes.

During this particular season, a young mountain buck strayed into the same forest. One day, he saw the beautiful young doe, and was deeply attracted to her immediately. He didn't know anything about her. But he was infatuated with her, captivated by her reddish-brown fur, fluffy white tail and her big bright eyes. He even dreamed about her, although she did not know he existed!

A few days after the young mountain buck had set his eyes on the beautiful doe, he decided to introduce himself. He walked out to where she was grazing, and began to speak: "Oh my sweet beauty, one who is as lovely as the stars and as bright as the moon, I confess to you that I am deeply" - Just then the young buck's hoof got caught in a root, he tripped and fell, and his face dropped into a mud puddle! The pretty village doe was flattered, so she smiled. But deep inside, she thought this mountain buck was really rather silly!

Meanwhile, unknown to the deers, a clan of tree fairies who lived in the forest had witnessed everything - from the first time the mountain buck caught sight of the doe and his secret admiring from afar to his present clusmy fall into the mud puddle. "What fools these dumb animals are!" the fairies laughed. But there was one who did not laugh. "I fear this portends danger to this young fool!" he said.

The young buck was a little embarrassed, but he did not see how this could be dangerous to him. From then on, he followed the doe wherever she went. He kept telling her how

beautiful she was and how much he loved her. She didn't pay much attention to him.

Then night came, and it was time for the doe to go down to the village. The people who lived along the way knew the deers would pass by at night. They set traps to catch them. That night, a hunter waited, hiding behind a bush.

Carefully, the village doe set out. The mountain buck, who was still singing her praises, went right along with her. She stopped and said to him: "My dear buck, you are not accustomed to being around villages. You don't know how dangerous human beings are. The village, and the route to it, can bring death to a deer even at night. Since you are so young and inexperienced (and foolish, she thought to herself), you should not come down to the village with me. You should remain in the safety of the forest."

At this, the tree fairies applauded. But of course, the deers could not hear them.

The young buck paid no attention to the doe's warning. "Your eyes look so lovely in the moonlight!" he said and kept walking with her. "If you won't listen to me, at least be quiet!" she said sternly. He was so mesmerised that he could not control his mind. But he did finally shut his mouth!

After a while, they approached the place where the hunter was hiding behind a bush. The fairies saw him, and became agitated and frightened for the deers' safety. They flew nervously around the trees, but they could only watch.

The doe could smell the scent of the hunter. She was afraid of a trap. Anxious for her own life, she let the buck deer go first while she followed behind.

When the hunter saw the unsuspecting mountain buck, he shot his arrow and killed him instantly. Seeing this, the terrified doe turned around and quickly dashed back into the forest.

The hunter claimed his kill. He started a fire, skinned the buck deer, cooked some of the venison and ate heartily. Then he threw the carcass over his shoulder and carried it back home to feed his family.

When the fairies saw what happened, some of them cried. As they watched the hunter cut up the once noble-looking buck, some felt sick. Others blamed the village doe for leading him to his death.

But the wise fairy, who had given the warning earlier said: "It was the excitement of infatuation that killed this foolish deer. Such blind desire brings false happiness at first, but ends in pain and suffering."

THE MORAL IS ✏ Infatuation leads to destruction.

14

The Wind-deer and the Honey-grass

[The Craving for Sweet Taste]

Once upon a time, the King of Benares had a gardener who looked after his pleasure garden. Sometimes, animals from the nearby forest would wander into the garden. The gardener

complained about this to the king, who in turn said: "If you see any strange animal, tell me at once."

One day, the gardener did see something strange. He saw a weird kind of deer at the far end of the garden. When the deer saw him, it ran like the wind. The gardener knew he had caught a glimpse of the 'wind-deer'. They were a rare species and were extremely timid. They were very easily frightened by human beings.

As instructed, the gardener told the king about the wind-deer. "Would you be able to catch this rare animal?" asked the king. "My lord, if you give me some bee's honey, I could even bring him into the palace!" answered the gardener. The king ordered that the gardener could have as much bee's honey as he wanted.

Now in this story, our little wind-deer loved to eat the flowers and fruits that grew in the king's pleasure garden. Not to frighten the wind-deer off, the gardener let himself be seen little by little, so that the deer would be familiar to his presence. Next, he spread honey on the grass where the wind-deer usually grazed. Sure enough, the deer began to eat the honey-coated grass. Soon, it developed a liking for the taste of this 'honey-grass', and come to the garden every day. Before long, the deer would eat nothing but the 'honey-grass'!

The gardener approached the wind-deer little by little. At first, it would run away. But slowly, the wind-deer was accustomed to having him around. It lost its fear and thought the man was harmless. Eventually, the gardener even got the deer to eat the honey-grass right out of his hand. He continued doing this for some time, in order to build up the confidence and trust of the deer.

Meanwhile, the gardener had rows of curtains set up, making a wide pathway from the far end of the pleasure garden to the king's palace. The curtains would prevent the wind-deer from seeing anybody from inside the pathway that might startle it.

When all was ready, the gardener took a bag of grass and a container of honey with him. Then he started to feed the wind-deer by hand when it appeared. Gradually, he led the wind-deer into the curtained-off pathway. He continued to lead him with the honey-grass slowly until finally the deer followed him right into the palace. Once inside the building, the palace guards closed the doors and the wind-deer was trapped. Scared out of its wits to see so many humans around, it began to dart around, frantically looking for a way to escape.

The king came down to the hall and saw the terrified wind-deer. "What a wind-deer! How could it have gotten into such a state? A wind-deer is an animal who will not return to a place where it has seen a human for seven full days. And generally, if it has been alarmed at a particular place, it will not return for the rest of its life! But look! Even such a shy wild creature can be trapped because of its desire for something sweet, and even be lured right into the palace at the centre of the city," he said.

"My friends, the teachers warn us not to be too attached to the place we live in, for all things are transient and pass away. They say that being too attached to a small circle of friends is confining and restricts a broad outlook. But see how much more dangerous is the simple craving for a sweet flavour, or for any other taste sensation. Just see how my gardener ensnared this beautiful shy animal by taking advantage of its craving for honey-coated grass."

Not wishing to harm the gentle wind-deer, the king released it back into the forest. From that day onwards, the deer never again returned to the royal pleasure garden.

THE MORAL IS ✏ "Cravings and desires can be dangerous to one's well-being."

15
The Fawn That Skipped School

[Truancy]

A long time ago, there was a herd of forest deer. In this herd lived a wise and respected teacher. He taught the tricks and strategies of survival to the young fawns.

One day, his younger sister brought her son to him. She said: “Oh brother, this is my son. Please teach him the tricks and strategies of deerhood.” The teacher said to the fawn: “Very well, you can come at this time tomorrow for your first lesson.”

At first, the young deer attended classes as he was supposed to. But soon, he became more interested in playing with the other young bucks and does. He didn’t realise it was dangerous for a deer to know nothing but deer games. So he started playing truant. Soon he was missing classes all the time.

Unfortunately, the fawn who played truant stepped into a snare one day and was trapped. Seeing that her little one could not be found, the worried mother went to her brother, and asked: “My dear brother, how is my son? Did you teach him all the tricks and strategies to survive?”

“My dear sister, your son is disobedient and unteachable. Out of respect for you, I tried my best to teach him. But he did not want to learn the tricks and strategies of survival. Instead, he missed school! How can I possibly teach him? You are obedient and faithful, but he is not. It is useless to try to teach him,” he replied.

Soon after, they received the sad news that the stubborn fawn had been trapped and killed by a hunter. He skinned the young deer and took the meat home to his family.

THE MORAL IS ✏ A student who plays truant will miss out on learning important skills and knowledge from his teacher.

16
The Fawn That Played Dead

[Attendance]

Long, long ago, there lived a herd of forest deer. Living in this herd was a particular deer that was wise and respected. As he was skilled in the ways of survival, he was tasked with the responsibility of teaching the tricks and strategies of survival to the young fawns.

One day, his younger sister brought her son to him and said: “Oh brother, this is my son. Could you please teach him the tricks and strategies of survival?” “Very well, you can come at this time tomorrow for your first lesson,” said the teacher to the fawn.

The young deer attended classes as he was supposed to. While others skipped classes and played all day long, he was attentive in class. He was well-liked by the other young bucks and does, but he played with them only when his homework was completed. Eager to learn, he was always punctual for lessons. He was also patient with the other students, knowing that some learned faster than others. He respected his teacher for his knowledge, and was grateful to him for his willingness to share.

One day, the fawn stepped into a trap in the forest and was captured. He cried out in great pain. This frightened the other fawns. They ran back to the herd and told his mother. She was terrified, and ran to her brother, the teacher. Trembling with fear, she sobbed to him: “Oh my dear brother, have you heard the news? My little one has been caught by a hunter’s snare? How can I save my son’s life? Is he hardworking in class?”

“My sister, don’t be afraid. I have no doubt he will be safe. He is hardworking and always performs his very best. He has never missed a lesson and is always attentive. Therefore, there is no need to worry or be fearful. He will not be hurt by any human being. I am confident he will return safely to you. He has learned all the tricks and strategies to deceive the hunters. So be patient. He will return!”

Meanwhile, the trapped fawn was rapidly thinking of a way to save himself. “All my friends have ran away in fright. There is no one to help me. I must now use the tricks and strategies I have learned from my wise teacher.”

The strategy he decided to use was the one called “playing dead.” First, he used his hooves to dig up dirt and grass, to make it seem he had tried very hard to escape. Then he relieved

his bowels and released his urine, because when a deer was caught in a trap and died in great fear, this usually occurred. Next, he covered his body with his own saliva.

Lying stretched out on his side, he held his body rigidly and stiffened his legs out straight. He turned up his eyes, and let his tongue hang out from the side of his mouth. He filled his lungs with air and puffed out his belly. Finally, with his head leaning on one side, he breathed through the nostril next to the ground, not through the upper one.

Lying motionless, he looked so much like a stiff corpse that flies flew around him, attracted by the awful smells. Crows stood nearby waiting to eat his flesh.

Soon the sun was up and the hunter came to inspect his traps. Finding the fawn that was playing dead, he slapped the puffed up belly and found it stiff. Seeing the flies and the mess he thought: "Ah, it has already started to stiffen. This little deer must have been caught by the trap much earlier this morning. Already, the tender meat is starting to rot. I will skin and butcher the carcass right here, and carry the meat home."

Completely believing the deer to be dead, the hunter removed it, cleaned the trap, and began spreading leaves to prepare for the butchering. Realising he was free, the fawn suddenly sprang to his feet. He ran like the wind back to the comfort and safety of his mother. The whole herd celebrated his survival. All thanks to the lessons he learned from the wise teacher.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Well-learned lessons bring great rewards.

17
The Wind and the Moon
[Friendship]

Once upon a time, a lion and a tiger stayed together in a cave. The two were very good friends. Though it might seem strange to us, they did not think their friendship was at all

unusual, for they met when they were too young to know the difference between lions and tigers. Besides, they lived in a peaceful part of the mountains, possibly due to the influence of a gentle forest monk who lived nearby. He was a hermit, one who lives far away from other people.

One day, for some unknown reason, the two friends got into a silly argument. "Everyone knows the cold comes when the moon wanes from full to new!" the tiger said. "Where did you hear such nonsense? Everyone knows the cold comes when the moon waxes from new to full!" argued the lion.

The argument got more heated. Soon, they started calling each other names! They could not reach any conclusion to resolve their growing dispute as neither could convince the other. So, they decided to approach the learned forest monk to help resolve this issue.

When they reached the abode of the peaceful hermit, the two friends bowed respectfully before asking their question. The friendly monk pondered for a while and then gave his answer. "It can be cold in any phase of the moon, from new to full and back to new again. It is the wind that brings the cold, whether from the west or north or east. Therefore, in a way, you are both right! So neither of you are beaten by the other. The most important thing is to live without conflict, to remain united. Unity is best in all situations."

The lion and the tiger thanked the wise hermit. They were happy they were still friends.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Strong friendship and unity can only be good for all.

18

The Goat That Saved the Priest

[Ignorance]

Many full moons ago, there lived a very famous priest of a very old religion. One day, he decided it was the right day to perform the ritual sacrificing of a goat. In his ignorance, he thought this was an offering demanded by his god.

First, he got an appropriate goat. Then he ordered his servants to wash the goat in the holy river and decorate it with garlands of flowers. After that, as part of the purification practice, the servants were to bathe themselves.

At the riverbank, the goat suddenly realised that today it would die. It also became conscious of his past births, deaths and rebirths. It realised that the effects of his past negative deeds were about to ripen. So it laughed an uproarious goat-laugh, like the clanging of cymbals.

In the midst of his laughter, it realised another truth - that the priest, by sacrificing him, would suffer the same terrible end, due to his ignorance. Knowing this, it began to cry as loudly as he had just been laughing!

The servants, who were bathing in the holy river, were amazed to hear the laughter and weeping from the goat. "Why did you laugh loudly only to cry later? What is the reason for this?" they asked. "I will tell you the reason. But it must be in the presence of your master, the priest," replied the goat.

Since they were curious to find out why, they immediately took the sacrificial goat to the priest. They explained all that had happened at the riverbank. The priest, too, became very curious. He respectfully asked the goat: "Sir, why did you laugh loudly only to cry later?"

The goat, remembering his past lives, answered: "A long time ago, I too was a priest who was well-educated in the sacred religious rites. Like you, I thought that the sacrifice of a goat was a necessary offering I had to perform to my god, which would benefit others, as well as myself in future rebirths. However, the truth was for my next 499 lives I had to experience the suffering of being beheaded.

"While being prepared for the sacrifice today, I realised that I will lose my head once again, for the 500th time. And that, after today, I will finally be free from the negative karma of

the unwholesome deeds I committed so long ago. The joy of this made me guffaw.

“Then I suddenly realised that you, as a priest, are about to repeat the same negative action that I have committed, and would be doomed to experiencing the same outcome of having your head chopped off in your next 500 lives! So, out of compassion and sympathy for you, my laughter turned to tears.”

Afraid that the goat might be right, the priest said: “Well, sir goat, in that case, I will not kill you.” “Reverend priest, even if you don’t kill me, I know that I will lose my head today for sure and finally be released from my negative karma,” replied the goat.

“Don’t be afraid, my fine goat. I will provide the very best protection and personally guarantee that no harm will come to you,” the priest answered. “Oh priest, your protection is weak, compared to the power of karma.”

The priest cancelled the sacrifice, and started to have doubts about killing innocent animals. He released the goat and, along with his servants, followed closely in order to protect it from any danger.

Nonetheless, the goat was doomed to meet its end. The goat wandered into a rocky place, saw some tender leaves on a branch and stretched out to reach them, when all of a sudden, a lightning bolt struck an over-hanging rock, lopped off a sharp slab which fell and sliced off the goat’s head! It died instantly.

Hearing this bizarre phenomenon, hundreds of local people thronged the place. No one could understand how it could happen.

A fairy who lived in a tree nearby saw the entire incident. He appeared, fluttering his wings gently, and taught this to the curious people: “See what happened to this poor goat. This is

the result for killing animals! All beings who are born, suffer sickness, old age and death. But all are alike in wanting to live and not to die. When one kills another living being, this causes suffering to the one who kills, both now and in countless future rebirths.

"Being ignorant that the results of all deeds, good or bad, are unavoidable. Some continue to kill and pile up more suffering on themselves in the future. Each time they kill, a part of themselves must also die in this present life. Not only that, the suffering continues in the form of rebirth in hell worlds!"

Those who heard the fairy speak felt they were very lucky indeed. They gave up their ignorant killing, and led better lives that ended in pleasant rebirths.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Even religion can be a source of ignorance. Killing only brings suffering to one.

"All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill." – Dhammapada

19

The God in the Banyan Tree

[A Bad Promise]

In the past and even in some places today, people believe that tree gods or spirits inhabit large or unusual trees. They also believe that if you pray to the tree god and he helps to grant you your wish, you have to carry out what you promise the god.

In our story which took place in the city of Kasi in northern India, a long time ago, this was what happened to a man who chanced upon a large banyan tree. Thinking that there must be a god staying in the tree, he made a wish and promised to perform an animal offering if the wish was granted.

Not long after, his wish was fulfilled. But no one knows if it was the work of a god, a demon or by some other means. The man was sure the tree god had answered his prayer, so he wanted to keep his promise. As he had made a huge wish, it called for a big sacrifice. He brought many goats, mules, chickens and sheep to the tree. Then he collected firewood and prepared to burn the helpless animals as a sacrifice.

Suddenly, the spirit living in the banyan tree appeared. "Oh friend, you made a promise, and now are bound by that promise. You think by keeping your promise, you will be released from the bondage that the promise binds you. But if you commit this terrible unwholesome act of killing, it will put you in greater bondage. You will have to suffer for taking the lives of others, and even take rebirths in hell worlds! The way to end suffering is to give up doing unwholesome actions!"

"And furthermore, what makes you think I eat meat? Haven't you heard that we gods eat better stuff, like 'ambrosia' or stardust or sunbeams? I have no use for meat or any other food offerings." Having said that, he disappeared.

The foolish man realised the mistake he had made. Instead of committing unwholesome deeds that would only bring unhappy results to him in the future, he began to do only wholesome deeds that would benefit himself and others.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Because you reap what you sow, keeping a bad promise is worse than making it.

20

The Monkey King and The Water Demon

[Attentiveness]

Once upon a time, far away in a deep forest, lived a troop of 80,000 monkeys. They had a king who was unusually large, one who was as big as a fawn. He was not only huge in size, he was also 'broad in mind'. He was, after all, the Bodhisattva.

One day, he addressed his monkey citizens: "My subjects, there are poisonous fruits in this deep forest, and ponds possessed by demons. If you see any unusual fruit or a pond you have not come across before, do not eat or drink until you have asked me." Paying close attention to their wise king, all the monkeys agreed to follow his advice.

Later on, they came to an unknown pond. Even though they were all worn out and thirsty from foraging, no one dared to take a drink without first asking the monkey king. So they sat in the trees and on the ground around the pond.

When he arrived, the monkey king asked: "Did any of you drink the water?" "No, your Majesty, we followed your instructions," they replied. "Well done," he said.

Then he walked along the bank around the pond. He examined the footprints of the animals that had gone into the water, and saw that none came out again! He realised this pond must be possessed by a water demon. He said to his subjects: "This pond is possessed by a water demon. Do not touch the pond's water."

After a while, the water demon emerged from the centre of the pond when he realised none of the monkeys went into the water for a drink. He looked frightening with his enormous blue belly, deadly pale face, bulging green eyes, and blood red claws and feet. "Why are you just sitting around? Come into the pond and drink at once!" he cajoled.

"Are you the water demon who owns this pond?" asked the monkey king. "Yes, I am," replied the monster. "Do you eat all beings who enter the water?" asked the king. "Yes, I do. Even birds who drink from this pond," he answered. "When you are dehydrated and are forced to drink, I will savour eating you, the biggest monkey of all!" he leered, saliva dripping down his hairy chin.

But the monkey king was not a bit ruffled. He remained calm and coolly said: “I will not let you eat me or a single one of my followers. And yet, we will drink all the water we want!” “Impossible! How will you do that?” grunted the water demon. “Simple. All 80,000 of us will drink using bamboo shoots as straws. And you will not be able to touch us!”

Of course, anyone who has seen bamboo knows this can be pretty difficult. Bamboo grows in sections, one after another, with a knot in between. If any of the section was too short, the demon could grab the monkey, pull him under and gobble him up. But to sip through more than one section of the bamboo was impossible because of the knots.

But the monkey king in our story was a very special one. Having practised mindfulness, wholesome traits and virtuous conduct, he had developed very fine qualities of the mind.

Because of the fine mental qualities the Bodhisattva had, he created a miracle. He took a young bamboo shoot, blew through it and the knots disappeared! He used it to sip water from the pond. Next, incredible as it may sound, he waved his hand and all the bamboo which grew around the pond lost all their knots, and became a new kind of bamboo.

Using these bamboo, all 80,000 monkeys drank happily from the pond. The water demon was stunned. He could not believe his eyes. Grumbling to himself, he slid back into the waters, leaving only gurgling bubbles behind.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Test the water before you jump in.

21

The Tree That Acted Like a Hunter

[Impatience]

Long, long ago, an antelope lived deep in the forest and ate fruits which fell from trees. There was a tree which he particularly favoured. In the same area lived a hunter who captured and killed antelopes and deer. He would use fruits as bait to catch them.

Early one morning, the antelope came to his favourite tree in search of fruits to eat. He did not know that the hunter was hiding in the tree with his noose-trap ready. Even though he

was hungry, the antelope was very careful. He was always on the lookout for any possible signs of danger. When he noticed the delicious-looking fruits at the foot of his favourite tree, he wondered why no animals had eaten them yet, and so was afraid something wasn't right.

The hidden hunter saw the antelope approaching from a distance. Seeing that the animal was careful and worried that he wouldn't catch him, he began to throw fruits in the direction of the antelope, to lure him into coming closer.

But this was a pretty smart antelope. He knew that fruits only dropped straight down from trees and not horizontally. Since these fruits were flying towards him, he knew there was danger. He examined the tree very carefully, and saw the hunter in the branches. However, he pretended not to see him.

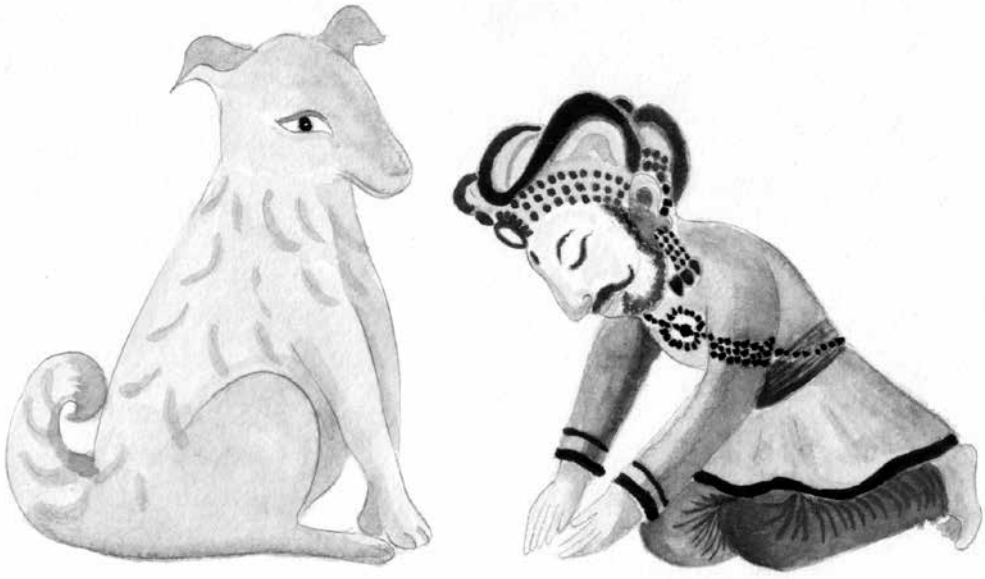
"Oh my dear fruit tree, you used to give me fruits by dropping them straight to the ground. Now, you are acting abnormally and throwing them towards me! Since you have changed your habits, I too will change mine. I will get my fruits from a different tree from now on, one that doesn't behave so abnormally!" said the antelope to the tree.

The hunter realised his mistake and saw that the antelope had outsmarted him. "You may escape this time, you clever antelope, but I'll get you next time for sure!" he yelled out angrily.

The antelope realised that in his anger, the hunter had given himself away a second time. So it spoke to the tree again. "Not only do you not act like a tree, you act like a hunter! Foolish humans who live by killing animals. You do not understand that killing the innocent brings harm only to oneself, in this life and the next by taking rebirth in a hell world. It is clear that we antelopes are far wiser than you. As we consume only fruits, we remain untainted and blameless of any killing, and so avoid the harmful results."

With that, the careful antelope leaped into the thick forest and was gone.

THE MORAL IS ✏ The wise remain pure and blameless.



22
The Dog King Named Silver
[Justice]

Once upon time, the King of Benares went to his pleasure garden in his fancily decorated chariot. He loved this chariot, mostly because it had intricately handcrafted leather belts and straps.

On that day, having stayed long in the pleasure garden, he returned to the palace late. Instead of locking his chariot up properly, it was left outside in the compound.

That night it rained heavily. The leather got wet and gave off an odour. The palace dogs caught the delicious wafting leather scent and came down into the compound. They chewed off and devoured the soft wet chariot straps and returned unseen to their places in the palace before daybreak.

When the king woke up and saw that the leather had been chewed by dogs. He called the servants and demanded to know how this happened.

Since they were supposed to watch over the palace dogs, the servants were afraid to tell the king the truth. Instead, they lied that stray dogs were the culprits and fabricated a story that mutts and mongrels that lived in the city had entered the palace through sewers and storm drains and were the ones who had eaten the fancy leather.

The king flew into a terrible rage. So angry was he that he decided to take vengeance against all dogs. He decreed that whoever saw a dog in the city was to kill it at once!

The massacre soon started. The dogs could not understand why they were suddenly being persecuted. Later that day, they learned of the king's decree. Frightened for their lives, they retreated to the cemetery just outside the city. This was where their leader, King Silver, lived.

Silver was king not because he was the biggest, strongest or toughest. He was actually average in size, with sleek silver fur, sparkling black eyes and alert pointed ears. But he walked with great dignity, that brought admiration and respect from men as well as dogs. He was also the wisest, having learned much in his long life, as well as the most compassionate of all dogs.

In the cemetery, the dogs were in chaos. They were frightened to death. When King Silver queried them, they told him all about the chariot straps, the king's decree, and the massacre in the city.

King Silver knew there was no way a stray could get into the palace grounds, since it was so heavily guarded. He knew the leather must have been eaten by the palace dogs.

"No matter how different we look, somehow we are all related. I must do all I can to save the lives of all these poor dogs, my relatives," he thought.

"Do not be afraid. I will save all of you. Stay here in the cemetery and don't wander into the city. I will tell the King of Benares who the real culprits are. The truth will save us all," he comforted them.

Before setting out, he went to a different part of the cemetery to be alone. Having trained his mind and practised goodness all his life, he now concentrated very hard and filled his mind with feelings of loving-kindness. "May all dogs be well and happy, and may all dogs be safe. I'm going to the palace for the sake of dogs and men alike. No one shall attack or harm me," he thought.

With that, King Silver began to slowly walk down the streets of Benares. Because his mind was focused, he had no fear. And because of his long life of goodness, he walked with a calm dignity that demanded respect. Nobody felt the least bit of anger or harboured any bad intention of harming him, instead they marvelled as the Bodhisattva passed by, having sensed the warm glow of his loving-kindness!

It was as if the whole city were spellbound. With no obstruction, King Silver walked past the palace guards, right into the royal hall of justice, and sat down calmly underneath the king's throne! The King of Benares was impressed by King Silver's show of courage and dignity that when servants came to remove the dog, he ordered them to let him remain.

A while later, King Silver came out from under the throne and faced the mighty King of Benares. He bowed respectfully and asked: “Your majesty, was it you who ordered that all the dogs of the city should be killed?” “Yes, I did,” replied the king. “What crime did the dogs commit?” asked King Silver. “They ate my beloved chariot leather and straps.” “Do you know which dogs did this?” asked King Silver. “No one knows,” said the King of Benares.

“My lord,” said the dog king, “for a king like you who wishes to be righteous, is it right to have all dogs killed because of a few guilty ones? Does this do justice to the innocent ones?” The king replied, as if it made perfect sense to him: “Since I do not know which dogs destroyed my leather, only by ordering the mass killing of all dogs can I be sure of punishing the guilty. The king must have justice!”

King Silver paused for a moment, before challenging the king with this crucial question - “My king, did you order all dogs to be killed? Or are there some that would be spared?” The king suddenly became a little uneasy as he was forced to admit, before his whole court, that not all dogs would be killed. “The fine pure-breeds of my palace are to be spared.”

“My lord, before, you said that all dogs are to be killed in order to ensure that the guilty parties would be punished. Now you say that your own palace dogs are to be spared. This shows that you are biased. For a king who wishes to be righteous, it is wrong to favour some over the others. The king’s justice must be unbiased, like an honest scale. Although you have decreed all dogs to be killed, the fact is only stray dogs in the city are slaughtered. Your pampered palace dogs are unjustly saved, while the wandering strays are wrongly killed!”

Recognising truth in the dog king’s words, the King of Benares asked: “Are you wise enough to know which dogs ate my leather straps and belts?” “Yes my lord, I do know,” said King Silver, “it could only be your own favourite palace dogs, and I can prove it.” “Do so,” said the king.

The dog king asked to have the palace pets brought into the hall of justice. Then, he requested for a mixture of buttermilk and grass, and the palace dogs were made to eat it. Lo and behold, when this was done they vomited out partly digested pieces of the king's leather straps!

"My lord, no stray dogs from the city can enter your well-guarded palace compound. You are blinded by prejudice. It is your own dogs that are guilty of the crime. Nevertheless, to kill is an unwholesome thing to do because somehow all lives are related. So all living beings deserve the same respect as relatives."

The whole court was astounded by what had just taken place. Overwhelmed by a rare and sudden feeling of humility, the King of Benares bowed before King Silver and said: "Oh great king of dogs, I have never seen anyone such as you, one who possesses perfect wisdom and great compassion. Truly, your justice is supreme. I offer my throne and the kingdom of Benares to you!"

The Bodhisattva replied: "Arise my lord, I have no desire for a human crown. If you wish to show your respect for me, you should be a just and merciful ruler. It would help too if you can observe the 'Five Precepts' by refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking of intoxicants."

The king followed the teachings of the wise King Silver, and ruled with great respect for all living beings. He ordered that whenever he ate, all dogs in Benares were to be fed as well.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Bias leads to injustice, wisdom leads to justice.

23, 24

The Great Horse Called Knowing-one

[Courage]

Once upon a time, King Brahmadatta, who ruled Benares in northern India, had a mighty horse. Unbeknowst to the king, this horse that was born in the land of Sindh, in the Indus River valley of western India, was a Bodhisattva.

Not only was the horse big and strong, he was also very intelligent and wise. When he was still a colt, people noticed that he always seemed to understand what his rider wanted even before he was told. So he was given the name 'Knowing-one'.

'Knowing-one' was considered the greatest and bravest of all royal horses, and so was given the very best of everything. His stall was decorated and was always kept clean and beautiful. As horses are usually faithful to their masters, 'Knowing-one' was especially loyal. He was grateful of how well the king cared for him, and for the respect and trust the king had for him.

One day, seven neighbouring kings allied to wage war on King Brahmadatta. Each king brought four great armies - an elephant cavalry, a horse cavalry, a chariot brigade and ranks of foot soldiers. Together the seven kings, with all their armies, surrounded the city of Benares.

King Brahmadatta assembled his ministers and advisers to make plans for defending the kingdom. They advised him not to surrender. "Your majesty, we must fight to protect our possessions and positions. But you should not risk your life by fighting the battle personally. Instead, send out the champion of all knights to represent you on the battlefield. If he fails, only then should you go."

The king summoned the champion. "Can you defeat the seven kings?" he asked. "If you allow me to ride on the great horse 'Knowing-one' when fighting the battle, I will be able to win," replied the knight. The king agreed and said: "My champion, it is now up to you and 'Knowing-one' to save our country. Take whatever you need with you."

The champion knight went to the royal stables and ordered that 'Knowing-one' be fed well and dressed in his protective armour, with all the finest trimmings. Then he bowed respectfully and climbed onto the beautiful saddle.

‘Knowing-one’ knew the situation. “These seven kings have come to attack my country and my king, who feeds and cares for me. I cannot let the seven kings with their large and powerful armies threaten my king and all in Benares. But I also cannot allow the champion knight to kill those kings, for I too would have a share in the unwholesome action of taking the lives of others, even if the battle was victorious. Instead, I will capture all seven kings without killing anyone. That would be a truly great victory!” he thought.

With that thought, ‘Knowing-one’ spoke to his rider: “Sir knight, let us win this battle in a new way, a way without destroying lives. Capture each king, one at a time, and remain firmly on my back. Let me find the true course through the many armies. Watch me as you ride, and I will show you the courage that goes beyond the old way, the killing way!”

As he spoke of “a new way”, and “the true course”, and “the courage that goes beyond”, it seemed the noble steed became larger than life. He reared up majestically on his powerful hind legs, and looked down on all the armies surrounding the city. The eyes of all were drawn to this magnificent one. The earth trembled as his front hooves returned to the ground and he charged into the midst of the four armies of the first king. He seemed to possess the speed of lightning, the might of a hundred elephants, and the glorious confidence of one from some other world.

The elephants had never seen a horse such as this, and so the elephant cavalry retreated in fear. The horses recognised that this great horse, one of their own kind, was the worthy master of them all, and so the horse cavalry and the chariot brigade stood still and bowed as the Bodhisattva galloped past. The ranks of foot-soldiers scattered like flies before a strong wind.

The first king hardly knew what had happened, before he was easily captured and brought back into the city of Benares. And so too with the second, third, fourth and fifth kings.

In the same way the sixth king was captured. But not before one of his loyal bodyguards leaped out from his hiding and thrust his sword deep into the side of the brave 'Knowing-one'. With blood streaming from his wound, 'Knowing-one' carried the champion knight and the captured sixth king back to the city.

When the knight saw the gushing wound, he was afraid to ride the injured 'Knowing-one' against the seventh king. So he got another war horse, one that was just as big as the brave 'Knowing-one', and dressed it in full battle armour.

"This champion knight lost his courage so quickly. He hasn't realised the true nature of my power - the knowledge that true peace is only won by peaceful means. He tries to defeat the seventh king and his armies in the usual way with an ordinary horse," thought 'Knowing-one' to himself when he saw what happened.

"Having taken the first step to prevent killing, I cannot stop now. If I do, all the effort I put in to prevent such killing would go down the drain!"

"Sir knight," said 'Knowing-one' to the knight "the seventh king and his armies are the mightiest of all. If you fight the battle with an ordinary war horse, even if you slaughter a thousand men and animals, you will still be defeated. Only I, 'Knowing-one' of the mighty Sindh horse tribe, can win the battle without harming any and bring back the seventh king alive!"

The champion knight regained his courage and mounted the great horse. Though in great pain from his deadly wound, the brave horse struggled to his feet, reared and charged through the four armies, and helped bring back the last of the seven kings. Again all those in his path were spared from harm. Seeing their seven kings in captivity, all armies dropped their weapons and surrendered.

Realising that 'Knowing-one' would not live through the night, King Brahmadatta went to see him one last time. He wept to see the great horse dying, for he had raised him since he was a colt and had come to love him.

"My lord, I have served you well. And I have gone beyond and shown a new way of achieving victory, one that does not require any bloodshed. Now, you must grant me my last wish. You must not kill these seven kings, even though they have done wrong to you. For a bloody victory sows the seeds of the next war. Forgive them for attacking you. Let them return to their kingdoms, and may you all live in peace from now on," said Knowing-one.

"Whatever reward you would give to me, give to the champion knight instead. Do only wholesome deeds, be generous, honour the Truth, and kill no living beings. Rule with justice and compassion."

Then he closed his eyes and breathed his last. The king sobbed uncontrollably, and all mourned the passing of the great horse. With the highest honours, they cremated the body of the Bodhisattva.

King Brahmadatta had the seven kings brought before him. They too honoured the great one, who had defeated their vast armies without spilling a single drop of blood, except his own. In his memory they made peace, and never again did these seven kings and Brahmadatta waged war on one other.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Hatred can never be ceased by hatred; hatred can only be ceased by love. For true peace is won only by peaceful means.

25
Dirty Bath Water
[Cleanliness]

Long, long ago, in a kingdom in India, some grooms were bringing a fine royal horse down to the river. The grooms always brought this horse, the finest of all royal horses, to the shallow pool at the river for its bath.

However, just before they arrived, a really filthy wild horse had just been washed at the same spot. Newly caught from the countryside, it had never taken a decent bath before.

When the fine royal horse was there, it sniffed the air. Right away, it could tell that some filthy wild horse had been washed there and had fouled the water. The royal horse was so disgusted that it refused to take its bath at that place.

The grooms tried their best to coax the horse into the water, but to no avail. They went to the king and complained that the fine well-trained royal stallion had suddenly turned stubborn and unmanageable.

In this story, the king had an intelligent minister who was well-known for his ability to understand animals. So he summoned him and said: “Please go and see what has happened to my finest horse. Find out why it refuses to be bathed. Is it because it is sick? Of all my horses, I thought this one was of such high calibre that it would never let itself sink into muckiness. Something must be wrong.”

The minister went down to the riverside immediately. He found that the stately horse was not sick, but in perfect health. He also noticed that it was deliberately breathing as little as possible. He sniffed the air and detected a slight foul odour. Upon further investigation, he found that the smell came from the dirty water in the bathing pool. He figured that another extremely grubby horse must had been washed there, and that the king’s horse was too fond of cleanliness to bathe in the dirty water.

“Did any other horse take a bath at this spot today?” asked the minister to the horse grooms. “There was one, sir” they replied, “before we arrived, a really dirty wild horse had just been washed here.” “My dear grooms, this is a fine royal horse that loves cleanliness. It does not wish to bathe in dirty water. Take him upstream, where the water is fresh and clean, and wash him there,” advised the minister.

They followed his instructions, and the royal horse was pleased to take a bath in the new place.

The minister returned to the king and told him what had happened. Then he said: "You were right, your majesty. This fine horse was indeed of such high calibre that he would not let himself sink into dirtiness!"

Astonished that his minister was able to understand what the horse wanted, the king rewarded him appropriately.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Even animals value hygiene.

26

Ladyface

[Association]

A long time ago, the King of Benares had a royal bull elephant. It was kind, patient and harmless. Along with its sweet disposition, it had a lovely gentle face. Hence it was affectionately known as 'Ladyface'.

One night, a gang of robbers gathered just outside the elephant shed. In the darkness, they schemed and discussed about their robbery plans. They used extremely crude and abusive language, and spoke violently of bashing and killing their victims.

Since the nights were quiet, Ladyface listened intently to all these terrible plans and violent talk. It listened carefully and, as elephants do, remembered it all. Having been brought up to obey and respect human beings, it thought these men were also to be obeyed and emulated like teachers.

After several nights of listening to the robbers' abusive words, Ladyface decided that to become rough and cruel must be the correct thing to do. This usually happened when one of a gentle nature associated with mean men of a cruel nature, and when one wished to please others and obtain their approval.

When Ladyface's mahout came, as usual, one morning to visit it, the elephant suddenly attacked him. Using its trunk, Ladyface suffocated him, and smashed him to the ground, killing him instantly. Then, it picked up two other attendants, one after another, and killed them just as ferociously.

Soon, news spread through the city that the once adorable Ladyface had suddenly gone mad and became a frightening man-killer. The people ran to the king for help.

It so happened that the king had an intelligent minister who was well-known for his ability to understand animals. The king summoned him and said: "Please go and determine what has happened to Ladyface. Find out why it has suddenly become so insanely violent. Is it because it is sick?"

Unbeknownst to the king, this minister was a Bodhisattva. Arriving at the elephant shed, he spoke gentle, soothing words to Ladyface, and calmed it down. He examined the elephant

and found it to be in perfect physical health. As he spoke kindly to Ladyface, he noticed that the elephant perked up its ears and paid very close attention. It was almost as if the poor animal was starved for the sound of gentle words. The clever minister figured out that the elephant must have heard abusive language or seen violent actions and was imitating those behaviours.

“Did anyone hang around this elephant shed, at night or any other time lately?” he asked the guards. “Yes, Sir,” they replied, “for the last couple of weeks a gang of robbers had been meeting here. We were afraid to do anything, since they were such mean thugs. Ladyface could hear their every word.”

The minister returned immediately to the king. “My lord, your favourite elephant, Ladyface, is in perfect physical health. However, I have discovered that it has learnt to be violent and cruel after hearing the foul and vicious speech of hoodlums for many nights. Unwholesome associations often lead to unwholesome thoughts and actions.”

“What do you propose, my minister?” asked the king. “Well my lord, we must now reverse the process. We must station wise men and monks who have a high noble nature for as many nights outside the elephant shed to discuss about the values of goodness and patience that will lead to compassion, loving-kindness and harmlessness,” answered the minister.

Immediately, this was carried out. For several nights, the kind wise ones spoke only of those wonderful qualities. They used gentle and refined words which were intended to bring only peacefulness and comfort to others.

Lo and behold, after hearing such pleasant conversations for several nights, Ladyface became even more gentle and sweet-natured than before!

Seeing this complete change, the minister reported it to the king. “My lord, Ladyface is

now even more harmless and sweet-natured than before. Now he is as gentle as a lamb!"

"It is amazing and wonderful indeed that such a madly violent elephant can be transformed by associating with wise men and monks," said the king. Astonished that his minister was able to read the mind of the bull elephant, the king rewarded him appropriately.

THE MORAL IS ✏ "Associate not with evil friends, associate not with mean men; associate with good friends, associate with noble men."

– Dhammapada

27

Best Friends

[The Power of Friendship]

Once upon a time, there was a royal bull elephant that was very well-taken care of. In the same neighbourhood of this elephant lived a scrawny, poorly-fed stray dog. Hungry and attracted by the smell of the rich sweet rice fed to the royal elephant, it would sneak into its shed and eat the delicious rice that fell from the elephant's mouth. It liked the sweet

rice so much that soon the dog would not eat anywhere else. The big mighty elephant did not notice the tiny shy stray dog.

Gradually, the scraggy dog grew bigger and stronger from eating the sweet rice, and became very good-looking. The good-natured elephant started to notice it. Since the dog had became familiar with the elephant, it was not afraid and so did not bark at it. Because the dog was friendly and not annoying, the elephant gradually got accustomed to the dog.

They became friends, and before long, neither would eat without the other. They enjoyed spending their time together. When they played, the dog would grab the elephant's heavy trunk, and the elephant would swing him forward and backward, from side to side, up and down, and even in circles! Soon, they became the best of friends, and neither wanted ever to be separated.

One day, a man from a remote village who was visiting the city passed by the elephant shed. He saw the frisky dog that had grown really striking and beautiful. He bought him from the mahout, even though he didn't really own it, and took it back to his home village. Nobody knows where that was.

The royal bull elephant was heartbroken. It missed its best friend. It was so depressed that it didn't want to do anything, not even eat, drink or bathe. Left with no choice, the mahout had to report this to the king. But he said nothing about selling the friendly dog.

In this story, the king had an intelligent minister. He was renowned for his ability to understand animals. So the king instructed him to investigate the reason for the elephant's melancholy.

The wise minister went to the elephant shed. He could tell at once that the royal bull elephant was in despair . He thought: "This formerly cheerful elephant does not appear to be physically sick. But I have seen this condition before, in men and animals alike. It is

grief-stricken, probably due to the loss of a very dear friend."

Then he asked the guards and attendants: "Do you know if this elephant has a very close friendship with anyone?" They told him about the stray dog and how they became best friends. "Where is the dog now?" asked the minister. "He was taken by an unknown man," they replied, "and we do not know where he is now."

The minister returned to the king and said: "Your majesty, I am glad to tell you that your elephant is not sick. As strange as it may sound, he became best of friends with a stray dog! Since the dog has been taken away, the elephant is grief-stricken and does not feel like eating, drinking or bathing."

"Friendship is one of life's most wonderful things," said the king. "My minister, how can we find the dog and make the elephant happy again?"

"My lord," replied the minister, "I suggest you make an official announcement that whoever has in his possession the dog which used to live at the royal elephant shed will be fined."

This was carried out, and when the villager heard of this announcement, he released the dog from his house immediately. Filled with great happiness, the dog ran as fast as it could, straight back to its best friend, the royal bull elephant.

The elephant was so overjoyed, that it picked up the dog with its trunk and sat it on top of its head. The happy dog wagged its tail, while the elephant's eyes sparkled with delight. They both lived happily ever after.

Meanwhile, the king, amazed by his minister's ability and pleased with his elephant's quick recovery, rewarded him appropriately.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Even different kind of beings from different species can become best friends, for friendship transcends language and appearance.

28

The Bull Called Delightful

[All Deserve Respect]

Long, long ago, the Bodhisattva was born as a calf in a city called Takkasila, in the country of Gandhara. Seeing he was well-bred for strength, a rich man bought the calf and soon became very fond of the gentle animal. He took good care of the calf, he named 'Delightful', and fed him only the best food.

In time, Delightful grew up into a big, fine strong bull. “My master brought me up, and generously gave me good food and constant care, even when there were difficulties. Now that I am a fully grown bull and there are none that can pull as heavy a load as I can, I should put my strength to good use and give something in return to my master,” he thought.

So he said to his master: “Sir, please challenge a wealthy merchant who is proud of having many strong bulls by saying that yours can pull 100 heavily loaded bullock carts.”

Following Delightful’s advice, the rich man went up to one such merchant and struck up a conversation with him. After a while, he brought up the topic of who had the strongest bull in the city.

“Many have bulls, but no one has any as strong as mine,” boasted the merchant. “Sir, I have a bull that can pull 100 heavily loaded bullock carts,” contested the rich man. “No, friend, That can’t be. How can such a bull exist? This is too incredible!” exclaimed the merchant. “I do have such a bull, and I am willing to make a bet,” replied the rich man.

“In that case, I will bet 1,000 gold coins that your bull cannot pull 100 loaded bullock carts.” The bet was made and a date and time were fixed for the challenge.

On that day, the merchant linked 100 big bullock carts together. He filled them with sand and gravel to make them really heavy. The rich man, on the other hand, fed the finest rice to his bull. He bathed Delightful and placed a beautiful, fresh garland of flowers around his neck.

Then he harnessed the first cart to the bull and climbed up onto it. Wanting to make himself seemed very important, he cracked a whip in the air and yelled at the faithful bull: “Pull, you dumb animal! I command you to pull, you big dummy!”

"I have never done anything bad to my master, and yet he insults me with such hard harsh words! Besides, this challenge was my idea," thought Delighful with indignation. So he remained in his place and refused to pull the carts.

The merchant laughed and demanded his winnings from the bet. The rich man had no choice but to pay him 1,000 gold coins. Saddened by his financial loss, he returned home and sat down, embarrassed by the blow to his pride.

Delightful grazed peacefully and when he reached home, he saw his master lying miserably on his side. "Sir, why are you lying there like that?" he asked. "Are you sleeping? You look sad." "I lost 1,000 gold coins because of you. With such a loss, how can I sleep?" answered the man.

"Sir, you called me a dummy. You even cracked a whip in the air above my head. In all my life, did I ever break or step on anything? Have I ever made a mess in the wrong place, or behaved like a dummy in any way?" "No, my pet," answered the rich man.

"Then sir, why did you call me a dumb animal and insult me in the presence of others?" asked the bull. "It is your fault. I have done nothing wrong. But since I feel sorry for you, go again to the merchant and make the same bet for 2,000 gold coins. And remember to use only respectful words that I deserve so truly."

The rich man went back to the merchant. This time he made a bet for 2,000 gold coins. The merchant agreed as he thought it was easy money to earn. Like the first time, he set up 100 heavily loaded bullock carts, while the rich man fed, bathed and decorated the bull with a garland of flowers around his neck.

When all was ready, instead of brandishing a whip, the rich man touched Delightful's forehead with a lotus blossom. Then speaking as if he were his own child, he said gently: "My son, please do me the honour of pulling these 100 bullock carts."

Lo and behold, the wonderful bull pulled with all his might and dragged the heavy carts, until the last one stood in the place of the first.

The merchant dropped his jaws wide open in disbelief. He had no choice but to pay 2,000 gold coins to the rich man. The onlookers were so impressed that they honoured Delightful with gifts. But even more important for the rich man than his winnings was the valuable lesson he had learnt in humility and respect.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Harsh words cause unhappiness. Respectful words bring happiness to all.

29

Grandma's Blackie

[Loving-kindness]

Once upon a time, when King Brahmadatta was the ruler in Benares, there was an old woman who had an ebony-coloured calf. Unknown to the woman, the calf was actually the Bodhisattva.

The old woman raised the little calf just like she would her own child. She gave him only the very best rice and porridge. She would often pet his head and neck, and the calf would respond by licking her hand. Since they were so friendly, the people began to call the calf, 'Grandma's Blackie'.

Even when he grew up into a big strong bull, Grandma's Blackie remained very tame and gentle. The village children often played with the bull, holding onto his neck, ears and horns. Sometimes, they would even grab the bull's tail and swing up onto his back for a ride. However, as Grandma's Blackie liked children, he never complained.

"The loving old woman, who brought me up, is like a kind mother to me. She raised me like her own child feeding me with only the best," thought the friendly bull. "She is poor and in need, but too humble to ask for my help, and too gentle to force me to work. Since I love her too, I want her to be well and wish to release her from the suffering of poverty." So he started looking for work.

One day, a caravan of 500 carts passed by the village. It had to stop when the caravan came to a nearby river. Even though the caravan leader had hooked up all 500 bullocks to the first cart, the bullocks still could not pull even one cart cross the raging river.

Left without a choice, the leader began to search for more bulls. An expert in assessing the calibre of bulls, he noticed Grandma's Blackie when he examined the wandering village herd. "This noble bullock looks like he has the strength and the will to pull my carts across the river," he thought at once.

He said to the villagers standing nearby, "To whom does this big black bull belong? I would like to use him to pull my caravan across the river, and I am willing to pay his owner for his services." "By all means, take him. His master is not here," answered the villagers.

So he put a noose through the bull's nose. But when he pulled, the bull would not budge! "Until this man says that he will pay for my work, I will not move," thought the bull.

The caravan leader understood what the bull wants. He said: "My dear bull, I will pay you two gold coins, not just one, but two, for each of the 500 carts you pulled across the river!" Hearing this, Grandma's Blackie went with him at once.

The man harnessed the strong black bull to the first cart, and Grandma's Blackie proceeded to pull it across the river. Without slowing down a bit, he pulled until all 500 carts were across the river!

When all was done, the caravan leader hung a package containing 500 coins around the mighty bullock's neck. "This man promised two gold coins per cart, but that is not what he has hung around my neck. I will not let him leave!" Thinking so, he went to the front of the caravan and blocked its path.

The leader tried to push him out of the way, but he would not move. He tried to drive the carts around him. But all the other bulls had seen how strong Grandma's Blackie was, and so they would not move either!

"There is no doubt that this is a very intelligent bull, and he knows I have paid him less than I have promised," thought the man. This time round, he hung another package, one which contained 1,000 gold coins, around the bull's neck.

With that, Grandma's Blackie re-crossed the river and walked directly towards the old woman, his 'mother'. Along the way, the children tried to grab the money package, thinking it was a game. But he escaped them.

When the woman saw the heavy package, she was surprised. The children told her what had happened down at the river. She opened the package and discovered the money.

Seeing how tired her ‘child’ looked, she said: “Oh my son, why do you work so hard and suffer? Do you think I wish to depend on you? No matter how difficult things may be, I will always take care of you.”

Then the kind old woman washed the lovely bull and massaged his tired muscles with oil. She fed him good food and cared for him, until the end of their happy lives together.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Loving-kindness makes the poorest house into the richest home.

30, 286
Big Red, Little Red and No-squeal
[Envy]

Long ago, in a rural household, there lived a girl and a piglet. Since the pig hardly made any noise, it was called 'No-squeal'. Besides the piglet, two calves - 'Big Red' and 'Little Red' also lived with that family.

The owners treated No-squeal very well. They gave it large amounts of the very best rice, and even fed it rice porridge with rich brown sugar. The two calves noticed this. They worked hard pulling ploughs in the fields and bullock carts on the roads. One day, Little Red said to Big Red: "My big brother, you and I do all the hard work in this household. We bring prosperity to the family. But they gave us only grass and hay. Whereas No-squeal which did nothing to support the family was fed the finest and fanciest food. Why should it get such special treatment?"

The wise elder brother replied: "Oh, young one, it is dangerous to be envious of another. Do not envy the baby pig for being fed such rich food. What it is eating is really the food of death! A marriage ceremony is going to be conducted soon for the daughter of this house, and little No-squeal will be the wedding feast! That's why it is being pampered and fed in such a rich manner."

"In a few days, the guests will arrive. And little No-squeal will be dragged by its legs to be killed and cooked into curry for the feast," carried on Big Red.

Sure enough, the wedding guests arrived a few days later. No-squeal was dragged away and slaughtered. And just as Big Red had said, the piglet was cooked into various types of curries and devoured by the guests.

Then Big Red said: "My dear younger brother, did you see what happened to baby No-squeal?" "Yes, brother," replied Little Red, "now I understand."

Big Red continued: "This is the result of being fed such rich food. Our humble grass and hay are a hundred times better than his cloying porridge and sweet brown sugar. For our food brings no harm to us, but instead promises long life!"

THE MORAL IS ✏ Don't envy those who seem well-off, until you know the price they pay.

31

The Heaven of 33

[Chapter 1. Co-operation]

Once upon a time, there was a young noble called 'Magha the Good' who lived in a remote village of 30 families. When he was young, his parents married him to a girl who was similar to him in character. They were very happy together, and she gave birth to several children.

The villagers respected Magha the Good because he was always trying to help improve the village, for the good of all. And because they respected him, he was able to teach them the Five Precepts, to purify their thoughts, words and deeds.

Magha taught by setting an example himself. For instance, once, when the villagers gathered to do handicraft work, Magha the Good had cleaned a place for himself to sit. But before he could sit down, someone else sat there. So he patiently cleaned another spot. Again, a neighbour sat in that position. This happened over and over again, until he had patiently cleaned sitting places for all those present. Only then could he himself sit in the last place.

Through such examples of demonstrating patience, Magha the Good taught his fellow villagers how to co-operate with one other, without quarrelling. Working together in this way, they constructed several buildings and made other improvements that benefited the whole village.

Seeing the worthwhile results of patience and co-operation, based on following the gentle ways of the Five Precepts, all in the village became calmer and more peaceful. And because the villagers observed the Five Precepts, eventually, all criminal activities and wrong-doings ceased to exist!

You would think this would make everybody happy. But, there was one man who did not like the new situation at all. He was the head of the village and a politician who cared only about his own interest.

When there were murders and thefts, he meted out punishments. When spouses were adulterous, reputations were damaged by lies, or contracts not fulfilled, he collected fines. The authority and power he had caused the villagers to fear him. And as he received tax money from the profits of selling strong liquor, he did not mind that many of the crimes were committed when the people were in a drunken state.

It was easy to see why the headman was upset. With the villagers living peacefully together, he had lost much of his authority, power and money. One day, he went to the king and lied: "My lord, some of the remote villages are being robbed and looted by bandits. We need your help." "Bring the criminals to me," replied the king.

The dishonest headman rounded up all the members of the 30 families and brought them as prisoners to the king. Without investigating, the king ordered all to be trampled to death by elephants. When they were ordered to lie down in the palace courtyard and the elephants were brought in, they realised what was happening. "Remember and concentrate on the peacefulness and purity that come from following the Five Precepts. Feel loving-kindness towards all. Do not get angry at the unjust king, the lying headman, or the unfortunate elephants," said Magha the Good to the villagers.

The first elephant was brought in by its mahout. But when he tried to force it to trample the innocent villagers, the elephant refused. It trumpeted and went away. Amazingly, this happened with each of the king's elephants. None would step on them.

The mahouts complained to the king that this was not their fault. "It must be," they said, "these men possess some drug which confuses the elephants."

The king had the villagers searched, but they found nothing. Then his advisers suggested: "These men must be magicians who have cast an evil spell on your mighty elephants!"

"Do you have such a spell?" asked the king's guards to the villagers. "Yes we do," replied Magha. This made the king very curious. "What is this spell and how does it work?" asked the king.

Magha the Good replied: "My king, we do not cast the same kind of spells that others cast. We cast the spell of loving-kindness with our minds purified by following the Five Precepts."

“What are the Five Precepts?” asked the king. “They are no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying and no taking of intoxications,” replied Magha the Good.

“As we have given up the unwholesome actions of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking of alcohol, we have become pure and harmless, and are able to radiate loving-kindness to all. Therefore, the elephants lost their fear of the mahouts, and did not wish to harm us. They departed, trumpeting triumphantly. This is our protection, which you have called a ‘spell’.”

Seeing that these were wholesome and wise people, the king questioned them and learned the truth. He decided to confiscate all the wealth of the dishonest headman and divide it among the villagers.

After the villagers were freed, they undertook even more projects that would benefit the whole village. They soon started building a huge roadside inn, right next to the highway crossroads.

By far the biggest project they had undertaken, the men were confident as they had learned well how to co-operate with one other for a common goal. But they had yet to learn how to co-operate with the women of the village.

At that time, Magha the Good had four wives named Good-doer, Beauty, Happy and Well-born. Of these, the first wife, Good-doer, was the wisest. She wanted to pave the way for the women to benefit from co-operating in doing community and charitable work. So she gradually became friendly with the person-in-charge of the roadside inn project.

Because she wanted to help and contribute in a big way, she gave a present to the foreman. “Can you think of a way so that I may become the most important contributor to this good work you are doing here?” she asked him.

"I know just the way!" he said. He secretly constructed the most important part of the building, the roof beam which would hold the roof together, wrapped it up and passed it to Good-doer. She was to hide it and allow it to dry so that in time the beam would become rigid and strong.

Meanwhile, the men of the village continued happily working on the building project. At last they got to the point of installing the roof beam. They began to make one, but the foreman interrupted them. He said: "My friends, we cannot use fresh green wood to make the roof beam. It will bend and sag. We must have an aged dry roof beam. Go find one!"

When they searched the village, they found that Good-doer just happened to have the perfect roof beam. It was even the right size! When they asked if they could buy it from her, she said: "This beam is not for sale at any price. I wish to contribute the roof beam for free, but only if you let me participate in building the inn."

Afraid and resistant to change, they replied: "Women have never been part of such project. This is impossible."

Then they returned to the construction site and told the foreman what had happened. After listening, he answered: "Why do you keep the women away? Women are part of everything in this world. Let us be generous and share the harmony and wholesomeness of this work with the women. Then the project and our village will be even more successful."

So they accepted the roof beam from Good-doer, and she helped to finish the building of the inn. Then Beauty had a wonderful garden built next to the inn, which she donated. It had flowers and fruit trees of all types and colours. Happy, too, contributed by having a lovely pond dug, and grew beautiful lotuses in it. But Well-born, being the youngest and a little pampered, did nothing for the inn.

In the evenings, Magha the Good held meetings in the roadside inn. He taught the people to assist their parents and elders, and to refrain from using harsh words, accusing others behind their backs, and being stingy.

It was said that the gods of the four directions, North, East, South and West, lived in the lowest heavenly world. Because he did what he preached, Magha the Good died with happiness in his heart. He was reborn as Sakka, king of the second lowest heaven.

In time, the heads of all other families of the village, as well as Good-doer, Beauty and Happy, also passed away. They were reborn as gods under King Sakka, and this heavenly world was known as the “Heaven of 33”.

[Chapter 2. Compassion]

Some unfortunate, ugly-looking demi-gods also lived in that heaven. They were known as 'Asuras'. Magha the Good, now Sakka, King of the Heaven of 33 thought: "Why should we share our heaven with these ugly-looking Asuras? Since this is our world, let us live happily by ourselves."

With such a thought, he invited the Asuras to a party, gave them strong liquor and got them drunk. It seemed King Sakka had forgotten some of his own teachings when he was Magha the Good. After getting the Asuras drunk, he sent them to a lower world, one that was just as big as the Heaven of 33.

When the Asuras were sober, they realised they had been tricked. Fuming mad, they rose up and waged war against King Sakka. They won the war, and King Sakka was forced to beat a hasty retreat.

While fleeing in his mighty war chariot, he came to the vast forest of the Garudas. Garudas were gods who, unfortunately, had no super powers. Instead, they were forced to get around by flapping their huge heavy wings.

When King Sakka's chariot drove through their forest, it upset the nests of the Garudas and made their babies fall. They cried in fear and agony. Hearing this, Sakka asked his charioteer where these sad cries were coming from. "These shrieks of terror are coming from the baby Garudas, whose nests and trees are being destroyed by your powerful war chariot," he answered.

At this moment, King Sakka realised that all lives, including his own, are only temporary. Hearing the suffering of the baby Garudas, compassion arose within this Bodhisattva and so he said: “Let the little ones have no more fear. The first precept must not be broken. There can be no exception. I will not destroy even one life for the sake of a heavenly kingdom that must some day end. Instead I will offer my life to the victorious Asuras. Turn back the chariot!”

When the Asuras saw King Sakka return, they thought he must have brought reinforcements from other worlds. So they ran, without looking back, and returned to their lower heavenly world.

[Chapter 3. Merits]

Victorious, King Sakka returned to his palace in the Heaven of 33. Next to his palace stood the mansion of his first wife, the reborn Good-doer. Outside the mansion was the garden of his second wife, the reborn Beauty. And there was the heavenly pond of his third wife, the reborn Happy.

However, Well-born had been reborn as a slender crane in the forest. Since he missed her, Sakka found her and brought her up to the Heaven of 33 for a visit. He showed her the mansion, the garden and the pond of his three wives. He told her that, by doing charitable work, the other three had gained merits. These merits had brought them happiness, both in their previous lives and in their rebirths.

"You, my dear crane, in your previous life as Well-born, did no such good work. So you gain neither merit nor happiness, and were reborn as a forest crane. I advise you to embark on the path of purity by following the Five Precepts," added King Sakka. After learning the Five Precepts, the lovely crane decided to follow them, and returned to the forest.

Shortly after, King Sakka wondered how the crane was doing. He transformed himself into a fish and lay down in front of her to test her. The crane picked him up by the head. She was about to swallow the fish when he wiggled his tail.

"This fish is alive!" thought the crane immediately. Bearing in mind the first precept, she released the fish back into the stream. King Sakka returned to his godly form and rose from the water. "It is very good, my dear crane, that you are abiding by the Five Precepts." Then he returned to his heavenly abode.

In time, the crane passed away. As she had followed the Five Precepts, it brought her both merits and a peaceful mind. So she was reborn as a human.

Interested in knowing where the crane had been reborn, King Sakka found her in a potter's family in Benares, in northern India. As he wanted to help her gain merits and happiness, he disguised himself as an old man and created a cart full of golden cucumbers. He went into Benares and shouted: "Cucumbers! Cucumbers! I have cucumbers!"

When people came to buy these amazing cucumbers, he said: "These golden cucumbers are not for sale. I will give them away, but only to one who is wholesome, and practises the Five Precepts."

"We have never heard of the Five Precepts. But we will buy your golden cucumbers. Name your price!" answered the people. "My cucumbers are not for sale. I have brought them as gifts for the person who practises the Five Precepts," he repeated. "This man has come here only to play tricks on us," said the people, and so they left him alone.

Soon, Well-born heard about this unusual man. Even though she had been reborn, she still had the habit of following the Five Precepts. "This man must be here for me," she thought.

She went to him and asked for the golden cucumbers. "Do you follow the Five Precepts? Have you given up destroying life, taking what is not given, doing wrong in sexual ways, speaking falsely, and losing your mind from alcohol?" "Yes sir, I do follow them, and I am peaceful and happy," she answered.

"I brought these cucumbers especially for you, to encourage you to gain more merits and future happiness," continued the old man. With that, he left the cart of golden cucumbers with her, and returned to the Heaven of 33.

Throughout the rest of her life, the woman was very generous with all this gold. Spreading her happiness to others, she gained merits. After she died, she was reborn as the daughter of the King of Asuras. She grew up to be a goddess of great beauty. To the Asuras this seemed like a miracle, since the rest of them were the ugliest of all the gods.

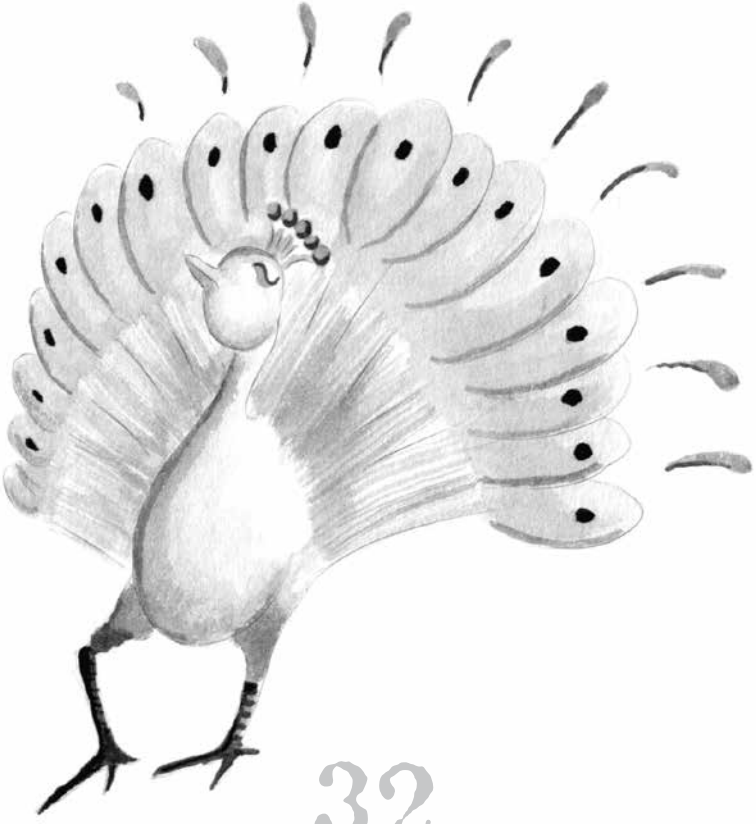
The Asura king was pleased with his daughter's goodness, as well as her famous beauty. He gathered all the Asuras together and gave her the freedom to choose a husband.

Sakka, King of the Heaven of 33, knew of his previous wife's latest rebirth. He came to the lower heaven world and took the shape of an ordinary ugly Asura. "If Well-born chooses a husband whose inner qualities of wholesomeness are the same as hers, we will be reunited at last!" he thought.

Because of her past associations with Magha the Good and King Sakka, even though he was now disguised as an ordinary Asura, the beautiful princess was still drawn to him, and chose him from among all the Asuras.

King Sakka took her to the Heaven of 33, made her his fourth wife, and they lived happily ever after.

THE MORAL IS ✏ The Five Precepts creates wholesomeness. Wholesomeness is the foundation of peace and happiness.



32
The Dancing Peacock
[Pride and Modesty]

Once upon a time, when the lion was appointed king of all four-footed animals, a giant fish ruled the oceans, and the golden swan was king of the birds. King Golden Swan had a

lovely golden daughter. When she was still young, he promised her that she could pick her own husband when she was old enough.

Time passed. One day, King Golden Swan called all the birds living in the vast Himalayan Mountains of central Asia to a gathering. The purpose was to find a worthy husband for his golden daughter. Birds from afar, even those from as far as Tibet flocked to the meeting. Geese, swans, eagles, sparrows, humming birds, cuckoos, owls and many other kinds of birds attended the assembly.

The gathering was held on a high rock slab, in the beautiful green land of Nepal. King Golden Swan told his pretty daughter to select anyone she liked.

She peered over the many birds. Her eyes were attracted by a shining emerald-green long-necked peacock, with gorgeous flowing tail feathers. "Father, this bird, the peacock, will be my husband," she said.

Hearing that he was the lucky one, all the other birds crowded around the peacock to congratulate him. They said: "Even among so many beautiful birds, the golden swan princess has chosen you. We congratulate you on your good fortune."

The peacock became so puffed up with pride, that he began to show off his colourful feathers in a fantastic strutting dance. He fanned out his spectacular tail feathers and danced in a circle to show off his beautiful tail. Conceited of his beauty, he forgot all modesty, and displayed his most private parts for all to see!

The other birds, especially the young ones, giggled. But King Golden Swan was not amused. He was embarrassed to see his daughter's choice behaving in such a stuck-up and arrogant manner. "This peacock has no sense of shame and modesty. Nor does he have the sense of

embarrassment to prevent indecent behaviour. Why should my daughter be disgraced by such a mindless mate?"

Standing in the midst of the great congregation of birds, the king said: "Sir peacock, your voice is sweet, your feathers are beautiful, your neck shines like an emerald, and your tail is like a splendid fan. But you have danced here like one who has no sense of shame or modesty. I will not permit my innocent daughter to marry such an ignorant fool!"

With that, King Golden Swan married his golden daughter to a royal nephew. Having lost a beautiful wife, the silly strutting peacock flew away.

THE MORAL IS ✏ If you let pride and arrogance go to your head, you'll end up acting like a fool.

33
The Quail King and the Hunter
[Unity]

Long, long ago, there was a Quail King that reigned over a flock of a thousand quails. During that time, there also lived a very clever quail hunter who knew how to make a quail call. As

his call sounded just like a real quail crying for help, it never failed to attract other quails. The hunter would then capture them with a net, stuffed them into baskets, and sold them for a living.

The Quail King was highly respected by all for he always put the safety of his flock first. One day, while on the lookout for danger, he came across the hunter and saw what he did. “This quail hunter has a good plan for destroying our relatives. I must think of a better one to save us,” he thought.

Then he called for a meeting with his whole nation of a thousand quails. He also invited other quails to attend this assembly. “Greetings, my fellow quails. We are presently facing a great crisis. Many of our relatives are being trapped and sold by a clever hunter where they are then being killed and eaten. I have thought up a plan to save us all. When the hunter covers us with his net, every single one of us must raise our necks all at the same time and fly away together with the net and drop it on a thorn bush. That will keep him busy, and we will be able to escape.” All agreed to follow this smart strategy.

The next day, as usual, the hunter lured the quails with his quail call. But when he threw his net over them, they all raised up their necks at once, flew away with the net, and dropped it on a thorn bush. He could catch no quails at all! In addition, it took him the rest of the day to loosen his net from the thorns - so he had no time to try again!

The next day, the same thing happened yet again, and he spent a second day unhooking his net from sharp thorns. He arrived home only to be greeted by acerbic remarks from his wife. “You used to bring home quails to eat, and money from selling quails. Now you return home empty-handed. What do you do all day? You must have another wife somewhere, who is feasting on quail meat at this very moment!” she complained.

“Don’t think like this, my darling. These days the quails have become very unified. They act as one, and raise up their necks all at the same time and carry my net to a thorn bush. But

thanks to you, my one and only wife, I know just what to do! Just as you have argued with me, one day they too will argue, as relatives usually do. While they are occupied in conflict and bickering, I will trap them and bring them back to you. Then, you will be pleased with me again. Until then, I must be patient," replied the hunter.

The hunter put up with his wife's complaints for several more days before one morning, when lured by the quail call, one quail accidentally stepped on the head of another. The quail that was stepped on immediately got angry and squawked at her. She removed her foot from his head and apologised: "Please don't be angry with me. Please excuse my mistake." But he would not listen. Soon both of them were squawking and squawking, and the conflict got even worse!

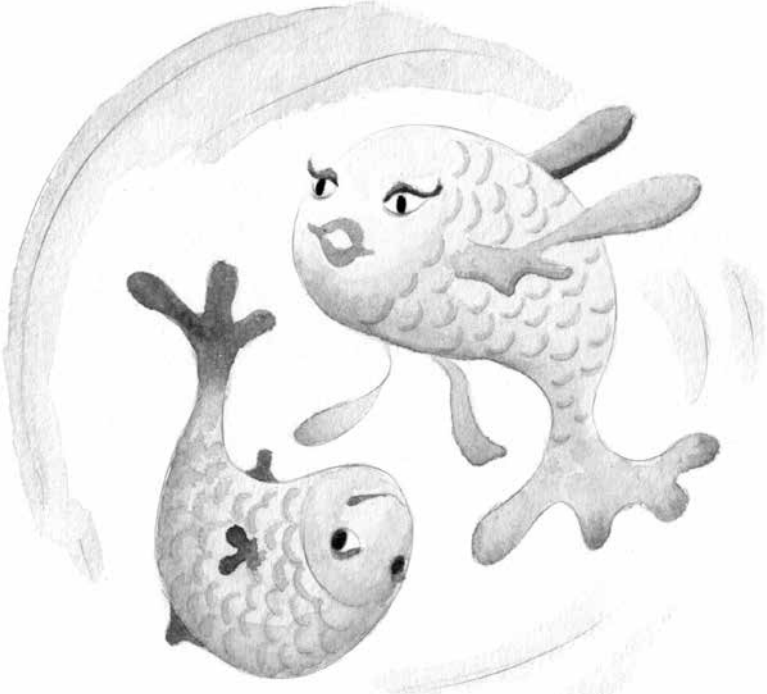
Hearing that the bickering was getting louder, Quail King said, "There is no advantage in conflict. Continuing it will lead to danger!" But they just wouldn't listen.

"I'm afraid this silly conflict will keep them from co-operating to raise the net," thought the Quail King. So he commanded that all should escape. His own flock flew away at once.

And it was just in time too! For suddenly, the quail hunter threw his net over the remaining quails. "I won't hold the net for you," screeched the two squabbling quails to each other. Hearing this, some of the other quails got emotional and squawked: "Why should I hold the net for anyone else?"

The conflict spread like wildfire. The hunter grabbed all the quails, stuffed them into his baskets, and took them home to his wife. Of course, she was overjoyed. And they invited all their friends over for a big quail feast.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Conflict and quarrel bring benefits to no one. Unity and harmony result in safety, peace and happiness.



34

The Fortunate Fish

[Desire]

A long time ago, King Brahmadatta had a very wise adviser who could understand the speech of animals. He understood what they said, and he could speak to them in their languages.

One day, the adviser was wandering along the riverbank with his followers when they chanced upon some fishermen who had cast a huge net into the river. While gazing into the water, they noticed a large handsome fish that was following his pretty wife.

Her shining scales reflected the morning sunlight in all the colours of the rainbow. Her feather-like fins fluttered like the delicate wings of a fairy, as she glided through the water. It was clear that her husband was so spellbound by the way she looked and the way she moved, that he was not paying attention to anything else!

As they came near the net, the female fish caught the scent, saw it and alertly avoided it at the very last moment. But her husband was so blinded by his desire for her, that he could not swerved fast enough to avoid it. Instead, he swam right into the net and was trapped!

The fishermen pulled in their net and threw the big fish onto the shore. They built a fire, and planned to barbecue him.

Lying on the ground, the fish was flopping around and groaning in agony. Since the wise adviser could understand what the fish was saying, he translated it for the others. "This poor fish is madly repeating:

"My wife! My wife! I must be with my wife!
I care for her much more than for my own life!"

"My wife! My wife! I must be with my wife!
I care for her much more than for my own life!"

The adviser thought: "This fish has truly gone crazy. He has landed himself in this terrible state because he allows himself to be a slave to his own craving and desire. It is clear that he has learnt nothing from the results of his actions. If he dies in such an agony caused by

strong desire and attachment in his mind, he will surely continue to suffer by being reborn in some hell world. Therefore, I must save him!"

This kind man went over to the fishermen and said: "Oh my friends, loyal subjects of our king, you have never given me and my followers a fish for our curry. Won't you give us one today?"

They replied: "Oh royal minister, please accept from us any fish you wish!" "This big one on the riverbank looks delicious," said the adviser. "Please take him, sir," they said.

Then he sat down on the bank. He took the fish, who was still groaning, into his hands. He spoke to him in a language only fishes could understand: "You foolish fish! If I didn't see you today, you would have gotten yourself killed. Your strong desire is leading you to further suffering. From now on, do not let yourself be trapped by your own desires!"

Realising how fortunate he was to have found such a friend, the fish thanked him for his wise advice. The minister released the lucky fish back into the river, and went on his way.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Fools are trapped by their own desires.

35

The Baby Quail That Could Not Fly Away

[The Power of Truth, Wholesomeness and Compassion]

Long, long ago, the Bodhisattva was born as a tiny quail. As he was still a baby, his parents worked hard to bring food to the nest, and feed him from their beaks.

Every year, forest fires would rage in that part of the world. It happened that a fire soon started in this story. All the birds flew away at the first sign of smoke. But the baby quail's parents stayed with him even as the fire spread. However, in order to save their own lives, they too, had to fly away when the fire got too close to their nest.

All trees, big and small, were burning and crackling loudly. The little one saw that everything was being destroyed by the fire that raged uncontrollably. He could do nothing to save himself. At that moment, he was overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness.

Then it occurred to him that his parents loved him very much. "They built a nest for me lovingly, and then unselfishly fed me. When the fire spread, they remained with me until the very last moment. All the other birds that could, had flown away a long time ago.

"So great was the loving-kindness of my parents, that they stayed and risked their lives, but still they were unable to save me. Since they could not carry me, they were helplessly forced to fly away alone. I thank them from the bottom of my heart, no matter where they are, for loving me so. I hope they will be safe, well and happy.

"Now I am all alone. There is no one I can go to for help. I have wings, but I cannot fly away. I have feet, but I cannot run away. But I can still think. I can use my mind - a mind that remains pure. The only beings I have known in my short life are my parents, and my mind is filled with loving-kindness towards them. As I have not done anything unwholesome to anyone, I'm filled with purity and the innocent truthfulness of a newborn."

Suddenly, an amazing miracle took place. The purity and innocent truthfulness grew and grew until it became larger than the little baby bird. The knowledge of truth spread beyond that one lifetime, and all of a sudden, the baby quail knew many of his previous births. In a previous birth, he knew a Buddha, a fully enlightened knower of Truth - one who had the power of Truth, the purity of wholesomeness, and the purpose of compassion.

"May this very young innocent truthfulness be united with that ancient purity of wholesomeness and the power of Truth. May all birds and other beings, who are still trapped by the fire, be saved. And may this spot be safe from fire for a million years!" thought the tiny baby quail compassionately.

And so it was.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Truth, wholesomeness and compassion can save the world.

36

Wise Birds and Foolish Birds

[Good Advice]

Once upon a time, there was a giant tree in the forest. Many, many birds lived in this tree. And the wisest of them was their leader.

One day, the leader saw two branches rubbing against each other. Then he noticed a tiny wisp of smoke rising from the rubbing branches. “There is no doubt a fire is going to start. One that may burn down the whole forest,” he thought.

The wise old leader called for a meeting with all the birds living in the great tree. "My dear friends," he said. "The tree we are living in is beginning to produce a fire. This fire may destroy the whole forest. Therefore it is dangerous to stay here. We must leave this forest at once!"

The wise birds agreed to follow his advice. They flew away to another forest in a different land. But the foolhardy ones said: "That old leader panics so easily. He imagines crocodiles in a drop of water! Why should we leave our comfortable homes that have always been safe? Let the timid ones go. We will be brave and place trust in our trees!"

Lo and behold, in a little while, the wise leader's warning came true. The rubbing branches made sparks that fell onto some dried leaves under the tree. Those sparks became flames and soon a forest fire raged madly. The giant tree caught fire too. The foolish birds that stayed behind were blinded and choked by the smoke. Not able to escape, many were trapped and burned to death.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Those who ignore the advice of the wise, do so at their own risk.

37

The Birth of a Banyan Tree

[Respect for Elders]

Once upon a time, there was a huge banyan tree in the forest beneath the mighty Himalayas. Living near this banyan tree were three very good friends - a quail, a monkey and an elephant. All of them were pretty smart.

Occasionally, the three friends would squabble. When a dispute occurred, all of their opinions were treated equally. None was considered more valuable regardless of the experience they had.

Every time they had a disagreement, it took them a long time to reach a solution. They realised it would save time and benefit their friendship more if they could do something to shorten their disagreements. They decided it would be most beneficial if they could consider the most valuable opinion first. If they could agree on that, they wouldn't have to waste time and effort, or hurt their friendship, by arguing about the other two.

They all unanimously agreed that the one with the most experience would give the most valuable opinion. Only if his opinion were clearly wrong, would they need to consider the rest. In this way, they could live more harmoniously together if they accord higher respect to the oldest among them.

Unfortunately, they had no idea who was the oldest. As this story took place at a time before old age was respected, they did not remember their birthdays or their ages.

Then one day, when they were relaxing in the shade of the big banyan tree, the quail and the monkey asked the elephant: "What was the earliest memory you have about the size of this banyan tree?"

"I remembered when I was just a little baby, I used to scratch my belly by rubbing it over the tender shoots on top of this banyan tree," replied the elephant.

"When I was a curious baby monkey, I used to sit and examine the little seedling of this banyan tree. Sometimes I used to bend over and nibble its top tender leaves," added the monkey.

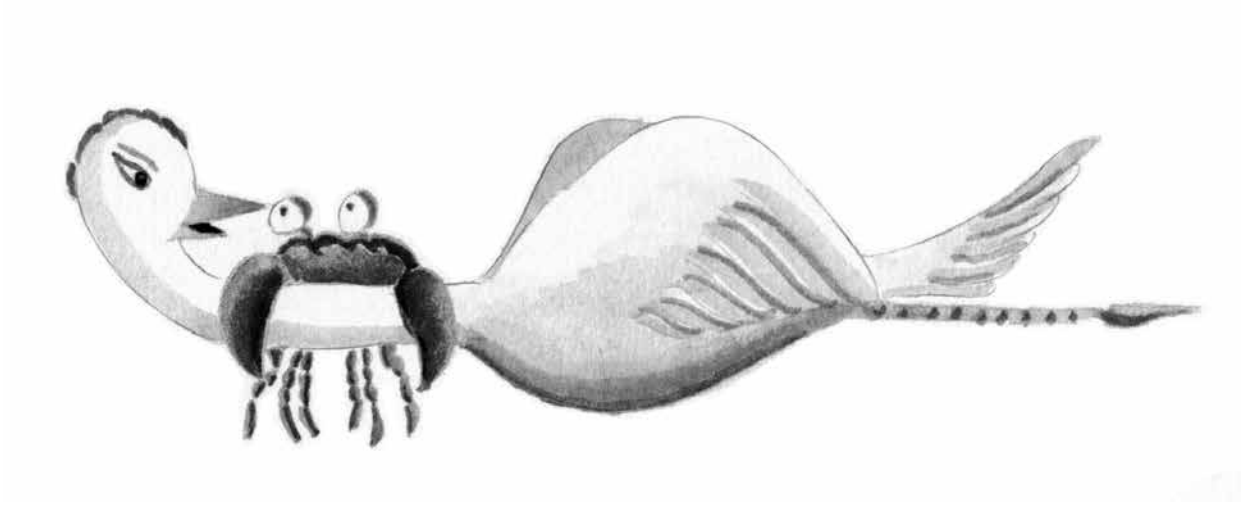
Then the monkey and the elephant asked the quail: “What was your earliest memory of this banyan tree?”

“Well, when I was young, I remembered searching for food in a nearby forest. That forest had a large banyan tree that was laden with full, ripe berries. I ate some of them, flew right here the next day, and let my droppings fall. One of the seeds contained in my droppings grew up to be this very tree!” answered the quail.

“Aha! Sir quail, you must be the oldest! You deserve our respect and honour. From now on we will pay close attention to your words. Based on your wisdom and experience, please advise us when we make mistakes. When there are disagreements, we will value your opinion most. We only ask that you be honest and just,” exclaimed both the monkey and the elephant

“I thank you for your respect, and I promise to always do my best,” replied the quail. This wise little quail was the Bodhisattva.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Respect for the wisdom of elders leads to harmony.



38
The Crane and the Crab
[Trickery]

Long, long ago, a crane lived near a small pond. Right next to the pond stood a gigantic tree. A fairy lived in that tree, and he learned by observing the various animals.

In the pond lived numerous small fishes. The crane would use his beak to catch the fishes and eat them. It happened that there was a drought in that area. The water level in the pond reduced so drastically, that it was now easy for the crane to catch the fishes. In fact, he was even getting a little fat from all that eating!

However, the crane discovered that no matter how much he ate, he was never satisfied. But he did not learn from this. Instead, he decided that if he finished eating all the fishes in the pond, he would find true happiness. “The more the merrier!” he said to himself.

In order to capture all the fishes in the pond, the crane thought up a clever plan. He would trick the fishes, deceive them into trusting him, and then gobble them up when they let down their guards. He was very pleased with himself for thinking up such a ploy.

Soon, the crane embarked on his ruse. To get the fishes to trust him, he sat quietly near the pond, in one position, just like a holy man in the forest.

Shortly after, the fishes swam up and asked: “Sir crane, what are you thinking of?” The holy-looking crane answered: “Oh my dear fishes, it makes me sad to think of your future. I am thinking about the impending disaster that will befall all of you.”

“My lord, what disaster will happen to us?” they asked. “Look around you! There is very little water left in this pond. You are also running out of food to eat. This severe drought is very dangerous for your poor little ones,” replied the crane solemnly.

“Oh dear! What can we do to save ourselves?” “My poor little children,” answered the crane, “you must trust me and do as I say. If you allow me to pick you up in my beak, I will take you, one at a time to another pond. That pond is much bigger than this one. It is filled with water and covered with lovely lotuses. It is like a paradise!”

When they heard the part about the beak, the fishes became a little suspicious. “Mr Crane, how can we believe you?” they said. “Since time immemorial, cranes have never helped us. Cranes only put us in their beaks to eat us. This must be a trick. Or else you must be joking!”

Raising his head to made himself look as dignified as possible, the crane said: “Please don’t say that. Can’t you see I am a very special crane? You should trust me. But if you don’t

believe me, send one fish with me and I will show him the beautiful pond. Then when I bring him back, you will know I can be trusted."

"This crane looks dignified, and sounds honest. But to play safe, let us send a useless little troublemaker to go with him. This will be a test," they said to one another. They found the little one who was well-known for skipping school, and pushed him towards the edge of the pond.

The crane bent his head and picked up the little one in his beak. Then he spread his wings and flew to a big tree on the shore of a beautiful big pond. Just as he had said, it was covered with lovely lotuses. The fish was amazed to see such a wonderful place. Then the crane carried him back to his poor old pond, just as he had promised.

Arriving home, the little fish described the wonders of the big beautiful pond. Hearing this, all the other fishes became very excited and rushed to be the first to go.

But the first passenger selected was that same little troublemaker. Again, the crane picked him up in his beak and flew to the big tree on the shore of the beautiful new pond. The little one was sure the helpful crane was going to drop him into the wonderful pond, when suddenly the crane killed him, gobbled up his flesh, and let the bones fall to the ground.

The crane returned to the old pond, brought the next little fish to the same tree, and ate him in the same way. One by one, he gobbled them all up!

The crane was so full that he had trouble flying back to the little pond. He realised there wasn't anymore fish for him to trick and eat, but he was still not satisfied!

Then he noticed a lonely crab crawling along the muddy shore. He walked over to the crab and said: "My dear crab, I have kindly carried all the fishes to a big wonderful pond not far from here. Why do you want to stay here alone? If you let me pick you up in my beak,

I will gladly take you there. For your own good, please trust me."

"There is no doubt this crane here has eaten all those fishes. His belly is so full he can hardly stand up straight. He definitely cannot be trusted! If I can get him to carry me to a new pond and put me in it, so much the better. But if he tries to eat me, I will have to cut off his head with my sharp claws," thought the crab.

Then the crab said: "My friend crane, I am afraid I am much too heavy for you to carry in your beak. You would surely drop me along the way. Instead, I will grab onto your neck with my eight legs, and then you can safely carry me to my new home."

The crane was so used to fooling others, that he did not imagine he would be in any danger - even though the crab would be grasping him by the throat. Instead he thought: "Excellent! This will give me a chance to eat the sweet meat of this foolish trusting crab."

So, the crane permitted the crab to grab onto his neck with all eight legs. In addition, he grasped the crane's neck with his sharp claws. "Now kindly take me to the new pond," said the crab.

The foolish crane, with his neck in the clutches of the crab, flew to the same big tree next to the new pond.

"Hey, silly crane, have you lost your way? You have not taken me to the pond. Why don't you take me to the shore and put me in?"

The crane answered: "Who are you calling silly? I don't have to take that from you. You're not my relative. I suppose you thought you have tricked me into giving you a free ride. But I'm the clever one. Just look at all those fish bones under this tree. I've eaten all the fishes, and now I'm going to eat you too, you silly crab!"

"Those fishes were eaten because they were foolish enough to trust you. Because you tricked them, you have become so conceited you think you can trick anyone. But you can't fool me. I have you by the throat. If one dies, we both die!" replied the crab.

Suddenly, the crane realised the danger he was in. "Oh my lord crab, please release me. I have learnt my lesson. You can trust me. I have no desire to eat such a handsome crab as you," he begged.

Then he flew down to the shore and continued: "Now, please release me. For your own good, please trust me."

But this old crab had been around for a long time. He realised the crane could not be trusted no matter what he said. He knew that if he let go of the crane, he would be eaten for sure. So, he cut through his neck with his claws, just like a knife sliced through a pound of butter! The crane's head fell to the ground, and the crab crawled safely into the wonderful pond.

Meanwhile, the inquisitive fairy had also come to the new pond and seen all that had happened. Sitting on the very top of the big tree, he said for all gods to hear:

"The one who lived by tricks and lies,
No longer trusted now he dies."

THE MORAL IS ✏ Deception can only bring you so far. One day, you will have to meet your end.

39

Buried Treasure

[The Arrogance of Power]

Once upon a time, there was an old man who lived in Benares. He had a beautiful young wife. He also had a very good friend, who was very wise.

The old man and his young wife had a son. The man loved his son very much. "My beautiful young wife cannot be trusted. When I die, I am sure she will marry another man, and together they will waste the wealth I have slogged so hard for. There will be nothing left for my son to inherit from his mother. I have to do something to guarantee an inheritance for my son. I will bury my wealth to protect it for him," he thought one day.

He called for his most faithful servant, Nanda. Together, they went deep into the forest with all his wealth and buried it. "My dear Nanda," he said, "I know you are obedient and faithful. After I die, you must give this treasure to my son. Until then, keep it a secret. When you give the treasure to him, advise him to use it wisely and generously."

Not long after, the old man died. Several years later, his son completed his education. He returned home to take his place as the head of the family. "My son, being a suspicious man, your father hid his wealth. I am sure that his faithful servant, Nanda, knows where it is. You should ask him to show you. Then you can get married and support the whole family," said his mother.

The son went to Nanda and asked him if he knew where his father had hidden his wealth. Nanda told him that the treasure was buried in the forest, and that he knew the exact spot.

They took a basket and a shovel, and set off together into the forest. When they reached the place where the treasure was buried, Nanda suddenly became very arrogant. As he was the only one who knew this secret, he became proud and thought he was superior than the son, even though he was only a servant. "You are just the son of a servant girl! Where would you inherit a treasure from?" he barked.

The patient son did not rebuff his father's servant. He suffered his abuse, even though it puzzled him. After a while, they returned home empty-handed. This strange behaviour happened twice.

“This is so strange. At home, Nanda appears willing to reveal the secret of the treasure. But whenever we go into the forest carrying the basket and shovel, he changes his mind. I wonder why,” thought the son.

He decided to seek the advice of his father’s wise old friend. He went to him and described all that had happened.

The wise old man said: “Go again with Nanda into the forest. Watch where he stands when he abuses you, which he surely will do. Then send him away saying: ‘You have no right to speak to me that way. Leave me.’”

“Dig up the ground on that very spot and you will find your inheritance. Nanda is a weak man. Therefore, when he comes closest to his little bit of power, he turns it into abuse.”

The son followed his advice. Sure enough, he found the buried treasure. As his father had hoped, he generously used the wealth for the benefit of many.

THE MORAL IS ✏ A little power soon goes to the head of one who is not used to it.

40
The Silent Buddha
[Generosity]

Long, long ago, there lived a very rich man in Benares. When his father passed away, he inherited even more wealth. "Why should I horde this treasure for myself? Others should also benefit from these riches."

With that thought, he built dining halls at the four gates of the city - North, South, East and West. In these halls, he gave food freely to all who wanted it. He became famous for his generosity. He and his followers were also renowned for being practitioners of the Five Precepts.

In this story, a Silent Buddha happened to be meditating in the forest near Benares. He was called a Buddha as he was enlightened. He knew all living beings were one and no different. He was able to experience life as it really was, in each and every moment.

As he was the Awakened One, he was filled with compassion and sympathy for the suffering of all beings. He wished to teach and help them to be enlightened just like him. But the time during which our story took place was a most unfortunate time. It was a time when nobody was able to understand the Truth and experience life as it really was. The Buddha knew this, that was why he remained silent.

While meditating in the forest, the Silent Buddha entered into a very high mental state. His concentration was so great that he remained in one position for seven days and nights, without eating or drinking.

When he returned to his ordinary state, he was in danger of dying from starvation. So, he went to collect alms food at the mansion of the rich man of Benares.

When the rich man was about to have lunch, he saw the Silent Buddha coming with his alms bowl. He rose from his seat respectfully, and told his servant to give alms to the Silent Buddha.

Meanwhile, Mara, the god of death, had been watching. Mara craved for power over all beings. However, he could only have this power if the being was afraid of death.

Since the Silent Buddha lived fully in each and every moment, with no desire for a future

life or fear of death, Mara had no control over the Silent Buddha. And because of that, Mara wished to destroy him. When he saw that he was near the brink of death from starvation, he knew that he had a good chance of succeeding.

Before the servant could place the food in the Silent Buddha's alms bowl, Mara caused a deep pit of red hot burning coals to appear between them. It seemed like the entrance to a hell world.

When the servant saw this, he was frightened to death. He ran back to his master. The rich man asked him why he returned without giving the alms food. "My lord, there is a deep pit full of red hot burning coals just in front of the Silent Buddha," he replied.

"This man must be seeing things!" thought the rich man. So he sent another servant with the alms food. He was also frightened by the same pit of fiery coals. Several more servants were sent, but all returned terrified to death.

"There is no doubt that Mara, the god of death, is trying to prevent me from giving alms food to the Silent Buddha. He is obstructing me at all costs from performing a wholesome deed, because doing wholesome deeds is the start on the path to enlightenment. But he underestimates my confidence in the Silent Buddha and my determination to give."

With that thought, he personally took the alms food to the Silent Buddha, and saw flames rising from the fiery pit. Then he looked up and saw the terrible god of death, floating above in the sky. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am the god of death!" replied Mara.

"Did you create this pit of fire?" asked the man. "I did," said the god. "Why did you do so?" "To prevent you from giving alms food, so the Silent Buddha will die! I'm also obstructing you from performing a wholesome deed which will put you on the path to enlightenment, so that you will remain in my power!"

"Oh Mara, you cannot kill the Silent Buddha, and you cannot prevent me from doing *dana*! Let us see whose determination is stronger!" exclaimed the man.

Then he looked across the raging pit of fire, and said to the calm and gentle Enlightened One: "Oh Silent Buddha, let the light of Truth shine forth as an example to us. Accept this gift of life!"

As he said this, he felt no fear. When he stepped into the burning pit, he was miraculously lifted up by a beautiful cool lotus blossom. The pollen from this marvellous flower spread into the air, and covered him in gleaming gold. While standing in the heart of the lotus, the Bodhisattva poured the alms food into the bowl of the Silent Buddha. Mara, the god of death, was defeated!

In appreciation for this wonderful gift, the Silent Buddha raised his hand in blessing. The rich man bowed in homage, joining his palms above his head. Then the Silent Buddha left Benares, and went to the Himalayan forests.

Still standing on the amazing lotus, glowing in gold, the generous master taught his followers. "Practising the Five Precepts is necessary to purify the mind. With a pure mind, there is great merit in giving alms."

When he had finished, the fiery pit and the lovely cool lotus disappeared completely.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Be as fearless as the lion when doing wholesome deeds.

41
The Curse of Mittavinda
[Chapter 1. Jealousy]

Once upon a time, there was a monk who lived in a tiny monastery in a little village. He was very fortunate as a rich man in the village supported him in the monastery. He never had to worry about the cares of the world. His alms food was always provided automatically by the rich man.

The monk was always calm and peaceful, as he had no desire for greater comforts and pleasures of the world, nor did he have to worry about losing his comfort and daily meals. He was free to spend his time practising the correct conduct of a monk - doing wholesome deeds and eliminating his faults, but he didn't realise how lucky he was!

One day, a more senior monk came to the village. He had followed the path of Truth and had cultivated spiritually until he was now perfect and faultless.

When the rich man saw this new monk, he was very pleased by his gentle manner and calm attitude. He invited him home, and gave him food to eat. He felt very fortunate to receive a short teaching from him. After that, he invited him to stay at the village monastery. "I will visit you at the monastery later in the evening, to make sure all is well," he said.

When the older monk reached the monastery, he met the village monk. They greeted each other cordially. "Have you taken your lunch today?" asked the village monk. "Yes, the supporter of this monastery had offered me lunch. He also invited me to stay here," replied the other.

The village monk took him to a room and left him there. The perfect monk passed his time in meditation.

Later that evening, the rich man came. He brought fruit drinks, flowers and oil lamps, in honour of the visiting holy man. "Where is our guest?" he asked the village monk. He showed him the room, and the man went in. He bowed respectfully, and greeted the perfect monk. Again, he was thankful to the rare, faultless one for giving him another teaching on the Truth.

As evening approached, the rich man lit the lamps and offered flowers at the monastery's lovely temple shrine. He also invited both monks to lunch at his house the next day. Then he left and returned home.

In the evening, a terrible thing happened. The village monk, who had always been contented, had allowed the poison of jealousy to creep into his mind. "The rich man provides me with shelter and fills my belly once a day. But I'm afraid this will change because he respects this new monk so much. If he remains in this monastery, my supporter may stop caring for me altogether. Therefore, I must make sure the new monk does not stay."

With these thoughts, he lost his former tranquility. Because of his jealousy and fear of losing his food and shelter, his mind became disturbed, and he resented the perfect monk. He started to plot and scheme to get rid of him.

Late that night, as was the custom of that time, the monks met to end the day. The wise monk spoke in his usual friendly way, but the village monk would not speak to him at all.

The wise monk understood that he was jealous and resentful. "This monk does not understand my freedom from attachment to families, people and creature comforts. I am free of any desire to stay here, but I am also free of any desire to leave here. For it makes no difference. It is sad this monk cannot understand non-attachment. I sympathise with him for the price he must pay for his ignorance."

He returned to his room, closed the door, and meditated in a high mental state throughout the night.

The next day, when it was time to collect alms food from the supporter of the monastery, the village monk rang the temple gong. But he rang it by tapping it lightly with his fingernail. Even the birds in the temple courtyard could not hear the tiny sound.

Then, he went to the older monk's room and knocked on the door. Again, he only tapped the door lightly with his fingernail. Even the little mice inside the walls could not hear the silent tapping.

Having performed his required duty in such a tricky way, he set off for the rich man's house. The man bowed respectfully to the village monk, took his alms bowl and asked, "Where is our visitor?"

"I have not seen him. I rang the gong. I knocked at his door, but he did not appear. Perhaps he was not used to the rich food you gave him yesterday. Perhaps he is still asleep, busily digesting the food, dreaming of his next feast!" replied the village monk.

Meanwhile, back at the monastery, the wise monk woke up. He cleaned himself and put on his robe. Then he calmly left the monastery to collect alms food.

The rich man offered the village monk the richest food. Made from rice, milk, butter, sugar and honey, it was delicious and sweet. When the monk had eaten his fill, the man took his bowl, scrubbed it clean, and sweetened it with perfumed water. He then filled it up with the same wonderful food, and gave it back to the monk, saying: "Honourable monk, our holy visitor must be worn out from travelling. Please take my humble alms food to him." Saying nothing, the village monk accepted the generous gift meant for the perfect monk.

By now, the village monk's mind was trapped by his own jealous scheming. "If that other monk eats this fantastic meal, even if I grabbed him by the throat and kicked him out, he still wouldn't leave! I must get rid of this alms food secretly. But I can't give it to a stranger, lest it be discovered and talked about. I can't throw it into a pond as the butter will float on the surface and be detected. And if I throw it away on the ground, crows will come from miles around to feast the food. People will notice that too. So how can I get rid of it?" he thought deeply.

All of a sudden, he saw a field that had just been razed by farmers to enrich the soil. It was covered with hot burning coals. He threw the rich man's generous gift on the coals, and the alms food burned up without a trace! But with this act went his peace of mind too!

When he returned to the monastery, he found the visitor gone. "He must be a perfectly wise monk, who realised I was jealous and resentful of him, and afraid of losing my own advantageous position. He must have known I tried to trick him into leaving. I even wasted alms food meant for him, and all for the sake of keeping my own belly full! I'm afraid something terrible will happen to me! What have I done?"

For the rest of his life the rich man continued to support him. But his mind was filled with torment and suffering. He felt doomed like a walking starving zombie, or a living hungry ghost.

When he died, his torment continued. He was reborn in a hell world, where he suffered for hundreds of thousands of years. But the effects of his past unwholesome actions were only partly completed. When his life as a hell being ended, he was reborn as a demon for 500 times!

In those 500 lives, there was only one day when he had enough to eat, and that was a meal of afterbirth dropped by a deer in the forest!

After those 500 lives as a demon, he was reborn as a starving stray dog for the next 500! Likewise, these 500 lives were also filled with hunger, worrying and searching for food. He only had enough to eat once, and that was a meal of vomit he found in a gutter!

Finally, when most of the effects of his actions were finished was he fortunate enough to be reborn as a human being. But even then, he was born into the poorest of the poor beggar families in the city of Kasi, in northern India, and was given the name, Mittavinda.

From the moment he was born, this poor family became even more worse-off and miserable. The pain of hunger became so great that a few years later, his parents chased him away. "You are nothing but a curse! Be gone forever!" They shouted at Mittavinda.

Poor Mittavinda! Because he did not realise how fortunate he was, he had allowed fear and jealousy to poison his mind when he was a village monk. This, in turn, led to the unwholesome acts of resentment against a perfect monk, and trickery committed in denying the faultless one a wholesome gift of alms food. For that unwholesome act, he suffered unending hunger and loss of comfort for a thousand and one lives. His own actions of ensuring food and shelter for himself when he was a village monk had instead brought him great suffering and the very state he was most afraid of!

[Chapter 2. Greed]

Chased away from home, Mittavinda wandered about and eventually ended up in Benares. There, he met the Bodhisattva who was a world famous teacher at that time with 500 students. The people of Benares gave food to these poor students as an act of charity, and even paid the teacher's fees for teaching them.

Luckily, Mittavinda was permitted to join them. He began studying under the great teacher, and at last, had regular meals.

But he paid no attention to the teachings of the wise master. He was disobedient and violent. Life as a hungry dog for 500 lifetimes had caused him to be quarrelsome. It had become such a strong habit for him that he constantly got into fist fights with the other students.

It became so bad that many of the students quit studying. Because of that, the income of the world famous teacher dwindled down to almost nothing. Finally, Mittavinda was forced to run away from Benares due to his fighting.

He found his way to a small remote village where he worked as a labourer. He married a very poor woman, and had two children.

Later, the villagers found out that he had once studied under the world famous teacher of Benares. They went to him for advice whenever questions arose. They also provided him with a place to stay near the entrance of the village.

But things did not go well after they started listening to his advice. The village was fined seven times by the king. Then their houses were razed to the ground seven times. And seven times the town pond dried up.

They realised that all their troubles began when they started taking Mittavinda's advice. So they chased him and his family out of the village. "Be gone forever! You are nothing but a curse!" they shouted at him.

While they were on the run, they went through a haunted forest. Demons that lurked around in the shadows came out, and killed and ate his wife and children. Mittavinda was the only one who escaped.

He wandered to a seaport city alone, penniless and feeling miserable. It happened that a kind and generous rich merchant stayed in that city. When he heard of Mittavinda's misfortunes, he and his wife adopted him as they had no children of their own. They treated him just like how they would treat their own son.

Mittavinda's foster mother and father were very religious people. They constantly performed wholesome acts. But Mittavinda had not learned his lesson. He did not accept any religion, and so was often committing unwholesome deeds.

One day, some time after his father's death, his mother decided to try and help him be a more religious person. "There is this life and there is a future life. If you do bad things, you will suffer painful results in both lives," she said.

But foolish Mittavinda replied: "I will do whatever I enjoy and make myself happy. There is no point considering whether what I do is wholesome or unwholesome. I don't care about such things!"

On the next full moon day, Mittavinda's mother advised him to go to the temple at night to listen to the teachings of the monks till the next morning. "I wouldn't waste my time!" he said. "When you return I will give you 1,000 gold coins," answered the mother.

Mittavinda thought that with enough money he could enjoy himself all the time and be happy, so he went to the temple. He sat in a corner, paid no attention, and fell asleep for

the night. Early the next morning, he went home to collect his reward.

Meanwhile, his mother thought he would appreciate the wise teachings, and would invite the oldest monk home with him. So she prepared delicious food for the expected guest. When she saw that he was alone, she asked: "Oh my son, why didn't you ask the senior monk to come home with you for breakfast?"

"I did not go to the temple to listen to a monk or to bring him home with me. I went only to get your 1,000 gold coins!" His disappointed mother replied: "Never mind the money. Since I have prepared so much food - have a feast before you rest." "Until you give me the money, I refuse to eat!" he answered. She gave him the gold coins. Only then did he gobble up the food until he was so full he fell fast asleep.

But Mittavinda did not think 1,000 gold coins were enough for him to constantly enjoy himself. He used the money to start a business, and before long he became very rich. One day, he came home and said to his foster mother: "I now have 120,000 gold coins. But I am still not satisfied. Therefore, I will board the next ship, go overseas and make even more money!"

"Oh my son, why do you want to go abroad? The ocean is dangerous and it is very risky doing business in a strange land. I have 80,000 gold coins right here in the house. That is enough for you. Please don't go, my only son!" she pleaded and held onto him to keep him from leaving.

But Mittavinda was crazy with greed. He pushed his mother's hand away and slapped her face. She fell to the floor. Hurt and shocked, she yelled: "Be gone forever! You are nothing but a curse!"

Without looking back, Mittavinda rushed to the harbour and set sail on the first departing ship.

[Chapter 3. Pleasure]

After seven days on the Indian Ocean, all winds and currents suddenly stopped dead. All on board were terrified they would die after they were stranded for seven days in the sea.

They drew lots to find out who was the cause of their bad luck and frightening misfortune. And seven times the shortest lot was drawn by Mittavinda!

They forced him onto a tiny bamboo raft, and set him adrift on the open sea. “Be gone forever! You are nothing but a curse!” they shouted. When that was done, a strong wind sent the ship on its way.

Fortunately, Mittavinda’s life was spared. This was the result of his wholesome actions as a monk, so many lifetimes ago.

No matter how long it takes, wholesome actions always bring positive results. Sometimes, an action causes a mixed result, with some parts pleasant and some unpleasant. It is said there are Asuras who live through such mixed results in an unusual way.

Asuras are ugly-looking gods. Some of them are lucky enough to change their form into beautiful, young dancing female goddesses. These are called Apsaras.

They enjoy the greatest pleasures for seven days, afterwhich they then descend into a hell world and suffer torments as hungry ghosts for seven days. When the seven days are up, they become Apsara goddesses again. This takes place back and forth, back and forth - until both kinds of results are finished.

In our story, while floating on the tiny bamboo raft, Mittavinda came to a lovely Glass Palace and met four very pretty Apsaras. He indulged with them in heavenly pleasures for seven days.

When it was time for the goddesses to become hungry ghosts, they said to Mittavinda: "Wait for us just seven short days, and we will return and continue our pleasure."

The Glass Palace and the four Apsaras disappeared. But Mittavinda had not regained the peace of mind he originally had as a village monk, so very long ago. Seven days of pleasure had not satisfied him. He could not wait for the lovely goddesses to return. He craved for more. So he left and continued on, in the little bamboo raft.

Lo and behold, he came to a shining Silver Palace. Eight beautiful Apsara goddesses lived in that palace. Again, he enjoyed seven days of the greatest pleasures. These Apsaras also asked him to wait for them, and disappeared into a hell world.

But greedy Mittavinda couldn't wait! He left, and amazing as it may seem, came upon a sparkling Jewel Palace with 16 gorgeous Apsaras. He spent the next seven days in the greatest of bliss. But when they too had to leave, he went on to spend the following seven days in a glowing Golden Palace with 32 of the most alluring Apsaras of all.

But still he was not satisfied! When all 32 asked him to wait, he again departed on his raft.

Soon, he came to the entrance of a hell world filled with tortured beings in great suffering. They were living out the negative karma they had created for themselves. But his desire for pleasure was so strong that Mittavinda thought he saw a beautiful city surrounded by a wall with four fabulous gates. "I will go inside and make myself king!" he thought.

After he entered, he saw one of the victims of this hell world. He had a collar around his neck that spun like a wheel, with five sharp blades cutting into his face, head, chest and back.

But Mittavinda was so blinded by his greed for pleasure that he could not see the pain right before his eyes. Instead, he saw the spinning collar of cutting blades as if it were a lovely lotus blossom. He saw the dripping blood as if it were the red powder of perfumed sandalwood. And the screams of pain from the poor victim sounded like the sweetest of songs!

He said to the poor man: "You've had that lovely lotus crown long enough! Give it to me, for I deserve to wear it now." The condemned man warned him: "This is a collar of blades." "You only say that because you don't want to give it up," answered Mittavinda.

The victim thought, "At last the negative results of my past unwholesome deeds must be completed. Like me, this poor fool must be here for striking his mother. I will give him the wheel of pain." "Since you want it so badly, take the lotus crown!" he said.

With these words, the wheel of blades spun off the former victim's neck and began spinning around the head of Mittavinda. Suddenly, all the illusions disappeared. Mittavinda realised this was not a beautiful city, but a terrible hell world; he knew this was no lotus crown, but a cutting wheel of blades; and he knew he was not king, but prisoner. Groaning in pain he cried out desperately: "Take back your wheel! Take back your wheel!" But the other one had disappeared.

Just then, the king of gods arrived for a visit to teach in the hell world. "Oh king of gods, what have I done to deserve this torment?" asked Mittavinda. The god replied: "Refusing to listen to the teachings of monks, you obtained no wisdom, only money. Even then 1,000 gold coins, not even 120,000, could satisfy you. Blinded by greed, you struck your mother on your way to amassing greater wealth.

"Then, the pleasure of four Apsaras in their Glass Palace did not satisfy you. Neither eight Apsaras in a Silver Palace, nor 16 in a Jewel Palace. Not even the pleasure of 32 exquisite goddesses in a Golden Palace was enough for you! Blinded by greed for pleasure you wished

to be king. Now at last, you see your crown is only a wheel of torture, and your kingdom is a hell world."

"Learn this, Mittavinda - all who follow their greed wherever it leads are left unsatisfied. For it is in the nature of greed to be dissatisfied with what one has, whether a little or a lot. The more obtained, the more desired - until the circle of greed becomes the circle of pain."

Having said this, the god returned to the heavens. At the same time the wheel crashed down on Mittavinda. With his head spinning in pain, he found himself adrift on the tiny bamboo raft.

Soon, he came to an island inhabited by a powerful she-devil that happened to be in the disguise of a goat. Hungry, Mittavinda thought nothing of grabbing the goat by its hind leg. The she-devil kicked him way up into the air. Finally, he landed in a thorn bush on the outskirts of Benares!

After he untangled himself from the thorns, he saw some goats grazing nearby. He wanted very badly to return to the palaces and to the dancing Apsaras. Remembering that a goat had kicked him here, he grabbed the leg of one of these goats. He hoped it would kick him right back to the island.

Instead, this goat only bleated. The shepherds came and captured Mittavinda for trying to steal one of the king's goats.

As he was being taken to the king as a prisoner, they passed by the world famous teacher of Benares. Immediately, he recognised his student. "Where are you taking this man?" he asked the shepherds.

"He is a goat thief! We are taking him to the king for punishment!" they replied. "Please

don't do so. He is one of my students. Release him to me, so he can be a servant in my school," requested the teacher. They agreed and left him there.

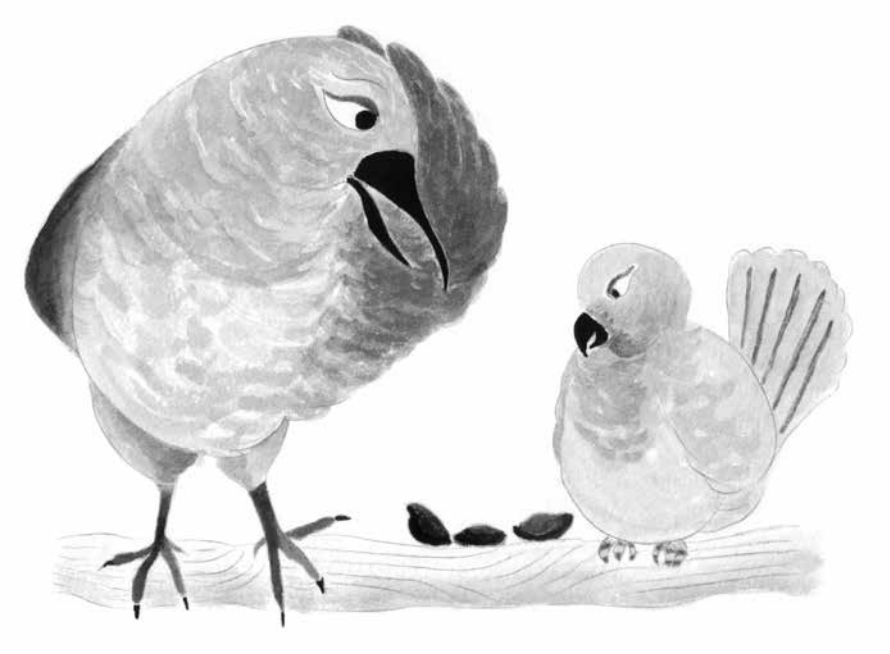
"What happened to you after you left me?" asked the teacher.

Mittavinda recounted his story, how he was first respected, and then cursed by the people of the remote village. He told his teacher of his marriage and his two children, only to see them killed and eaten by demons in the haunted forest. He told him of slapping his generous foster mother when he was blinded by greed, or how he was cursed by his shipmates and cast adrift on a bamboo raft. He also told his teacher of the four palaces with their stunning goddesses, and how each time his pleasure ended he was left craving for more. He told him of the crown of blades - the reward for the greedy in hell. And he told him of his hunger which only got him kicked back to Benares without even a bite to eat!

"It is clear that your past actions have caused both positive and negative results, and both are completed. But you do not realise that pleasures have to come to an end someday. Instead, you allow your desire and greed for pleasures to grow, only to be left exhausted and unsatisfied! Calm down, my friend. Understand that trying to hold water in a tight fist, will always leave you thirsty!" taught the wise teacher.

Hearing this, Mittavinda bowed respectfully to the great teacher. He begged for the teacher to accept him as a student again, and the Bodhisattva welcomed him with open arms.

THE MORAL IS ✏ There is neither loss nor gain when there is peace of mind.



42

The Pigeon and the Crow

[The Danger of Greed]

A long time ago, the people of Benares were fond of setting up bird houses. This was an act of generosity and kindness, done for the comfort of the birds. It also made the people happy to hear the friendly birds singing.

The richest man in the city had a cook. He kept such a bird house near the kitchen. In it lived a gentle and careful pigeon. The pigeon was so mild that he did not eat meat, and careful enough to keep his distance from the cook. He knew the cook roasted and boiled dead animals, including birds!

Each day, the pigeon would leave the bird house early in the morning to search for food, and he returned only at night to sleep in the bird house. He was quite contented with his calm and harmless life.

Staying near the pigeon was a crow that was quite a different sort of character. The crow ate anything and everything, got excited easily, and was impulsive, often acting without due considerations. Uncontented, he often got himself into trouble.

One day, the crow caught a whiff of delicious food cooking in the rich man's kitchen. He was so attracted by the aroma that he thought about it endlessly. He decided that he must have the rich man's meat at any cost. He began to spy on the kitchen, figuring out a way to get some of the meat and fish.

That evening, the pigeon returned with his little belly satisfied, and contentedly entered his little home for the night. Seeing this, the hungry crow thought: "Ah, wonderful! I can make use of this dull pigeon to grab a delicious feast from the kitchen."

The next morning, the crow followed the pigeon when he left for the day. "Oh my friend, why are you following me?" asked the pigeon. "Sir, I like you very much, and I admire your calm and steady way of life. From now on, I would like to assist you and learn from you," replied the crow.

"Friend crow, your lifestyle is much more exciting than mine. You would get bored following me around. And you don't even eat the same food as I. So how can you assist me?" answered the pigeon.

"Well, when you go each day to find your food, we will separate and I will search for mine. In the evening, we will reunite to help and protect each other," suggested the crow. "That sounds fine to me. Now, you go and find your own food," answered the pigeon.

As usual, the pigeon spent his day eating grass seeds. It took time to patiently search for a few little grass seeds, but he was satisfied and contented.

On the other hand, the crow spent his day turning over cowdung patties, so he could gobble up the worms and insects he found there. This was fairly easy work, but he thought it would be even easier to steal from the rich man's kitchen. And no doubt the food would be better too!

When he was full, he went to the pigeon and said: "Sir pigeon, you spend too much time searching for food. It is no good wasting the whole day that way. Let us go home now." But the pigeon kept on steadily eating grass seeds, one by one. He was quite happy that way.

At the end of the day, the impatient crow followed the pigeon back to his bird house. They slept in it together peacefully. They spent several days and nights in this manner.

One day, there was a delivery of many types of fresh meat and fish. The cook hung them on hooks in the kitchen for storage.

The crow saw this and was overwhelmed by the sight of so much food. His desire soon became greed, and the crow started plotting a way to get what he wanted. He decided to pretend to be ill, and so spent the entire night groaning and moaning.

The next morning, the pigeon was ready to leave the bird house. "Go without me, sir pigeon," said the crow. "I'm sick. My stomach has been giving me problems since last night."

The pigeon replied: “My dear crow, that sounds strange. I’ve never heard of a crow getting an upset stomach before. I have only heard that they sometimes faint from hunger. I suspect you want to gobble up as much as you can of the meat and fish in the kitchen. But it’s for humans, not crows. Humans don’t eat pigeon food. Pigeons don’t eat crow food. And it would not be wise for you to eat food meant for humans. It may even be dangerous! So come with me as usual, and be satisfied with your crow food, sir crow!”

“I’m too sick, friend pigeon, I’m too sick. Go ahead without me.”

“Very well, but your actions will speak louder than your words. I warn you, don’t risk safety for the sake of greed. Be patient until I return.” Then the pigeon left for the day.

But the crow paid no attention to the pigeon. He thought only about grabbing a big piece of fish, and was glad the pigeon had left. “Let him eat grass seeds!” he thought.

Meanwhile, the cook prepared the meat and fish in a big stew pot. While it was cooking, he kept the lid slightly off, to allow the steam to escape. The crow smelled the delicious fragrance in the rising steam. Watching from the bird house, he saw the cook left the kitchen to take a break from the heat.

The crow saw that this was the chance he had been waiting for. He flew into the kitchen and sat on the edge of the stew pot. First, he looked for the biggest piece of fish he could find. Then, he stuck his head inside and reached for it. But as he did this, he knocked the lid off! The clattering sound brought the cook back into the kitchen at once.

He saw the crow standing on the edge of the pot with a fish much bigger than the bird, hanging from his beak! Immediately, he closed the door and window of the kitchen. “This food is for the rich man. I work for him, not for some mangy crow! I will teach him a lesson he’ll never forget!” thought the cook.

The poor crow could not have picked a worse enemy, for this cook did not mind being cruel when he had the upper hand. He took no pity at all on the clever crow.

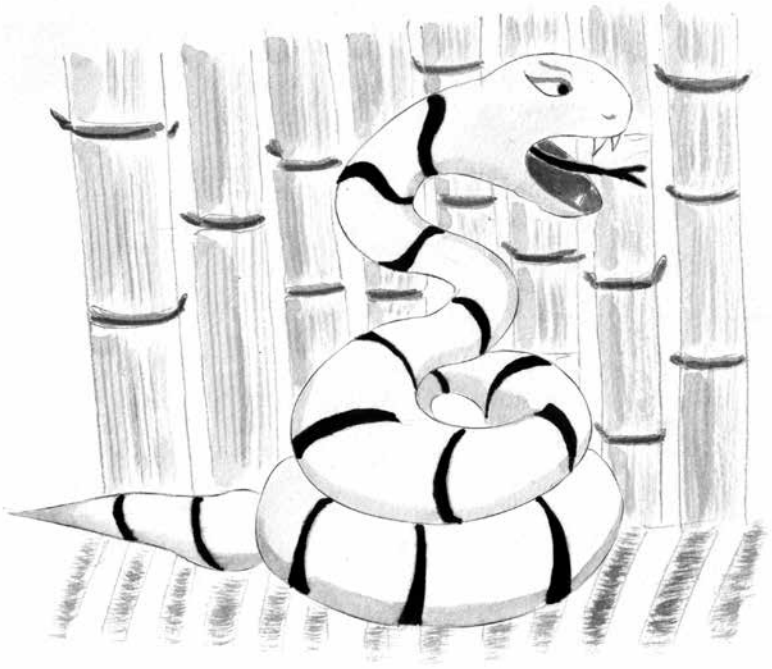
He grabbed the bird, and plucked out all his feathers. The poor crow looked ridiculous without his shiny black feathers. Next, the vengeful cook made a spicy paste from ginger, salt and chilli peppers and rubbed it all over the crow's pink sore skin. He then put him on the floor of the bird house and laughed.

The crow sweated and suffered from the terrible burning pain. He cried in pain all day long.

In the evening, the pigeon returned. He was shocked to see the terrible state his friend was in. "Obviously, you didn't listen to me at all. Your greed has done you in. I'm so sad there's nothing I can do to save you. And I'm afraid to stay in this bird house so close to that cruel cook. I must leave at once!" said the pigeon.

The careful pigeon flew away in search of a safer bird house. And the plucked and pasted crow died an agonising death.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Greed makes one deaf to sound advice.



43

Bamboo's Father

[Not Heeding Advice]

Once upon a time, there was a teacher who was such a good meditator that he had developed his mind to a high level. Gradually, his fame spread, and those who wished to be guided by a wise man came to hear him teach. Soon, 500 decided to become his followers.

Out of these 500 followers who considered his teachings to be wise, there was a man who was a pet lover. In fact, he loved pets so much that there was no animal he did not wish to keep as a pet.

One day, he came upon a cute little poisonous snake that was searching for food. He decided the snake would make an excellent pet. He made a little bamboo cage to keep the snake when he had to leave it alone. The other followers named the little snake, 'Bamboo'. Because he was so fond of his pet, they called the pet lover, 'Bamboo's Father'.

Not long after, the teacher heard that one of his followers was keeping a poisonous snake as a pet. The teacher questioned Bamboo's Father and asked if this was true. "Yes master, I love Bamboo like my own child!"

"It is not safe to live with a poisonous snake. I advise you to let him go, for your own good," said the wise teacher.

But Bamboo's Father thought he knew better. "This little one is my son. He won't bite me. I can't give him up and live all alone!"

The teacher warned him: "Then surely, this little one will be the cause of your death!" But the follower did not heed his master's warning.

Soon after, all 500 of the followers went on a trip to collect fresh fruits. Bamboo's Father left his 'son' locked up in the bamboo cage.

Since there were many fruits to collect, it took them several days before they returned. Bamboo's Father realised that poor Bamboo had not eaten all the while he was away. He opened the cage to let it out to find food.

But when he reached inside, his ‘son’ bit his hand. Having been neglected for all that time, Bamboo was angry as well as hungry. Since it was only a snake, it had no idea what poison was!

But his ‘father’ should have known better. After all, he had been warned by the very teacher he himself considered wise.

Within minutes of being bitten, Bamboo’s Father dropped dead!

THE MORAL IS ✏ There’s no benefit in following a teacher if you don’t listen to what he says

44, 45
Two Stupid Children
[Foolishness]

Long ago, there was an old carpenter with a shiny, bald head. On sunny days, his bald pate shined so brightly that people shaded their eyes when talking to him!

On one particularly sunny day, a hungry mosquito was attracted to the old carpenter's bright shiny pate. It landed on his head and started biting.

The carpenter was busy smoothing a piece of wood with a plane when he felt the mosquito bite. He tried to chase it away. But the hungry mosquito would not leave. So, the man called his son over and asked him to get rid of the stubborn pest.

The son was not a bright boy. But he was hardworking and obedient. "Don't worry Dad, be patient. I'll kill that bug with just one blow!" he said.

The son picked up a very sharp axe. He took careful aim at the mosquito. Without thinking twice, he came down with the axe and split the mosquito into two! Unfortunately, after slicing through the mosquito, the axe also split the old carpenter's shiny bald head into two.

Meanwhile, an adviser to the king happened to be passing by with his followers. They saw what had happened, and were stunned that anyone could be so stupid!

"Do not be surprised by human stupidity! This reminds me of a similar event that occurred just yesterday," said the king's adviser.

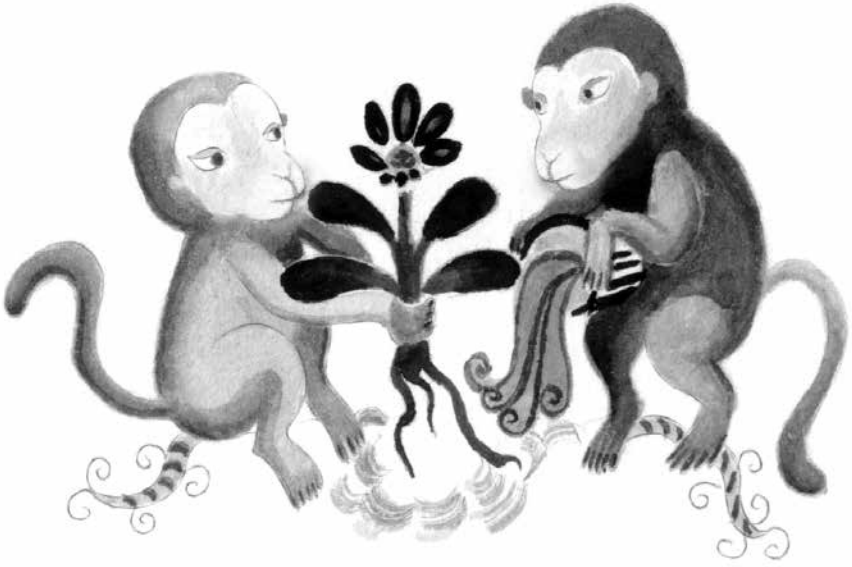
In a village not far from here, a woman was cleaning rice. She was pounding it in a mortar with a pestle to separate the husks. As she was perspiring, a swarm of flies began buzzing around her head. She tried to chase them away, but the flies would not leave.

She called her daughter over and asked her to shoo away the bothersome insects. Although she was a rather foolish girl, the daughter always tried her best to please her mother.

So she stood up from her own mortar, raised her pestle, and took careful aim at the biggest and boldest of the flies. Without thinking, she pounded the fly to death! But of course, the same blow that killed the fly, also ended her mother's life.

"You all know what they say," said the adviser, finishing his story, "With friends like these, who needs enemies!"

THE MORAL IS ✏ A wise enemy is less dangerous than a foolish friend.



46
Watering the Garden
[Foolishness]

This story took place just before New Year's Day in Benares, in northern India, a long time ago. Everyone in the city, including the gardener of the king's pleasure garden, was busy preparing for the three-day celebration that was about to follow.

Now, in this pleasure garden lived a large troop of monkeys. They always listened to the advice of their leader, the monkey king, so that they did not have to think too much.

As the royal gardener wanted to celebrate the New Year's holiday, just like everybody else, he decided to hand his duties over to the monkeys.

"Oh king of monkeys, my honourable friend, would you do me a little favour?" he asked the monkey king. "New Year's Day is coming, and I wish to celebrate it too. I will be away for three full days. There are plenty of fruits, berries and nuts to eat in this lovely garden. Please be my guest, and feast as much as you and your subjects wish. But in return, please water the young trees and plants while I'm gone."

"Don't worry about a thing, my friend! We will do a terrific job! Have a good time!" promised the monkey king.

The gardener showed the monkeys where the watering buckets were kept. Feeling assured, he left to celebrate the festive holiday. "Happy New Year!" the monkeys called after him as he left.

The next day, the monkeys filled up the buckets, and began watering the young trees and plants. "My subjects, it is not good to waste water. Therefore, pull each young tree or plant up before watering. Check how long the roots are. Give more water to the ones with long roots, and less water to the ones with short roots. That way, we will not waste water and the gardener will be pleased!" instructed the monkey king.

Without giving it a second thought, the obedient subjects followed their king's orders.

Meanwhile, a wise man was passing by the entrance of the garden. He saw the monkeys uproot all the lovely young trees and plants, measure their roots, and carefully pour water

into the holes in the ground. "Oh foolish monkeys, what do you think you're doing to the king's beautiful garden?" he asked.

"We are watering the trees and plants, without wasting water! We are commanded to do so by our king," they answered.

"If this is the wisdom of the wisest among you - the leader - what are the rest of you like? Intending to do a worthwhile deed, your foolishness turns it into disaster instead!" said the man.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Foolishness turns well-meaning deeds into bad ones.

47
Salty Liquor
[Foolishness]

Once upon a time, there was a tavern owner in Benares. He had a hardworking bartender who was always inventing new ways of doing things.

One hot day, the tavern owner wanted to take a bath in a nearby river. So he put the bartender in charge of the tavern while he was away.

Now, the bartender wondered why most of the customers always took a bit of salt after drinking their alcohol. Not wishing to demonstrate his ignorance, he never bothered to ask them why they did this. He did not know that they ate the salt in order to remove the aftertaste of the liquor.

Thinking the customers ate the salt to make the liquor taste good, he wondered why taverns did not add salt to their liquor. He decided that if he did this, the business would make more money, and the tavern owner would be very pleased. So he added salt to all the liquor!

To his surprise, when the customers came to the tavern and drank the salty liquor, they spit out the drink immediately and went to a different bar.

When the owner returned from his dip in the river, he found his tavern empty of customers and all his liquor ruined. He recounted this story to his friend, an adviser to the king. "The ignorant, wishing to do good, often cannot help but cause harm instead," said the adviser.

THE MORAL IS ✏ The best intentions are no excuse for ignorance.

48

The Magic Priest and the Kidnapper Gang

[Power and Greed]

Long ago in Benares, there was a king named Brahmadatta. In one of the remote villages in King Brahmadatta's kingdom lived a priest who had magical powers. He knew a special magic spell which was transmitted to him secretly by his teacher.

But, this spell could only be used once a year, when the planets were lined up in a certain way. Only then would the spell work when the priest uttered the secret magic words into his open palms, looked up into the sky, and clapped his hands. A shower of precious jewels would then fall from the sky onto him.

Now, this priest had a very good student. He was intelligent and able to understand the most difficult ideas. He was also obedient and faithful, and always wished to honour and protect his master.

One day, the priest had to go on a trip to a faraway village to perform an animal sacrifice. Since he had to take a dangerous route, the good student went with him.

Along this route hid a gang of 500 bandits known as the 'Kidnapper Gang'. They captured people and demanded ransom in exchange for their lives. The priest and his good student

were unfortunately captured by the Kidnapper Gang. They wanted a ransom of 5,000 gold coins in exchange for the life and freedom of the priest. So, they sent the student to get the money.

Before leaving, the student knelt before his teacher and bowed respectfully. "Oh master, tonight is the night in which the planets will align perfectly, and your spell will work," whispered the student so the bandits could not hear. "However, I must warn you, my beloved and respected teacher, that to use this power to save yourself from these greedy men would be extremely dangerous. Obtaining great wealth so easily would lead to disaster for them. If you think only of your own safety, and brought harm to them, that will also cause danger to you as well.

"Therefore, my teacher, do not conjure the spell of jewels tonight. Let this auspicious night pass by for this year. Even if these bandits harm you, trust your faithful student to save you, without adding to your danger." With that, he left.

That evening, the kidnappers tied up the priest tightly, and left him outside their cave for the night. They gave him nothing to eat or drink.

When the moon came out and the priest saw the planets aligning, he thought, "Why should I suffer like this? I can use magic to pay for my own ransom. Why should I care if harm befall these 500 kidnappers? I am a priest with magical powers. My life is worth much more than theirs. I care only for my own life. Besides, such opportunity comes but once a year. I cannot waste the chance to use my great power!"

Deciding to ignore his student's advice, he called the kidnappers: "Oh, brave and mighty ones, why do you tie me up and make me suffer?"

"Oh holy priest, we need money. We have many mouths to feed. We must have money, and lots of it!" they answered.

"Ah, you did this for money? Is that all you want? In that case, I will make you so rich it is beyond your wildest dreams! For I am great and powerful. As a holy priest, you can trust me. You must untie me, wash my head and face, dress me in new clothes, and cover me with flowers. Then, after honouring me, leave me alone to perform my magic."

The kidnappers followed his instructions. But as they did not trust him, instead of leaving him alone, they hid in the bushes and watched him secretly.

They saw the priest look up into the sky, lower his head and mutter the magic spell into his hands. These were sounds that no one could understand. The spell sounded something like this: "Nah Wah Shed-nath. Eel Neeah Med-rak. Goh Bah Mil-neeay."

Then he gazed into the sky and clapped his hands. Suddenly, the sky rained the loveliest jewels onto him!

The Kidnapper Gang came out from hiding and grabbed all the precious stones. They wrapped them up in bundles and went down the route, with the priest behind.

On the way, they were stopped by another gang of 500 robbers. "Why did you stop us?" asked the kidnappers. "Give us all your wealth!" demanded the other gang.

"Leave us alone. You can get all the riches you want from this priest here, like we have done. He knows magic. He just has to utter some magical words, look up into the sky, clap his hands, and the most fabulous jewels will come falling down!"

The robbers let the Kidnapper Gang go, and surrounded the priest. They demanded that he perform his magic again for them.

"Of course, I can give you all the jewels you want. But you must be patient and wait for a year. The auspicious time, in which the planets aligned, has passed. It will not happen again until next year. Come see me then, and I will be happy to make you rich!"

Robbers are not exactly patient people. They became angry at once. "Ah, you tricky lying priest! You made the Kidnapper Gang wealthy, but now you refuse to do the same for us. We'll teach you a lesson for taking us so lightly!" they shouted at him. Then they sliced him into two with a sharp sword, and left both halves of his body in the middle of the road.

The robbers pursued the Kidnapper Gang, and a terrible bloody battle ensued. After hours of fighting, they killed all 500 kidnappers and stole the wonderful gems.

As soon as they left the battleground, the 500 robbers began to quarrel over the wealth. Dividing into two rival groups of 250 each, they fought another bloody battle, until only two survived, one from each side.

These two took all the valuable jewels and hid them in the forest. As they were very hungry, one guarded the treasure, while the other started cooking.

"When the other has finished cooking, I will kill him and keep all this loot for myself." thought the one who was guarding the jewels.

Meanwhile, the one who was doing the cooking thought: "If I share the jewels with him, I will get less. Therefore, I will poison the food, kill the other, and keep all the jewels for myself. Why share, when I can have them all!"

Hungry, he ate some of the rice, and poisoned the rest. Next, he took the rice pot and offered

it to the other robber. That robber immediately swung his sword and chopped off the head of the one with the rice pot!

Then he began to eat the poisoned rice. Within minutes, he dropped dead on the spot!

A few days later, the good student returned with the ransom money. He could not find his teacher or the Kidnapper Gang. Instead, he found only the worthless possessions they had left behind after getting the jewels.

As he went down the route, he saw the gruesome sight of his teacher's dead body. Realising that his teacher must have ignored his warning, he mourned his grisly death. Then he built a funeral pyre, covered it with wildflowers, and burned the body of his respected teacher.

A little further down the road, the good student came upon the 500 dead bodies of the Kidnapper Gang. Further still, he saw 498 bloody bodies of the dead robbers, and two sets of footprints going into the forest. He suspected the last two would also fight over the treasure. He followed the footprints until he saw the bundles of valuable jewels and the two dead bodies - one slumped over the rice pot, and the other with his head chopped off. He could tell immediately what had happened.

"This is so sad. My teacher had great knowledge, but not enough common sense. He could not resist using his magical powers, regardless of the results. By causing the deaths of one thousand greedy thugs, he brought harm to himself as well," he thought.

The good student took the treasure back to the village, and used it generously for the benefit of many.

THE MORAL IS ✏ When power has no conscience, and greed has no limit – the killing has no end.

49

The Groom Who Lost His Bride to the Stars

[Astrology]

Once upon a time, a rich family in Benares, in northern India, had arranged for their son to marry a good honest girl from a nearby village. As the bride was very pretty, they were sure they could not find a better wife for their son.

The groom's family picked a date for the wedding, and the bride's family agreed to meet them in the village on the wedding day.

Meanwhile, when the astrological priest of the rich family found out they had selected the wedding day, without paying him to consult the stars, he became angry. He decided to get even with them.

When the wedding day arrived, the astrological priest dressed up in his finest robes, and called the family together. He bowed to them all, and then looked at his star charts very seriously. He told them that a star was too close to the horizon, another planet was in the middle of an unlucky constellation, and that the moon was in a very dangerous phase for having a wedding. He told them that, by not seeking his advice, they had chosen the worst day of the year for a wedding. This would only lead to a terrible marriage.

Frightened by what the priest had said, the rich family remained home in Benares. They forgot all about the wonderful qualities of the intended bride.

Meanwhile, the bride's family had prepared everything for the wedding ceremony in the village. When the agreed upon hour arrived, they saw no sight of the groom and his family. They waited and waited, and finally realised they were not coming. "This is so insulting! These city people picked the date and time, and now they didn't show up! Why should we wait any longer? We shall let our daughter marry an honourable and hardworking man in the village," they thought. They quickly arranged a new marriage and celebrated the wedding.

The next day, the astrological priest suddenly told the rich family that it was a perfect day to hold a wedding as the stars, planets and moon were in perfect positions! The rich family hurriedly went to the village and asked for the wedding to take place. "You picked the date and time. Then you disgraced us by not showing up!" said the villagers.

"Our family priest told us that yesterday was a very unlucky day for a wedding as the stars, planets and moon were in inauspicious positions. But he has assured us that today is a most lucky day. So please send us the bride at once!" replied the family from Benares.

"You have no honour. You have decided that the selection of date is more important than the choice of the bride. It's too late now! Our daughter has married another," answered the village family. The two families began to quarrel heatedly.

Meanwhile, a wise man happened to walk past. Seeing the two families bickering, he tried to settle the dispute.

The family from Benares told him that they had respected the warnings of their astrological priest. It was because of the inauspicious positions of the stars, planets and moon, that they failed to turn up for the wedding.

"The good fortune was in the bride, not in the stars. You fools have followed the stars and lost the bride. Without your foolishness, stars from afar can do nothing!" answered the wise man.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Fortune and blessings come from positive actions, not from stars.

50

The Prince Who Had a Plan

[The Power of Superstition]

A long time ago, when King Brahmadatta ruled Benares, in northern India, the Bodhisattva was born as his son. The prince was quite intelligent. He completed his entire education by the time he was 16. So at this early age, his father appointed him second-in-command.

In those days, most people in Benares worshipped gods. They were very superstitious and believed that the gods were the cause for things that happened to them, rather than the results of their own actions. They would pray to the gods and ask for special favours. Sometimes, they asked for a lucky marriage, others, the birth of a child or wealth and fame.

In return for prayers answered, they promised the gods they would present offerings to them. Besides offering flowers and perfumes, they would also kill many animals - goats, lambs, chickens, pigs and others thinking that the gods desired the sacrifice of animals as offerings.

The prince saw all this and thought: "These helpless animals are also subjects of the king, so I must protect them too. The people commit these unwholesome acts due to ignorance and superstition. This cannot be true religion. For true religion offers life as it really is, giving peace of mind, and not killing or cruelty.

"I fear these people believe in their superstitions too strongly to give them up. This is very sad. But perhaps their beliefs can be put to good use? Some day, I will become king. So I must think of a plan to let their superstitions help them. If they must offer sacrifices, let them kill their own greed and hatred, instead of these helpless animals! Then the whole kingdom will benefit," he thought.

The prince devised a really clever plan. Every so often, he would ride in his grand chariot to a popular banyan tree just outside the city. This was a huge tree, where people came and prayed and made offerings to a god they thought resided in the tree. The prince descended from his chariot, and made the same offerings as the others - with incense, flowers, perfumes and water - but not animal sacrifices.

Soon, news spread about his offerings. Pretty soon, all the people thought he was a true believer in the great god of the banyan tree.

In time, King Brahmadatta died and his son became king. The new king ruled Benares righteously, and the people benefited. Before long, all his subjects came to trust and respect him as a just and honourable king.

One day, the new king decided it was the ripe time to carry out the rest of his plan. He summoned all the leading citizens of Benares to the royal assembly hall and asked them: "Worthy ministers and loyal subjects, do you know how I was able to ensure that I would become king?" No one could answer his question.

"Do you remember that I often gave wonderful, sweet offerings to the great god of the banyan tree?" he asked. "Yes, our lord," they said.

The king continued: "Each time, I promised the powerful god of the tree that if I'm crowned king of Benares, I will offer a special sacrifice to him, one that is far greater than flowers and perfume."

"Since I am now the king, you can see for yourselves that the god has answered my prayers. So now I must keep my promise and offer the special sacrifice."

All those in the assembly hall nodded their heads. "We must prepare this sacrifice at once. What animals do you wish to kill, my lord?" they asked the king.

"My dear subjects, I am glad you are so willing to co-operate. I promised the great god of the banyan tree that I would sacrifice anyone who fails to practise the Five Precepts. That is, anyone who destroys life, takes what is not given, commits sexual misconduct, speaks falsely, or loses his mind from alcohol will be sacrificed. I promised to offer the flesh and blood of anyone who does the above on the great god's altar!"

Being so superstitious, all those in the hall agreed that this must be done, or the god would surely punish the king and the kingdom.

"Ah, such is the power of superstition that these people have lost all common sense! They cannot see that, since the first precept is to avoid killing, if I sacrifice one of my subjects, I will be next on the altar! Such is the power of superstition that I can make such a promise, and never have to carry it out!" he thought.

So, with full confidence in the power of superstition, the king said to the leading citizens, "Spread the news and announce the promise I made to the god. Then proclaim that the first 1000 who break any of the precepts will have the honour of being sacrificed, to keep the king's promise."

Lo and behold, the people of Benares became renowned for carefully practising the Five Precepts. And the good king, who knew his subjects so well, sacrificed nobody.

THE MORAL IS ✏ Sacrifice your own wrongdoing, not some helpless animal.

Appendix A.
Who Was the Bodhisattva?

Some who tell these stories say they are about the past lives of the Buddha, the Enlightened One. Before he became enlightened as the Buddha, he was called the Bodhisattva. Look at the list below to see who is said to be the Bodhisattva in each story.

1. The wise merchant
2. The tradesman
3. The honest salesman
4. The king's wise adviser
5. The honest price maker
6. Prince Goodspeaker
7. Little Prince No-father
8. The best teacher
9. The king with one grey hair
10. The wise old master
11. The wise old deer
12. King Banyan Deer
13. The wise fairy
14. The King of Benares
15. A wise and respected teacher
16. A wise and respected teacher
17. A gentle forest monk
18. A fairy who lived in a tree nearby
19. The god living in the banyan tree
20. The monkey king
21. The careful antelope
22. The Dog King Silver

23,24 The great horse called Knowing-one

Appendix A.
Who Was the Bodhisattva?

25, 26, 27.	An intelligent minister who was renowned for understanding animals
28.	The bull called Delightful
29.	Grandma's Blackie
30.	Big Red
31.	Magha the Good
32.	King Golden Swan
33.	Quail King
34.	A very wise adviser who understood the speech of animals
35.	The baby quail that could not fly away
36.	The wise old leader
37.	A quail
38.	The inquisitive fairy
39.	The father's wise old friend
40.	The rich man of Benares
41.	The world famous teacher
42.	A gentle and careful pigeon
43.	A teacher who was a good meditator
44, 45.	An adviser to the king
46.	A wise man
47.	An adviser to the king
48.	The good student
49.	A wise man
50.	The prince who had a plan

Appendix B.
An Arrangement of Morals

The morals from the stories are arranged below, according to three pairs of unwholesome and wholesome qualities. These are: greed and generosity, anger and loving-kindness, delusion and wisdom. This can be used as a different order for reading the stories.

Moral	Story	Page
Greed and Generosity		
Cravings and desires can be dangerous to one's well-being.	14	55
Greed makes one deaf to sound advice.	42	160
When power has no conscience, and greed has no limit – the killing has no end.	48	175
There is neither loss nor gain when there is peace of mind.	41	146
Infatuation leads to destruction.	13	51
Fools are trapped by their own desires.	34	123
Non-attachment to wealth and power increases one's happiness	10	37
Anger and Loving-kindness		
Conflict and quarrel bring benefits to no one. Unity and harmony result in safety, peace and happiness	33	120
Bias leads to injustice, wisdom leads to justice.	22	76
Loving-kindness makes the poorest house into the richest home.	29	100

Appendix B.
An Arrangement of Morals

Moral	Story	Page
Even different kinds of beings from different species can become best friends, for friendship transcends language and appearance.	27	93
Strong friendship and unity can only be good for all.	17	63
Harsh words cause unhappiness. Respectful words bring happiness to all.	28	96
Hatred can never be ceased by hatred; hatred can only be ceased by love. For true peace is won only by peaceful means.	23	81
Delusion and Wisdom		
A fool in high office can bring shame even to a king.	5	15
Deception can only bring you so far. One day, you will have to meet your end.	38	134
One must always be wise enough not to be fooled by tricky talk and false appearances.	1	1
Don't envy those who seem well-off, until you know the price they pay.	30	104
Foolishness turns well-meaning deeds into bad ones.	46	170
A wise enemy is less dangerous than a foolish friend.	44, 45	168
A little power soon goes to the head of one not used to it.	39	139

Appendix B.
An Arrangement of Morals

Moral	Story	Page
If you let pride go to your head, you'll wind up acting like a fool.	32	117
The best intentions are no excuse for ignorance.	47	173
Even animals value hygiene.	25	86
Associate not with evil friends, associate not with mean men; associate with good friends, associate with noble men.	26	89
Respect for the wisdom of elders leads to harmony.	37	131
A student who plays truant will miss out on learning important skills and knowledge from his teacher.	15	58
There's no benefit in following a teacher if you don't listen to what he says.	43	165
Those who ignore the advice of the wise do so at their own risk.	36	169
One is rewarded a hundred times more for following the advice of a wise teacher.	8	30
A wise leader puts the safety of his followers first.	11	56

Appendix B.
An Arrangement of Morals

Moral	Story	Page
Well-learned lessons bring great rewards.	16	60
Test the water before jumping in.	20	71
Fortune and blessings come from positive actions, not from stars.	49	180
Even religion can be a source of ignorance. Killing only brings suffering to one.	18	65
Sacrifice your own wrongdoing, not some helpless animal.	50	183
With energy and ability, great wealth comes even from small insignificant beginnings.	4	11
Don't give up too easily. Keep on trying until you reach your goal.	2	5
Even a long life is too short to waste.	9	34
The truth is always stronger than a lie.	7	27
Honesty is the best policy.	3	8
Because you reap what you sow, keeping a bad promise is worse than making it.	19	69

Appendix B.
An Arrangement of Morals

Moral	Story	Page
Be as fearless as the lion when doing wholesome deeds. The Five Precepts creates wholesomeness.	40	142
Wholesomeness is the foundation of peace and happiness.	31	106
Unwholesome actions bring shame and fear, while wholesome actions bring self-respect and peace to one.	6	19
The wise remain pure and blameless.	21	74
Wherever it is found, compassion is a sign of greatness.	12	44
Truth, wholesomeness and compassion can save the world.	35	126