



THE MAN WHO  
BECAME  
an OX  
& Other Stories

Editor: Esther Thien   Cartoonist: Robert Yeo





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For Free Distribution Only

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## How the Venerable Master Xu Yun Repaid His Parents' Kindness

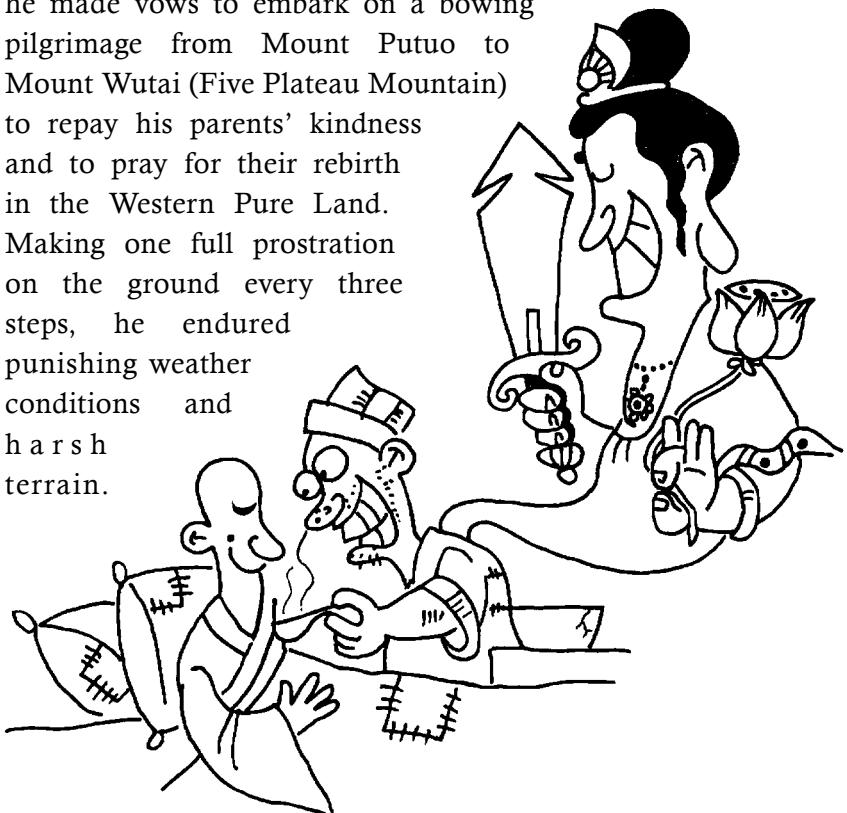
By: Wei K. Yong

Filial piety is a virtue that is emphasised in the teachings of Buddhism. It is based on the fact that a person owes his existence to his parents who have to make great sacrifices to provide for his development and well-being. As the saying goes: "When drinking water, one must think of its source." It is, therefore, only right that a person should never forget his parents' love and kindness.

An excellent example of showing gratitude to one's parents is the Venerable Master Xu Yun (Empty Cloud), the Eighth Patriarch of the Wei-Yang Sect. He lived from 1840 to 1959, a period of great upheaval in China.

The Master's birth was most unusual as he was born enclosed in a flesh-bag. At the sight of this, his mother was gripped by shock and she passed away. The next day, a medicine seller visited his house. On learning the matter, he cut open the flesh-bag and revealed a baby boy. Thereafter, the child was brought up by his stepmother. Even when young, he was interested in studying the Buddhist texts. At the age of nineteen, against his father's wishes, he secretly left home to become a monk.

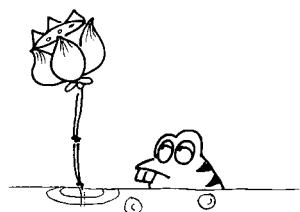
The Master felt remorseful whenever he thought of his mother whom he had never seen, and how he had brought much grief to his father by running away from home. Therefore, in the year 1882 when he was 43 years old, he made vows to embark on a bowing pilgrimage from Mount Putuo to Mount Wutai (Five Plateau Mountain) to repay his parents' kindness and to pray for their rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Making one full prostration on the ground every three steps, he endured punishing weather conditions and harsh terrain.

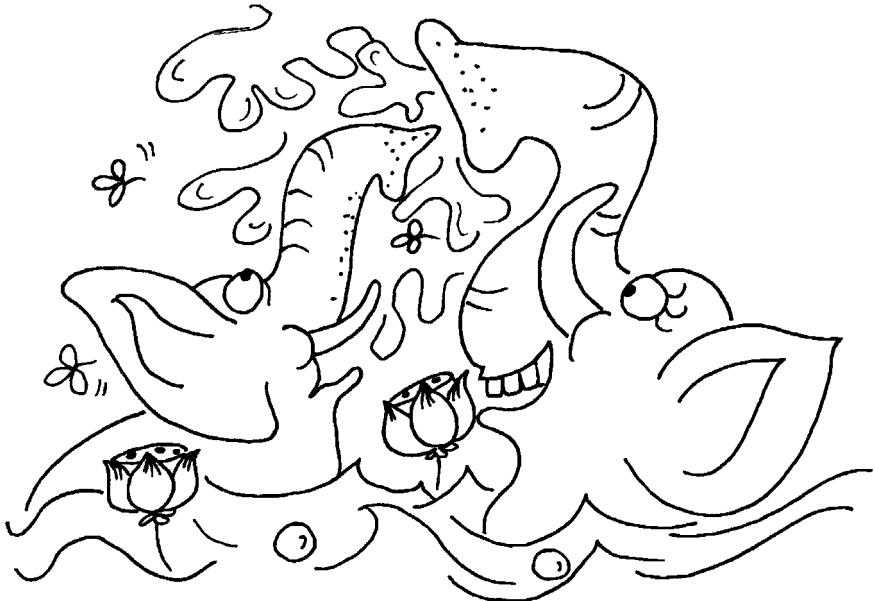


On two occasions, hunger and illness brought him to the brink of death but he was saved by a beggar called Wen Ji who nursed him back to health. On recovery, he continued his bowing pilgrimage with single-minded determination and eventually reached his destination at Mount Wutai. It was then that he discovered that Wen Ji was a transformation body of Manjushri Bodhisattva!

It took three years for the Master to complete his bowing pilgrimage and his vows were finally fulfilled only after much difficulty and suffering. It was his sincerity that moved Manjushri Bodhisattva to help him in the guise of a beggar. ↗

**In this modern world, many people are unaware of the importance of filial piety and the debt of gratitude that they owe to their parents. Indeed, many of the social ills that are prevalent in our society today stem partly from the lack of moral education in this respect. The great lengths to which Venerable Master Xu Yun took to repay his parents' kindness serve as a good example to later generations.**





## The White Elephant and His Blind Old Mother

Retold by: Esther Thien

**E**n even in a former life, the Buddha knew the importance of gratitude and of repaying the kindness shown by our parents.

Long, long ago in the hills of the Himalayas near a lotus pool, the Buddha-to-be was once born as a baby elephant. He was a glorious elephant, milky white in colour with rosy pink feet and face. His trunk shimmered like a silver cord and his pristine ivory tusks twirled in a long arc.

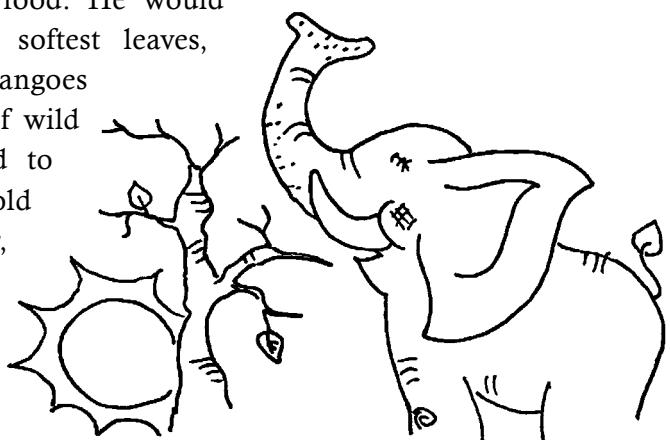
He followed his mother everywhere. She plucked the softest leaves and sweetest, juiciest mangoes from the lofty trees and gave them to him.

"First you, then me," she said gently. She bathed him in the sparkling lotus pool among the sweet-smelling flowers, spraying the cool water drawn from her trunk over the top of his head and back until he glowed. While bathing, he would play with his mother, squirting water all over her. Without blinking, she would squirt back. Back and forth, back and forth, they gleefully splashed and splashed water all over each other.

Exhausted from their activity, they would doze off in the soft muck with their trunks coiled together. Sometimes, the mother elephant rested on her own, under the shade of a large tree while keeping a watchful eye over her son as he romped and frolicked with the other baby elephants.

The little elephant grew and grew until he was the biggest and strongest young bull in the herd of 80,000 elephants, and so became their leader. While he grew taller and stronger, his mother grew older and feeble. Her tusks were yellow and broken and in time she went blind.

Each day, this white elephant would go deep into the forest in search of food. He would look for the softest leaves, sweetest mangoes and the best of wild fruits to send to his dear old blind mother, thinking gratefully "First you, then me".



But alas, his mother never received any. This was because his messengers would always eat the food themselves. Each night, when he returned home, he would be surprised to hear that his mother had been starving all day. Frowning upon what his herd had done, he decided to take his mother to live by themselves near the beautiful lotus pool.

Each day, after feeding her, he bathed her in the sparkling pool among the fragrant and lovely pink lotuses. Drawing the fresh cool water up in his trunk, he sprayed her over the top of her head and back until she glistened. Then, they rested in the soft muck with their trunks curled together. In the deep shadows of afternoon, the white elephant would guide his mother to the shade of a large tree for a rest while he busied about.

One day, the king of Benares went hunting and spied the noble-looking white elephant.

“What a magnificent animal! I must have him to ride upon,” thought the king. The young elephant was collecting lotus shoots for his mother’s meal when he sensed the presence of humans. But he knew if he put up a struggle, many of the men would be killed. And he was just too kind-hearted to want to harm anyone.

He decided to go with them and to request the king to set him free. Thus, the king’s men caught the elephant easily and put him in the royal stable.

That night, the white elephant did not return home. His mother was very worried. She had heard all the commotion and guessed that the king’s men had taken away her son.

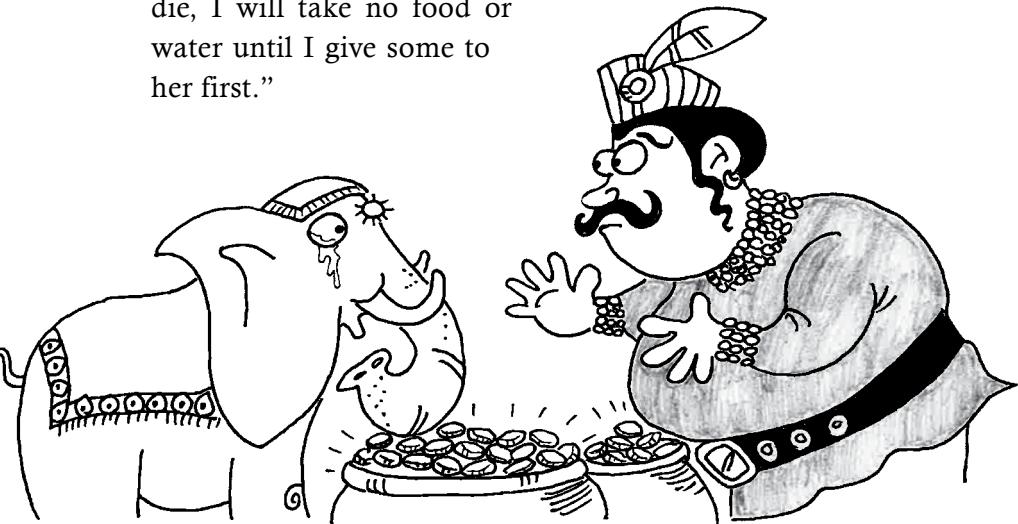
She was fearful that the king would ride him out to battle and her son would die. She was also afraid that no one would be around to look after her or feed her, as she could not see. She just lay down and cried bitterly.

Meanwhile, the king had the white elephant adorned with silk, jewels and garlands of lotuses. He gave him sweet grass and juicy plums and filled his trough with pure water.

But the young elephant would not eat or drink. He just sat there looking completely despondent. Worried that the splendid elephant would waste away, the anxious mahouts reported the situation to the king.

“Noble elephant,” said the king, “I decorate you with silk and jewels. I give you the finest food and the purest water, yet you do not eat or drink. What will make you happy?”

The young elephant replied, “Silk and jewels, food and drinks do not please me. My blind old mother is all alone in the forest with no one to care for her. Though I may die, I will take no food or water until I give some to her first.”



“Never have I seen such kindness, not even among humans,” answered the king.

“It is not right to keep this young, noble elephant in chains. Free him.”

Out of the stable, the young elephant raced through the hills looking for his mother. He found her lying by the lotus pool, too weak to move. With tears in his eyes, he filled his trunk with water and sprayed the top of her head and back until she gleamed.

“Is it raining?” she asked.

“Or has my son returned to me?”

“Yes, mother. I have returned!” he cried.

“The king has set me free!”

“Bless the king! May he rejoice today as I rejoice at being with my son again!” she said.

The young elephant then plucked the softest leaves and juiciest mangoes from a tree and gave them to her. “First you, then me.” 

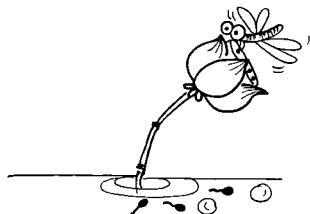
*Adapted from The Jataka Tales, Story 455.*

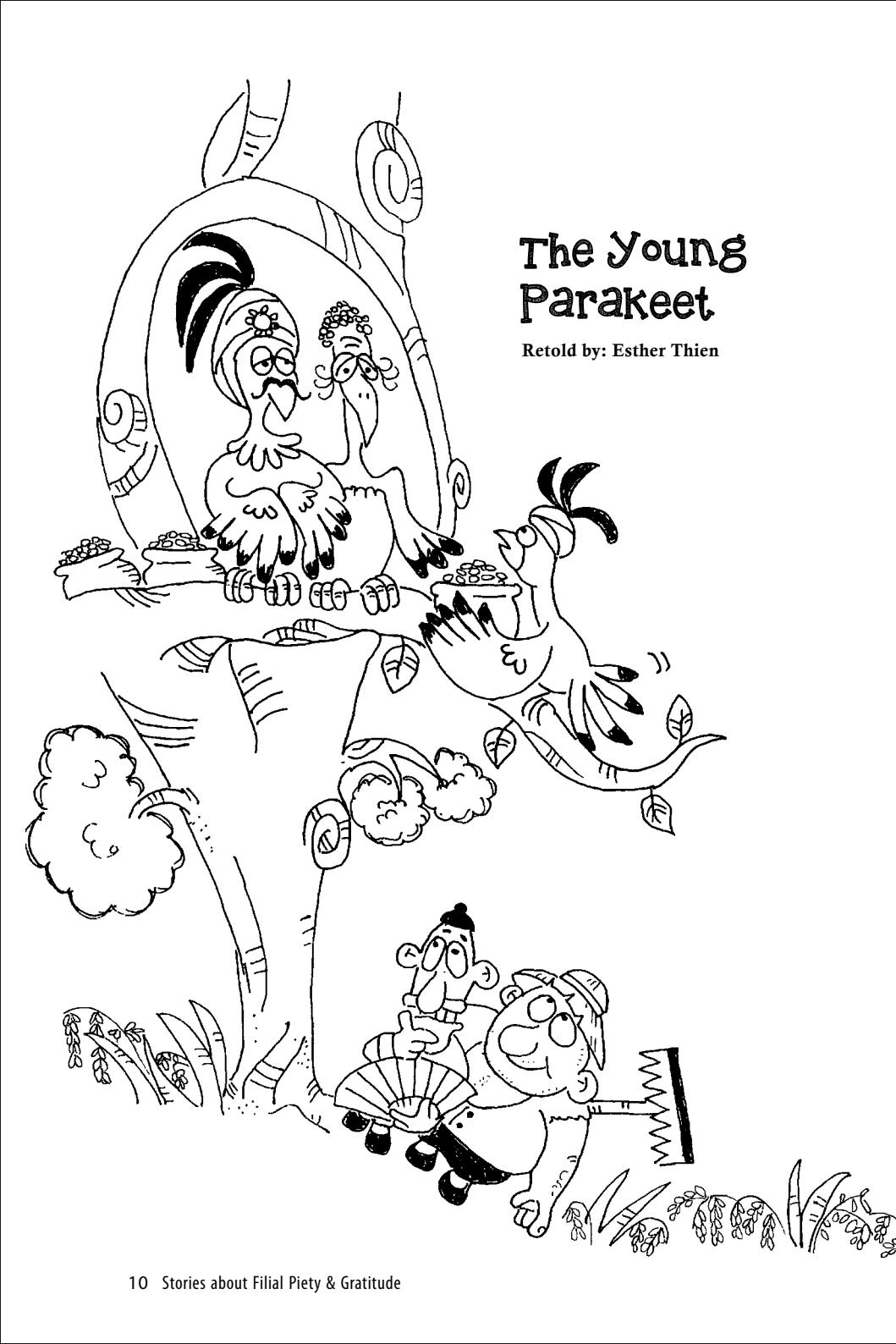
The Buddha said...  
If for company,  
You cannot find a wise and prudent friend  
Who leads a good life,  
Then, like a king who leaves behind a conquered kingdom,  
Or like a lone elephant in the elephant forest,  
You should go your way alone.

In this world, good it is to serve one's mother,  
Good it is to serve one's father,  
Good it is to serve the monks,  
And good it is to serve the holy men.

Good is virtue until life's end,  
Good is faith that is steadfast,  
Good is the acquisition of wisdom,  
And good is the avoidance of evil.

- Dhammapada Verses 329, 332 & 333





# The Young Parakeet

Retold by: Esther Thien

**O**nce upon a time, there lived a very great parakeet king and his queen who ruled over a flock of beautiful parakeets. As the king and queen were growing old with failing eyesight, they called for their son, an outstanding parakeet with magnificent feathers and a good heart, and told him that it was time for him to lead the flock. Understanding that his parents were no longer strong enough to handle the task and that they needed his service, he dutifully agreed and promised to take good care of the flock, just as they had cared for him when he was young.

Now, a wealthy man owned thousands of acres of rice fields surrounding the hill-top which the parakeets made their home. Keen to please his parents, the young parakeet saw some ripened rice at the bottom of the hill and so led the flock down to feast. A field worker employed by the landowner spotted this and was very displeased. He was in charge of tending the rice fields and so did not like the birds in the fields. He tried to chase them away, but of course, the young parakeet merely led his flock to another part of the fields.

Frustrated with the birds and nervous that the landowner would suspect him of pocketing the missing rice, he began to study the habits of the parakeets. Much to his astonishment, he observed that the most extraordinarily beautiful of all the parakeets was not only feeding on the rice, but also gathering and flying off with it. He had never seen such a sight before. Completely baffled over what he saw, the field worker went to the landowner and told him the story of the fine-looking bird that was stealing the rice. The landowner was not the least bit concerned with the rice, but was very curious about the bird that was collecting

it. So he instructed the field worker to lay a trap, catch the bird and bring him back alive.

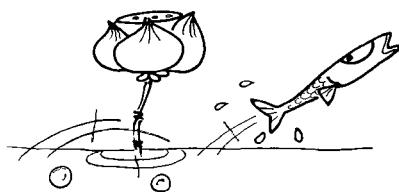
The next time the parakeet brought his flock to feed, he accidentally stepped into the trap. It clamped around his leg and caused him great pain, yet he kept quiet until the last bird had eaten his fill before letting out a cry of alarm that sent the birds flying in all directions. The cry caught the attention of the field worker who was tremendously pleased to see that he had caught the very bird he was seeking.

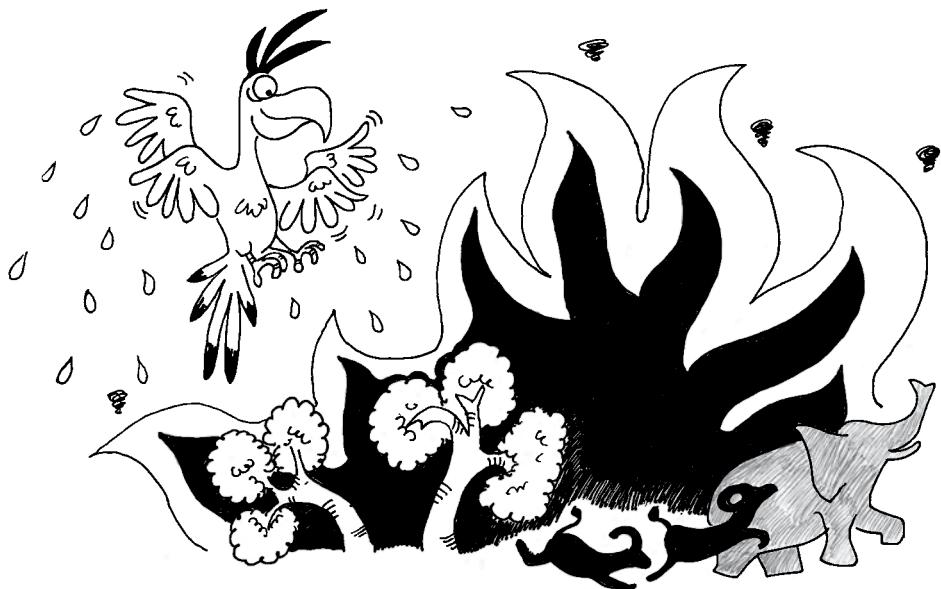
When the field worker handed the young parakeet to the landowner, the landowner questioned the bird about the rice. He probed the bird if he had a farm of his own or committed the acts of stealing out of acrimony towards the landowner. The parakeet answered that it was neither. He took the rice as a duty and obligation to feed his ageing parents, now that they were unable to forage themselves.

Hearing this, the landowner was so touched that he untied the bird and massaged the parakeet's legs with oils to heal the injury caused by the leather straps. He told the young parakeet he had never seen such noble and worthy actions before and for that very reason, he welcomed all of the parakeets to feast on his rice whenever they liked.

Before releasing the bird, the landowner thanked the parakeet for teaching him the important lesson of love and respect that a good son should always demonstrate to his parents. ↗

This parable demonstrates the importance of filial love. A good child should always show love and respect for his or her parents. Filial piety is a noble quality that the wise praise and we should practise.





## The Grateful Parrot

Retold by: Esther Thien

Long ago, there was a parrot that strayed into a forest on the mountain. All the animals and birds in the forest were very cordial and hospitable towards him and they became very good friends. After a while, the parrot decided to return to his own home and so he bade farewell to all his friends and left.

Time passed. One day, the forest caught fire and the whole mountain was engulfed in flames. All the denizens of the forest were trapped. They were in great danger of being burnt alive. Just then, the parrot happened to fly past and noticed the forest burning furiously. Immediately, he sped to a river and soaked his feathers in the water. He then flew back over the forest and flapped his wings to sprinkle the water droplets, hoping to put out the fire. Flying to and fro countless times, the parrot made a desperate attempt to save his friends.

At that moment, a heavenly being noticed the parrot trying desperately to stop the raging fire and called out to him, “Hey! Why are you so foolish? The fire has already engulfed a vast area of the forest. How are you going to extinguish it with the little bit of water from your feathers?”

To this, the parrot replied, “How can I not know that this is a futile attempt? Previously, when I was a guest in this forest, all the animals and birds were so kind to me and treated me as one of their own. Now that they are in danger, I cannot possibly stand by and do nothing.”

On hearing the parrot’s reply, the heavenly being was touched. There and then, he summoned his awesome celestial power to bring on a heavy downpour. The fire was put out and all the denizens of the forest were saved. ﴿

**This parable illustrates the importance of showing kindness and gratitude to others. We must always be mindful of the sufferings of other living beings and bring forth a mind of compassion and empathy. To those who have shown us kindness, we should be grateful and reciprocate their goodwill.**





## Sama, The Devoted Son

Retold by: Esther Thien

A long time ago, a boy named Sama lived happily in a forest with his old parents. His parents would venture out to gather fruits for their daily meals. One day, however, Sama's parents did not return. Worried, the filial son went searching for them.

Hearing their son calling out to them, the stranded parents said, "Son, do not come near us. We have been blinded by the poisonous fumes of a snake when we took shelter under a tree when it rained."

16-year old Sama was deeply saddened. With the help of a long stick, he slowly guided his blind parents to him. From that day onwards, Sama, whom they grew to cherish even more than before, was their sole support.

Sama tied ropes and bamboo poles in all directions for his blind parents to follow. He swept their dwelling place clean of leaves and insects, gathered their food and fed them succulent fruits. He bathed them and comforted them. Every day without fail, he would also go to a pond to fill a waterpot for his parents to drink.

With great love and care, he tenderly administered to their every need.

He moved about so gently, with great loving-kindness, that even the deer and other animals, which were timid of other men, were never afraid of him and accompanied him wherever he went.

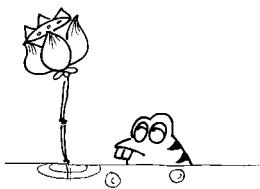
One day, as Sama was fetching some water, he was shot by King Pilliyakka. The king had let off the poisonous arrow as he was fascinated that Sama had the ability to tame the wild animals of the forest. He wanted to capture Sama and show him off to his ministers. The deer fled in terror and Sama fell.

“Whom have I wronged in this forest? I only have love and kindness for all who dwell here. I am not the least bit concerned about my death, but how will my helpless parents live when I am gone?”

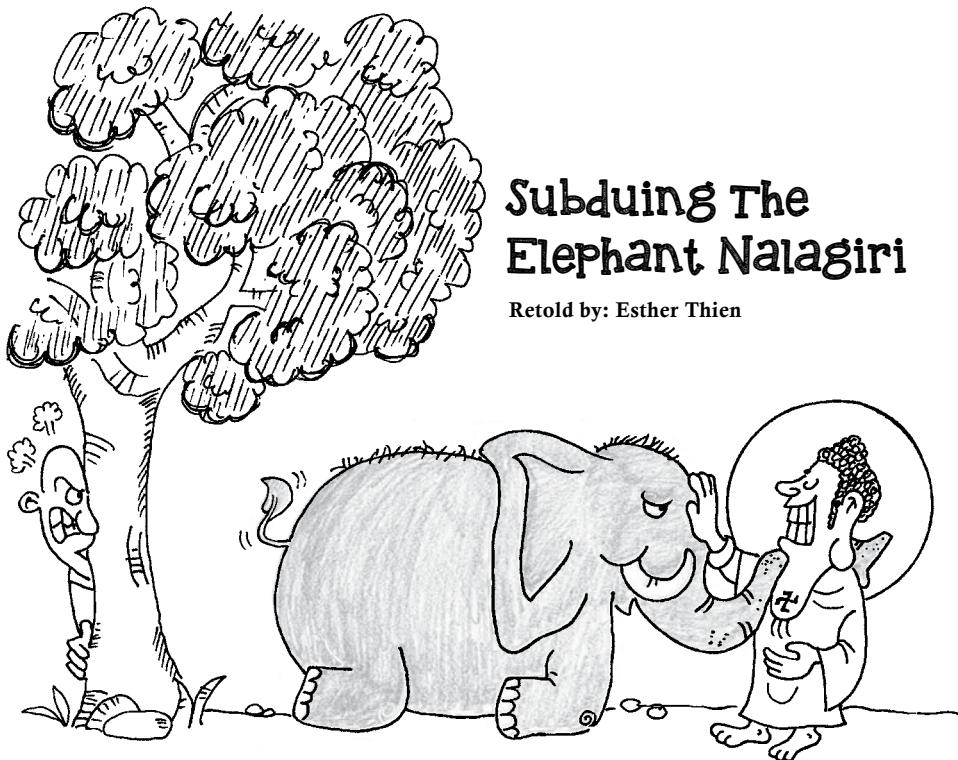
Full of remorse, the guilty king slowly went up to Sama. He asked about Sama’s parents, then set off to find them and confess to them his atrocious act.

Stricken with indescribable grief and sorrow, the blind parents came crying to the spot where their son lay. Feeling

some warmth still in the body, Sama's parents pronounced an Act of Truth and miraculously revived their beloved dying son. ග



**After His Enlightenment, the Buddha said:  
“No being was afraid of me; nor was I frightened  
of any. Boosted by the power of loving-kindness  
did I seek delight in the forest at that time.”**



## Subduing The Elephant Nalagiri

Retold by: Esther Thien

**D**evadatta was one of the Buddha's disciples and also his cousin. Thus, he had expected to become the future leader among the monks. To his surprise, the Buddha treated him like everyone else. This made him so angry that he plotted to harm the Buddha. After several futile attempts to kill the Buddha, Devadatta obtained Ajatasattu's permission to use a savage elephant from the royal stables at Rajagaha as a means to secure the Buddha's death. The name of the elephant was Nalagiri.

"The elephant knows nothing of the Buddha's virtues and will have no qualms in destroying him," thought Devadatta. To put the elephant on a war path and ensure that things

would go as planned, Devadatta fed Nalagiri some alcohol to make it drunk and crazy. Proclamation was then made, by the beating of drums, that the streets of the city should be cleared as Nalagiri would be let loose upon them. When the Buddha was informed of this and warned against going into the city for alms, he ignored the warning, and went into Rajagaha with the monks from the 18 monasteries in the city.

On seeing the Buddha, Devadatta had the elephant driven onto the path where the Buddha was walking. At the sight of Nalagiri, all the people in the city fled in terror. They scattered in panic in all directions, shouting, “Mad elephant! Run for your lives!”

Yet, the Buddha kept on walking with his usual dignity and poise.

When Ananda saw the elephant charging towards the Buddha in a wild frenzy, he went, contrary to the Blessed One's orders, and stood in front of the Buddha to protect him. The Buddha had to use his supernatural power to move Ananda away. Meanwhile, a woman in her haste and fright to escape the fierce huge creature dropped the child she was carrying at the Awakened One's feet.

As the elephant came close and was about to trample the baby, the Buddha radiated loving-kindness (*metta*) towards the elephant. So vast and deep was the Buddha's love that as the elephant reached the Buddha, it stopped, became quiet and stood subdued before the Enlightened One.

Then, the Buddha in his usual composure touched the animal's forehead, stroking it gently, and spoke softly to

it. Suffused in the Buddha's love, the ferocious elephant, to the people's amazement, respectfully bowed down on its knees before removing the dust at the Awakened One's feet with its trunk, and scattering it over its own head. The people further observed that the Buddha taught Dharma to the elephant.

The docile elephant then retreated, with its head facing the Buddha, as far as to its stable, and remained fully tamed. Usually elephants are subdued with whips and weapons, but the Blessed One tamed the elephant with the power of loving-kindness, transforming the animal's hostility into reverence. It is said that had the elephant not been a wild beast it would have become a *sotapanna* (the first step to Arhathood) after having listened to the Buddha's teaching. It is also said that nine hundred million living beings, who saw the miracle, realised the Truth.

The Bodhisattva, in a past life, was once riding an elephant when he saw a Pratyekabuddha. Intoxicated by his own glory, he made the elephant charge at the Pratyekabuddha. It was as a result of this action that the Buddha, in this birth, was charged at by Nalagiri. ප



**Show Loving-kindness to Everyone!**  
**Loving-kindness or Metta means showing kindness to others that they will be well and happy.**

We show loving-kindness to others by wishing them to be well and happy. Generating loving-kindness also helps to counteract anger and other negative mental states of mind.

One way to demonstrate loving-kindness is to help others so that they will be able to do things by themselves.

We wish ourselves to be well and happy so that we can do good and help others – and because we all want to be happy.

We should try to make our parents and teachers well and happy because they teach us so many interesting things that we do not know about.

We should try to make animals well and happy. Animals are just like human beings because they also suffer pain and sadness.

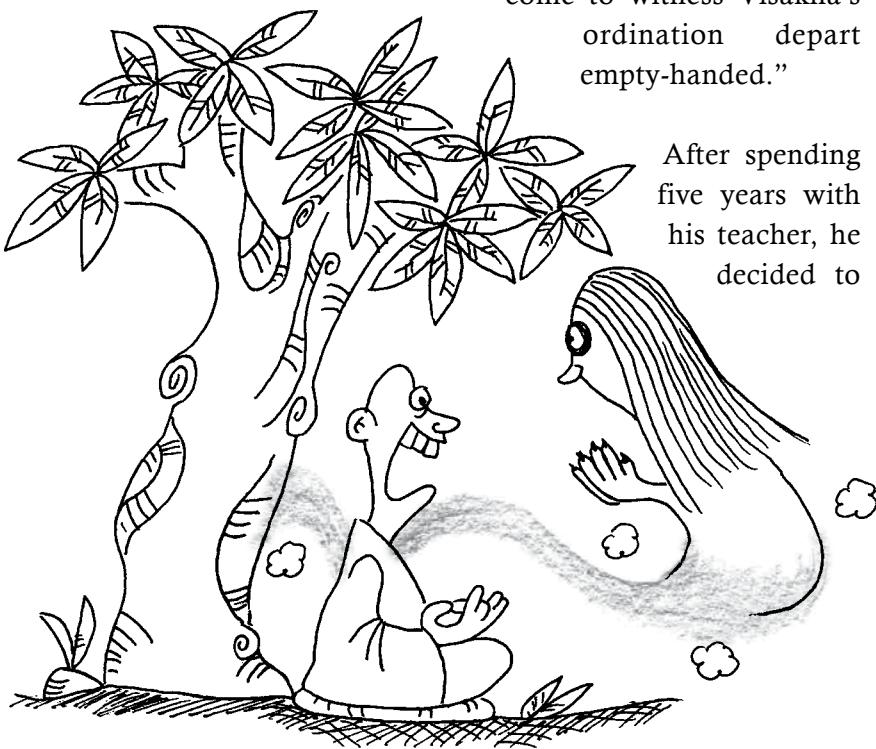
Before going to bed, we should generate loving-kindness for all beings. If we can always do this, we will be happy and peaceful.

# The Power and Blessings of Loving-Kindness

Retold by: Esther Thien

A long time ago, there lived a landlord named Visakha. One day, he decided to travel to Sri Lanka and spend the rest of his life there as a monk. Leaving his great fortune to his wife and children, he left with a single gold coin in his possession. At the port, he struck a business deal with that one coin while waiting for a ship and made a thousand gold coins.

When he reached Sri Lanka and was about to be ordained, he gave all his money away saying, “Let no one who has come to witness Visakha’s ordination depart empty-handed.”



After spending five years with his teacher, he decided to

go to the jungle-monastery of Cittalapabbata. On his way, he came to a junction and was wondering which route to take when a certain deity who lived in a rock there pointed the road to him. He was able to see the deity as he had been practising loving-kindness meditation diligently.

Time passed and he had been staying at one of the monastery's huts for four months. One day, he was thinking of leaving the next morning when he heard someone weeping. "Who is that?" he asked.

"Venerable sir, I am Maniliya," answered the divine being who lived in the manila tree at the end of the path.

"Why are you weeping?"

"Because you are thinking of leaving this place. Venerable sir, as long as you live here, the divine beings and other non-human beings treat one another with kindness. But once you are gone, they will again start their squabbling and quarrels."

"Well, if my presence makes all of you live peacefully together, it is good."

So he stayed on for another four months, and when he thought of leaving the second time, it is said that the deity wept yet again. Thus the Elder stayed on permanently and attained Nirvana in the jungle-monastery of Cittalapabbata.

Such is the impact of loving-kindness on others, even among unseen beings. ණ

Monks, eleven advantages are to be expected from the release (deliverance) of one's heart by familiarising oneself with thoughts of loving-kindness, by the cultivation of loving-kindness, by constantly increasing these thoughts, by regarding loving-kindness as a vehicle (of expression), and also as something to be treasured, by living in conformity with these thoughts, by putting these ideas into practice, and by establishing them.

What are the eleven?

1. One sleeps happily;
2. One wakes happily;
3. One does not suffer bad dreams;
4. One is dear to human beings;
5. One is dear to non-human beings;
6. The gods protect one;
7. No fire or poison or weapon harms one;
8. One's mind can concentrate quickly;
9. The expression of one's face is serene;
10. One dies unperturbed without being confused in mind; and
11. Even if one fails to attain higher states, one will at least reach the state of the Brahma world.

These eleven advantages, monks, are to be expected from the release of heart by familiarising oneself with thoughts of loving-kindness, by cultivation of loving-kindness, by constantly increasing these thoughts, by regarding loving-kindness as a vehicle (of expression), and also as something to be treasured, by living in conformity with these thoughts, by putting these ideas into practice and by establishing them.

- *The Buddha (AN 11.16)*





## The Holy Man and the Animals

Retold by: Esther Thien

**F**ar off in the Himalayan Mountains, there once lived a holy man who wanted badly to achieve a deeper understanding of life and its nature. One summer, it got so hot that all the nearby streams dried up and the holy man was forced to dig his own well.

During the course of his difficult labour, the holy man noticed that many animals were also suffering from thirst and many of them were slowly dying. Feeling great compassion and empathy for these creatures, he decided to build them their own trough.

The holy man spent hours and hours in the sweltering heat working on this trough for the animals. First, he had to chop down a large tree and scrape out the wood to make a basin. As soon as this was completed he started bringing buckets of water from his well to fill the trough. This effort took up all of his time.

Soon, the animals in the area became aware of the water trough and word spread quickly through the region. Birds, rabbits, mice, deer and even a tiger all came to share from the same trough made by this very generous man. As the animals spent more and more time at the trough, they noticed that the holy man was losing weight and beginning to look ill. They also noticed he was growing weaker and that in his generosity towards them, he had greatly neglected his own needs and had not properly stocked food for the fast approaching winter.

The animals spoke among themselves and decided to repay his kindness by foraging for him and collecting all kinds of things for him to eat. Together the animals presented their gift to the holy man, who was so touched by the animals' compassion towards him that he continued to fill their trough until the drought finally came to an end.

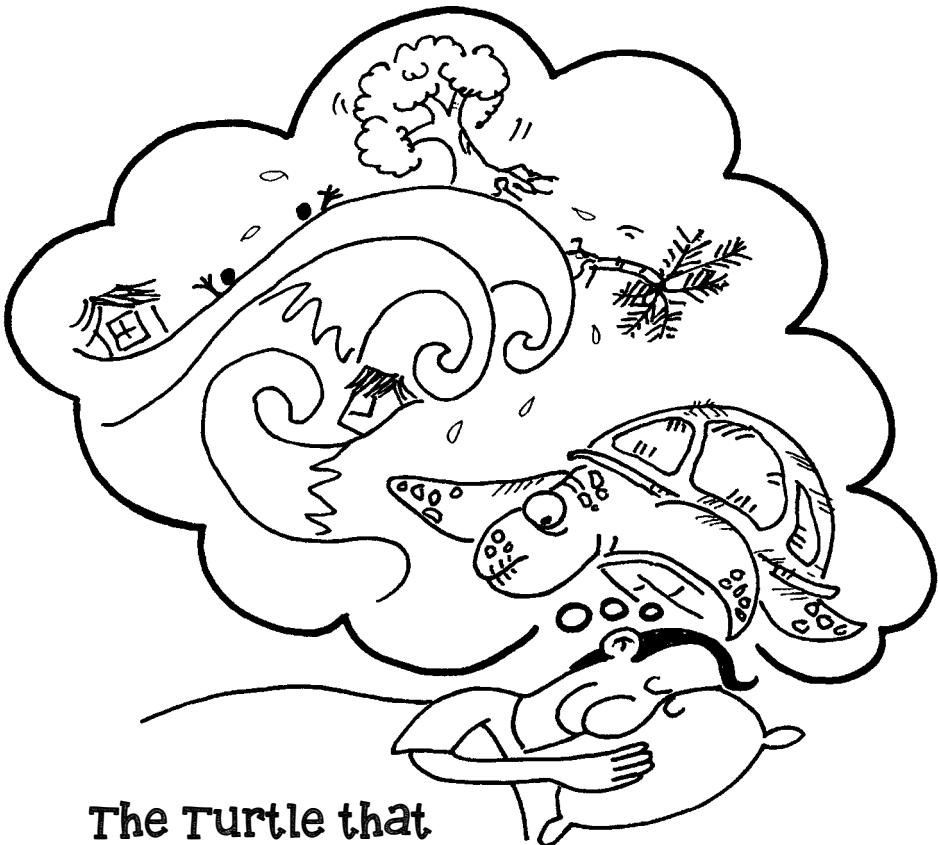
Although the drought did end and the streams did refill, the holy man and the animals remained friends. ☸

**This parable illustrates the importance of showing kindness to others. We must always be mindful of the suffering of other living beings.**

**When mothers who have been kind to one since beginningless time are suffering, what is the use of one's own happiness?**

**Therefore, generating the altruistic intention to liberate limitless sentient beings is the bodhisattva's practice.**





## The Turtle that Saved a City

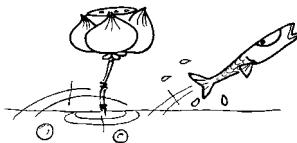
By: Wei K. Yong & Esther Thien

Once upon a time, there was a wealthy merchant who venerated the Triple Gem and was very kind and compassionate towards all living beings. One day, while walking in the marketplace, he saw a turtle being put up for sale.

Taking pity on it, he paid a high price for it and brought it home. He cleaned the turtle and tended to its wounds. After the turtle had recovered, he brought it to the river and released it.

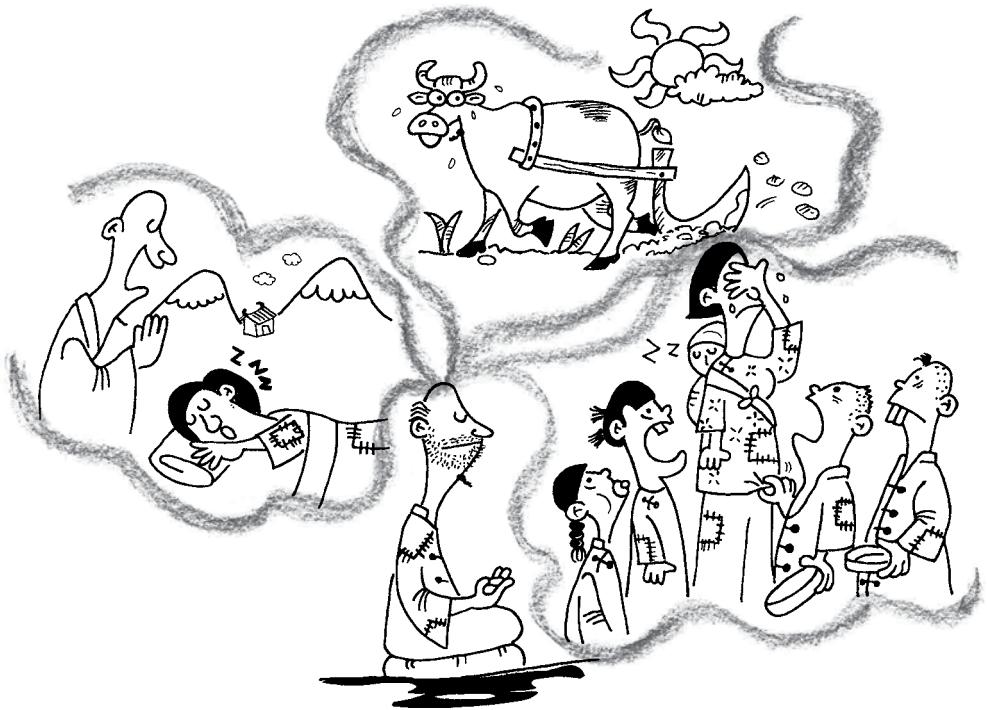
A few years later, in the middle of the night, the merchant heard someone pounding on his door. Upon checking, he discovered that it was the turtle that he had previously saved from the marketplace.

The turtle had come to warn him of an impending flood and advised him to leave his home immediately. On learning about the imminent disaster, the merchant quickly informed the king and all the people in the city to move to higher ground. In this way, everyone was saved. ☰



**This parable illustrates the importance of showing kindness to others. Instead of being swayed by the eight worldly concerns, especially of our own personal gain and loss due to self-grasping, we must always be mindful of the suffering of other living beings.**

**Bringing forth this virtuous mind of compassion and empathy, not only do we benefit others, ultimately we will also benefit ourselves and attain the fruits of happiness and enlightenment.**



## The Man Who Became an Ox

Retold by: Esther Thien

**O**n a remote farm in the mountains lived an old man with his son, daughter-in-law and their five children. For many decades, the old man was diligent in his spiritual cultivation. He integrated everything that happened in life into his spiritual practice. So, although he was poor, he never felt a sense of poverty. His joyful laughter and wisdom brightened everyone around him. All in all, they were a happy family.

Sadly, his son passed away all of a sudden one day. Not long after, the old man sensed that he too did not have much time left. The old man's greatest concern was his daughter-

in-law. He knew how hard it would be for her to work on the farm by herself while raising so many young kids.

After much meditation, he knew how he could help: he would be reborn as an ox in order to help his family.

Several months after his death, the family's old cow gave birth to a strong, bright-eyed calf. As the calf grew, it seemed to know what work needed to be done on the farm even before the widow did. For instance, when it was time to plough the fields, the ox would stand next to the plough and moo loudly till the widow understood its cries.

The ox helped the woman in many other ways too. Once, while working in the fields, she was bitten by a snake. Her ankle swelled up and became infected. Soon she could not walk and could only stay in bed, moaning from the pain.

Her children were too young to help her, but the ox walked up to the house and hit its tail on the porch. It continued until the woman crawled out to see what was going on. The ox then nudged her up on its back and carried her to a spring far inside the mountains. The spring stunk of rotten eggs, but the ox gently set her down so that her feet were submerged in the water. A few hours later, her swelling and fever subsided. If not for the ox, she would have died.

In this way, 20 years flew by. One by one, the children grew up and left home. Eventually, only the woman and the ox were left.

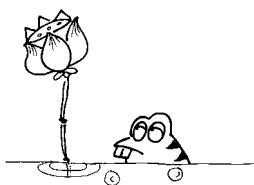
One evening, she fell asleep and had the strangest dream. She dreamt of her father-in-law, whom she had not thought

of in years, speaking to her, “Daughter-in-law, I know how tough it would be for you to raise five kids and take care of the farm all by yourself. So to help you and ease your hardship, I was reborn as your ox. I’m leaving now but another facet of me is living in a small temple on the other side of this mountain. If you would like to practise together, go to that temple.”

Startled, the woman awoke and immediately ran barefooted to the ox. Alas, it had died. She knelt there and cried, awed by the love of her father-in-law who was even willing to be reborn as an ox in order to help her.

When dawn broke, she set off for the temple that her father-in-law spoke about in the dream. After several days, she came to the temple and saw a young monastic who lived there alone. He was about 20 years old, and looked exactly like his father-in-law, right down to the mole on his face!

Her father-in-law had amazingly been reborn as both the ox and the young monastic! ම



**The ability and functioning of the mind is so profound that most people can't even imagine it. A single cup of water may not be able to do much but if you add that cup of water to the ocean, its combined strength becomes unimaginable. This is the strength of our fundamental Buddha-nature.**

But we are unable to recognise this when we spend each day lost in a thousand different kinds of dualistic thoughts. When we stop grasping at them and revert to our fundamental nature, the energy of our fundamental mind and the energy of everything we encounter will be able to function as one.

The energy of this combined functioning is beyond anything we can imagine. It overshadows even that of the oceans and skies, for it is the energy of every single thing in the universe, connected and working as one.

If you truly want to help someone, let go of all your dualistic thinking. Let go unconditionally of all your ideas about high and low, worthy and unworthy, human or animal.

When you keep entrusting everything to your fundamental essence, something deep within you will stir. This vast energy responds to whatever is needed and adapts by taking any form.

It is true compassion, and can take any shape – even that of an ox.

- Zen Master Daehaeng

# Prince Mahasattva and the Starving Tigress

Retold by: Esther Thien

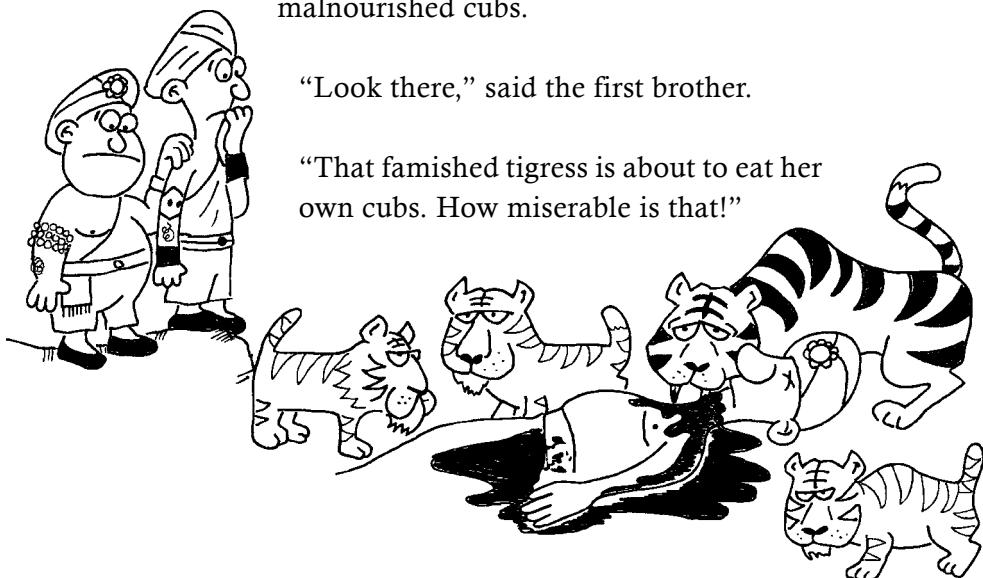
Once upon a time, there lived a devout and powerful king. He had three good and obedient sons, Maha Prashada, Maha Deva and Mahasattva.

One bright sunny day, the princes accompanied their father and his retinue on an excursion to a forest park. As the young princes admired the enchanting beauty of the flora and fauna, they wandered deep into the thick forest until they were soon separated from the king and his men. Noticing the princes' absence, the attendants reported the matter to the king. He ordered his ministers to go in search of them and returned to his palace.

Meanwhile, the three princes came to a mountain top, and saw a starving tigress almost on the brink of death with five malnourished cubs.

“Look there,” said the first brother.

“That famished tigress is about to eat her own cubs. How miserable is that!”



“What is their staple food, brother?” asked Mahasattva, the youngest brother.

“Flesh and blood is the staple food of lions and tigers, dear brother,” answered the eldest.

“The tigress seems very weak due to childbirth. She must have starved for days. How noble if one could sacrifice one’s body for their sake. But who would make such a sacrifice?” asked Maha Deva.

“Surely no one would be able to do that,” replied Maha Prashada.

“Ignorant people like us may be unable to sacrifice their bodies for the sake of another. But there may be selfless men of boundless compassion who would willingly do so,” replied Prince Mahasattva in a benevolent tone.

Casting a last glance at the helpless tigress, they left.

“I must sacrifice this impermanent body for the sake of this starving tigress and her cubs. Foul is this body; it is subject to decay and death. One may adorn and perfume it, but soon it will stink and perish,” thought Prince Mahasattva.

Reflecting thus, he said, “Brothers, please go ahead. I feel a little tired and would like to rest for a while. I will catch up with you soon.”

He went back to the mountain top, and as he hung his clothes and jewellery on a tree, he thought, “We must be compassionate towards all beings. To offer assistance and

service to those who are in need of help is our paramount duty. I will sacrifice this impermanent body of mine and save the tigress and her five cubs. By this virtuous act, may I gain supreme Buddhahood and save all beings from the ocean of suffering and cyclical existence. May all beings be well and happy.”

Moved by stirring compassion and selflessness, he jumped off the cliff towards the tigress.

The fall did not result in an instantaneous death. The tigress, though ruthless by nature, pitied the bodhisattva and would not even touch his body.

“Obviously the poor animal is too weak to devour me!” thought the bodhisattva. He searched and saw a bamboo splinter. Going up to the tigress, he slit his neck and fell dead in a pool of blood.

The hungry tigress quickly lapped up the warm, flowing blood and ate the flesh. It is said that the moment the bodhisattva sacrificed his body, the earth quaked, the waters of the ocean were disturbed, the sun’s ray dimmed, eyesight was temporarily blurred, heavenly beings gave cries of “holy one”, and celestial flowers rained down.

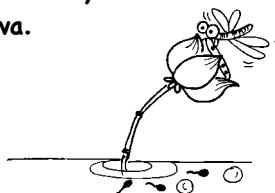
Affected by the earthquake and guessing that their brother had sacrificed himself, the two elder brothers turned and hurried back to the mountain top. They were horrified to see not their youngest brother but human bones stained with fresh blood and his clothes hanging on a tree.

They wept and fainted. On regaining consciousness, they

proceeded to return home with heavy hearts. Some ministers who had gone earlier to search for them returned to the palace with the heartbreakng news. Hearing it, nobody was able to stop sobbing. The king, however, comforted the queen and, mounting an elephant, sped to the forest with his attendants and brought back the other two inconsolable sons.

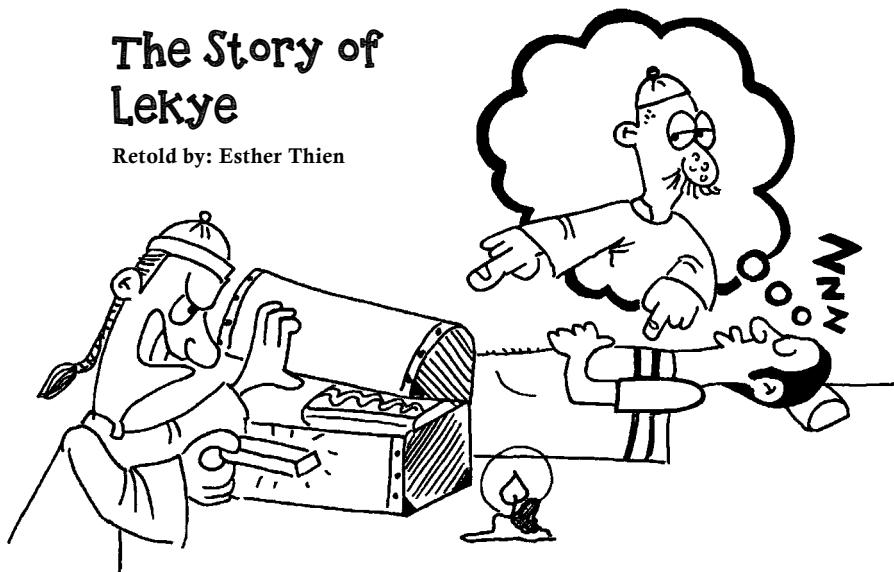
So great was the princes' grief that initially they were speechless. Slowly, they recounted the heroic deed of their noble brother to their bereaved mother. The king, queen and their entourage went to the spot where the youngest prince had sacrificed himself. Seeing the blood-tainted bones of their beloved son, the king and queen fainted. When they regained consciousness, the king ordered his ministers to gather all the hair, bones and garments of Prince Mahasattva and heaping them together, worshipped them. With a grief-stricken heart, he then ordered his ministers to build a memorial to enshrine the relics and returned to his palace. ¶

**Today in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal,  
stupas and shrines stand at the ancient  
holy site where this legendary story  
took place, which demonstrates the  
greatness of Lord Buddha's generosity  
when he was still a bodhisattva.**



# The Story of Lekye

Retold by: Esther Thien



Long ago, a son was born to a successful merchant. When the baby was born, the family's wealth and prosperity improved. Even crops grew especially well. Due to this, the family named the little one, "Lekye" or 'Well-born'. When the father died, the virtuous Lekye took over the business to support the family.

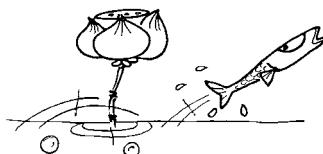
Once, during a business trip, he rented a room and fell asleep. Unknown to Lekye, the landlord was scheming against him. The landlord coveted Lekye's possessions. He took a golden statue from his own house and hid it among Lekye's goods. He planned to frame the merchant for stealing his golden statue the next morning.

But during the night, Lekye dreamt of his father who warned him, "Son, this is a treacherous place. The landlord has hidden a golden statue amid your merchandise. Take the statue out and bury it in the ground."

Awakened from the dream, the curious Lekye searched through his goods. To his surprise, there was indeed a golden statue among his things. He quickly buried it, as advised in the dream.

The next day, according to his original plan, the landlord accused Lekye of stealing his statue. The merchant denied the allegation, and the landlord demanded to inspect Leyke's possessions. The entire household searched every inch, but they never found it.

As the search was futile, Lekye packed all his wealth and returned to his own country. ↵



**The cause of these events came from Lekye's former lives.**

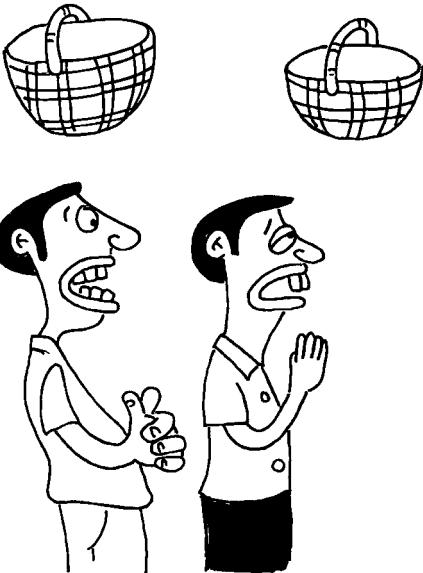
Previously, Lekye had been born as the son of a merchant too. Although he was involved in business, he always abstained from covetousness, harmful thoughts, sly ways and deceit. He was always satisfied with what he received and contented with whatever he had. Having practised non-covetousness for many lifetimes, he always enjoyed prosperous and peaceful lives.

This story inspires us to practise the Dharma by freeing ourselves from the grip of covetous and harmful thoughts. We should always rejoice in and appreciate what we have. The non-virtue of covetousness often leads to rebirth as a hungry ghost.

# The Same Dream

Retold by: Esther Thien

Long ago, there lived two close friends who were like brothers. One night, one of them woke up in a sweat after a strange dream. In it, he was holding a wide, shallow basket. As the dream bothered him, he went with his friend to see a Venerable who lived in a nearby temple.



As he recounted the dream, the Venerable burst out laughing and said, "Congratulations! You are going to be invited to a big party with all kinds of good food."

"This is a good lesson for you – even if a dream seems strange or frightening, always view it positively. Everything depends upon how we use our minds. Everything follows our thoughts. So be sure to use your mind in an upright and positive way."

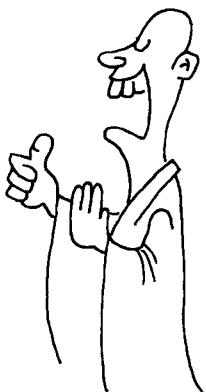
As his friend listened to this advice, envy began to stir in his heart.

"Good things always happen to him! How come things like that never happen to me?" he thought.

As foretold, the man soon received an invitation to a feast. He took his friend along and they enjoyed all kinds of delicacies. Still jealous, the second friend went to see the Venerable the



next day, pretending that he had also dreamt of holding a wide and shallow bamboo basket.



“What are you playing at? You’d better be careful – it means you’re going to get a real beating,” said the Venerable sternly.

The second friend couldn’t believe his ears. He went home, grumbling and huffing throughout the journey, “Instead of nice words of blessings, all I got was a warning when I repeated the same dream! What madness is this!”

That evening, some men from the next village assaulted him. He was so badly injured that he had to stay in bed for four days. They attacked him as he had started a harmless rumour about someone as a joke. But the rumour grew so large and out of hand that it started causing harm.

“This is so unfair. I only started a harmless rumour. As for the dream, it never even happened! How could the Venerable have predicted so accurately that I would be beaten up?”

Indignant, he went to see the Venerable on the fifth day, still bruised and aching.

“Venerable, to tell you the truth, I didn’t actually dream about the basket. So how could you tell I was going to get a beating?”

“The thoughts you gave rise to became your vision and destiny. You fabricated the dream hoping to receive the

results of it. Just as you wanted, you receive the results of it: scheming and jealousy.” ☰



You see, it wasn't important whether or not he dreamt of a basket. What mattered was his mind and how he used it. It makes no difference whether a dream is real or false, good or bad. This moment we are living in is the combined functioning of both the material and the non-material realms. They function together as one, so the thoughts we have can change things beyond all imagination.

A dream isn't something that happens only when you are asleep. The thoughts you have while awake also become dreams. For example, when you see someone who is suffering, and you stop and reflect how you can help, that becomes a good dream. If you often give rise to such altruistic thoughts, good things will result.

On the other hand, if you go about in life focusing only on your own desires, or taking joy in dominating and bothering others, those will also become dreams – bad ones – and those kind of results will return to you. If you keep this up, you will find yourself living in a nightmare. The thoughts you have will follow you around, so it is important to have positive thoughts. Even if you have a horrible dream, don't think that something terrible is going to happen to you. Turn that thought around.

All the lives and consciousnesses within your body follows from your thoughts, so learn to view things positively and have kind and generous thoughts.

- Zen Master Daehaeng

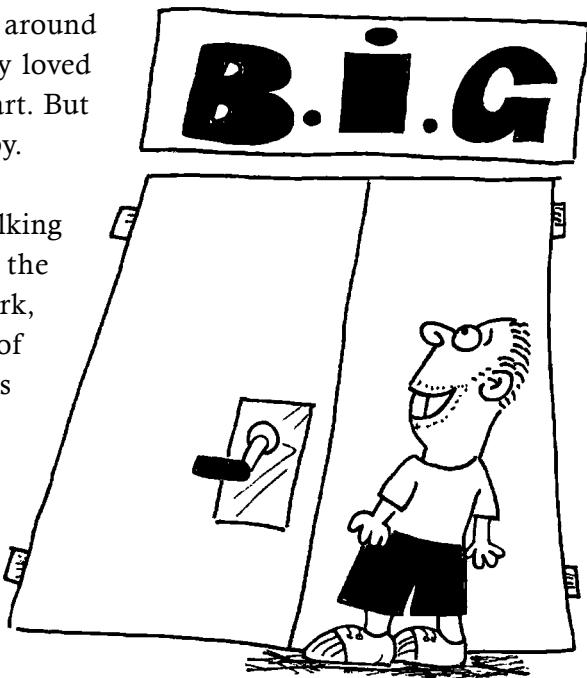
# The Little Man

By: Ng Pei Fuen

Once, there was a little man. He was dwarfish, so to speak, a mere one metre tall at an age when everyone was nearly twice that size. From young, he was unhappy. He hated the sight of himself in front of the mirror – a tiny, scrawny figure who was barely visible in crowds. He always tried very hard to make himself big. He held his breath so that his chest would expand, wore many layers of clothes so that he looked more ample, experimented with high-soled shoes, placed extra padding on his car seat so that he looked taller to passing cars, sat on a high stool before his customer service counter – you name it, he tried it. Still, he was unhappy.

Interestingly, people around him loved him. They loved him for his good heart. But he was still not happy.

One day, he was walking gloomily along the streets after work, trying to think of another ingenious way to become “big”. Suddenly, “plonk!”, a small piece of wood fell to the ground before him. He swore



and shuddered at the thought that it could have hit him. He looked up to see what it was and where it had come from. Lo and behold, there hanging inconspicuously under the window of the row of shophouses, was an old, rickety sign that said, “Want to look BIG? Come and have a chat with us.”

His heart leapt with joy, and he fell to his knees dramatically, placing his palms together and quickly chanted, “Thank you! Thank you for answering my prayers.”

Ending with a few more violent shakes of his folded palms, he quickly darted up the old, dark staircase by the side of the shophouse. Usually, he would have been too afraid to go anywhere so dark. But this time, he did not care. “Ah, an answer to looking big!” was all he could think of.

When he reached the third floor landing, he quickly located the door labelled prominently with the letters “B.I.G”. This must be it! He quickly knocked on the door, listening out for any sound inside that might tell him that someone was there. He heard the sound of feet shuffling, a cough and the sound of the doorknob turning.

As the door swung open, he saw a pair of eyes staring at him at eye level. At eye level, mind you! He had yet to meet anyone his size from birth till then! Inside his tiny frame, his heart sank. He had expected someone super big to open the door, a testament to the sign outside that window.

The pair of eyes scanned the little man, then an old wrinkled hand stretched out and held his left arm, “Ah, one of us! Welcome, young man, I’ve been waiting for you for a long

time.” When the door swung open a little more, the light from the room behind showed the face of a kind, serene old lady. He felt more comforted immediately and trusted her enough at that time to allow himself to be led in.

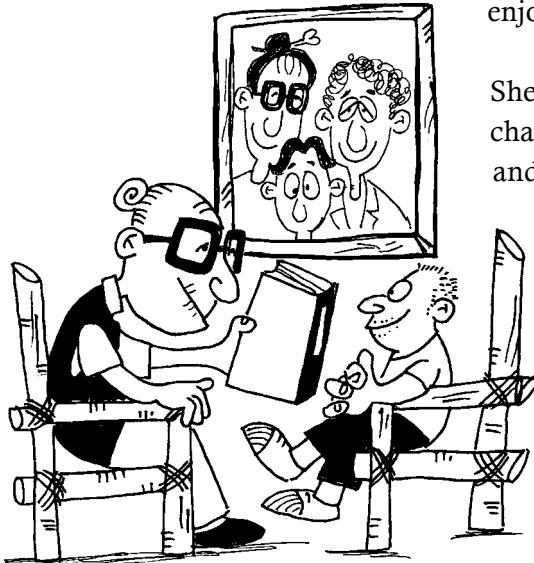
The room inside was small and bare. The old lady beckoned him to sit down on one of the two bamboo chairs available, and she walked into one of the two rooms in the small apartment. When she returned, she held in her hands an old photo album.

The little man scanned the whole room quickly. Old as it was, the room was neat and tidy. On the wall hung a family portrait and he quickly identified the old lady as the beautiful young woman sitting next to a man (her husband?) with a baby on her lap.

The old lady spoke, “Ah, that is my favourite family portrait. My old man has passed away now, and my son’s doing well.

But I prefer to stay alone and enjoy the peace.”

She pulled the other bamboo chair to face the little man and sat down slowly.



“I know why you are here, as all the other people before you. Before I start, I want to know why you are unhappy with your size. Don’t you have

parents who love you? Friends, colleagues, relatives? Do people hate you or look down on you that much?"

The little man blushed. In fact, almost all his family and friends loved him and more than once, reassured him that his size did not matter to them. His parents showered so much love on him that when they died, they left all their valuables to him. The cold, hard truth was: he could not love himself, being the size he was.

"Ha! Ha! Another unhappy one..." The old lady crackled.

"You people really know how to bring suffering upon yourselves. But well, since I started helping people like you and me, I have seen all kinds. I know how miserable it must feel inside. But I better introduce myself now and how I can help, before you think I'm taking you for a ride."

"You see, I was a world renowned seamstress. I trained under the greatest masters of the world. I even got into the World Book of Records for designing, cutting and sewing a full gown in thirty minutes. At the peak of my career, I met the man of my dreams and we got married. A year later, my son was born and we were the happiest family you could find. My son grew up over the years, but his stature was so small that his soccer friends always tackled him and he was often the target of the school bully. He became a very unhappy and angry boy.

One day, he came home from secondary school with a bleeding wound on his head. He stormed into my room where I was sewing the day's work and screamed at me, "I hate you! Why did you give birth to me so small?"

Those words broke my heart and I wept. I did not dare to talk to him, comfort him or even help him clean that nasty wound on his head. How could I tell him that I had no control over the genes that were imparted while he was in my womb?

For months, my little boy refused to speak to me or my husband and we were distraught. One night, I had a nightmare. I saw my little boy running frantically away from a crowd of huge men. They were looming close, almost catching him and they were so big that they could easily crush him just by sitting on him. Then I saw my boy fall into a hole. The big men surrounded the hole to see where he was. Suddenly, my boy sprang out of the hole – tall! The men were so frightened that they quickly ran away. When I woke up, I was both amused and worried for my little boy’s future. But that dream gave me an inspiration. What if I could tailor a suit for my boy that would make him bigger and taller?

That was way before the first man on the moon, mind you, and all that space suit stuff. But I began to design and conceptualise a suit that would give both height and volume to the wearer. My seamstress training only familiarised me with fabrics, but then I began experimenting with other materials, such as springs and swimming floats, which were inflatable but yet life-like. My dear husband was an amateur scientist and his help was crucial in this process.

In six months, our B.I.G. suit was ready. We happily packed it into a box and presented it to our little boy. When he walked out of his room the next morning, he was a beaming six-footer, looking well-muscled and sturdy. He kissed and

hugged us and went around showing off his new build. He became very popular and as he grew older, he progressed quickly in his career and soon found himself a beautiful wife. When he got married, he became unhappy again. You see, you cannot be wearing the B.I.G. suit all the time. When you shower or when you are with your wife, well, you know what I mean, you cannot be wearing it. So on his honeymoon, his new wife was shocked at how small he really was and it took her some time to get used to it. My son tried all ways and means by showering gifts and affection on her, in desperate attempts to make her love this body he hated. But over time, their marriage broke down. There was resentment and anger, but most of all, his wife felt cheated. How could he be one man before marriage and another man after?

They divorced and our son became unhappy again. This time, he was not so sure about the B.I.G. suit. He was undecided whether to ever wear it again. It was the cause of a failed relationship.”

The old lady suddenly looked apologetic and muttered to the little man, “Oh, sorry for the long story! I forgot to get you tea!”

The little man smiled gratefully and he felt both happy and touched by what this old lady was telling him. His heart was beating furiously with these silent questions, “Can I see the suit? Can I try it? Can I? Can I?”

He wanted to see how it would look on him. Incredible as it seemed, it was still the answer to what he had been searching for his whole life!

A cup of tea later, the old lady opened the photo album and showed him her son's photographs. At school, he was scrawny. Later at college, the picture of a confident, well-built young man flashed across the pages. The little man felt so excited to see the difference the B.I.G. suit had made!

Then the old lady took out another newer album and showed him the same man, now looking more mature but small, smiling serenely next to a woman taller than him by a head, clutching her by the waist. There were pictures of them with two little children playing and in all the photos, they were smiling so beautifully.

“This is his new wife. They married five years ago. He met her after his divorce, or rather, she bumped into his arms! Ha! Ha!”

The old lady laughed. “You see, my new daughter-in-law is partially blind. She cannot see beyond her hand held in front of her eyes.”

The little man gasped. Blind! His heart went out to her. He always had sympathy for people with disabilities. He nodded politely.

“But my dear son has never been happier. And he has given up his B.I.G. suit forever.”

The most beautiful smile spread across the old lady’s face as she reflected on her beloved son’s happiness.

“You see, when someone small meets someone blind, who can blame the other for being less than perfect? But the

most important thing is, when they met, they met each other as they were. They were not wearing any suits. They opened their hearts to each other right from the start, with honesty and acceptance of themselves and for each other. This is important for relationships to work. It also makes your own life easier. You just have to be yourself.”

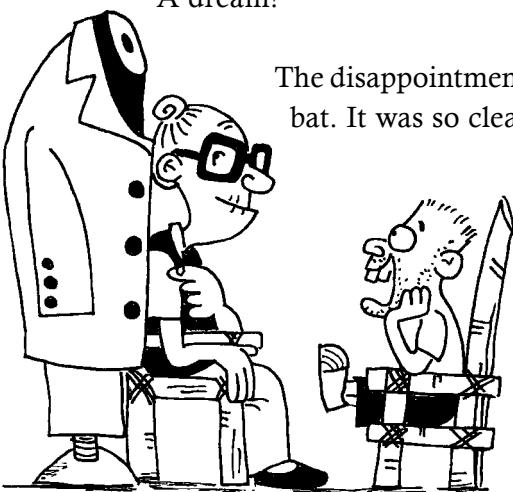
The old lady pulled her chair forward and held the little man’s hands in her warm, loving hands. “My son, do you still want the B.I.G. suit?”

The little man looked into her kind eyes and...

“YES!!!” the yell of the naughty little boy next door pierced through the early morning calm. “Yes, I want! I want it now!”

The little man jumped up from his bed as he mouthed the words, “Yes! Please do let me try the B.I.G. suit!”

He looked down at his body which was still the same tiny frame and he looked around him in confusion. Huh?  
A dream!



The disappointment hit him like a huge baseball bat. It was so clear and real and he could still clearly recall the story and the advice of that old lady. Disbelief was in his mind as he stepped bewildered into the shower, playing and re-playing the dream and the message it held for him.

As he stepped out of the shower, a body tinier than his ran into his legs and hugged him, giggling and screaming.

“Ah, you little cheeky fellow!”

As he swept the toddler into his arms, the baby kissed him wetly on his cheeks and his heart softened with love. He looked at that wriggling baby in his arms, this little nephew of his, who loved him truly for who he was.

“Brother, is baby in your room? Come and have your breakfast. I’ve prepared your favourite dish.”

As the little man walked out of his room, the morning sun illuminated the room with love and clarity. The room of his heart was brighter now. Perhaps the B.I.G. suit – real or imaginary – was not necessary in the first place.

As he tucked into his breakfast, he scanned the day’s papers from the sports page backwards. Three letters caught his eye. “B.I.G.” He quickly flipped to the obituary column and his jaws dropped wide open when he saw this caption printed in bold, “Maker of the B.I.G. suit passes away peacefully in her sleep”. Below that caption, was the face of the serene and motherly lady who had spoken to him in his dream! ↗

**Are you unhappy with who you are?**

**Looking for your B.I.G suit? Or B.E.A.U.T.I.F.U.L suit? Or E.L.O.Q.U.E.N.T or R.I.C.H or I.N.T.E.L.L.I.G.E.N.T or S.U.A.V.E or...?**

You know, we could fill up a whole warehouse with these suits and it will still not be enough. Some of us go through our whole lives looking for such suits, to beautify ourselves outside, to make ourselves feel more secure, to make us think that we are happy. We strive endlessly our whole life so that we can afford to be who we are not. It does not take that much suffering to be happy!

**Just stop, slow down and look deep inside yourself.**

**Peace and contentment come from within. Any kind of grasping outside only brings more pain and bewilderment.**

**With honesty, comes acceptance;  
With acceptance, comes tranquility;  
With tranquility, comes insight;  
With insight, comes liberation.**





## Princess Kashika

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once upon a time, there was a king called Tsangjin. His queen gave birth to a beautiful baby. So exquisitely lovely was the princess that she was named "Kashika" or 'beautiful daughter'. The princess's beauty soon spread beyond Varanasi until it reached the neighbouring six kingdoms. Each of those six kings wanted the princess' hand in marriage for their own sons. King Tsangjin had a tough time deciding who the princess should be married to.

One day, all six princes arrived in Varanasi accompanied by great entourages and adorned with splendid ornaments. As King Tsangjin paced the palace in anxiety, wondering what he should do in this delicate situation, Princess Kashika asked, "Father, what is troubling you?"

"The six princes from the neighbouring kingdoms all want to marry you. I do not know what to do. The fathers of the

princes I don't select as your husband will declare war and destroy our kingdom."

"Father, this won't be difficult. Tell all six princes to gather here tomorrow and I will choose my own husband."

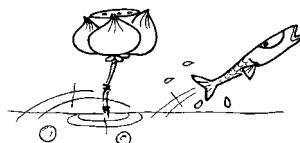
The next day, all six princes arrived with their magnificent ornaments, impressive entourages, glorious thrones and so forth. Each thought he would be the chosen one. Princess Kashika went before each prince unadorned by any ornaments.

In a beautiful and melodious voice, she said, "All kinds of bodies are like a magician's display, impermanent. All forms are like a rainbow that will disappear without a trace. This body is like an autumn flower that will fade easily and inevitably, so don't be attached to it. Why invest so much importance to it? Being a householder in samsara is the primary cause of suffering. All accumulated wealth is illusory. I have decided to leave the kingdom, devote myself to the Dharma and meditate in solitude."

With this, she left and became a nun. The six princes were so captivated by Princess Kashika's beauty and melodious voice that they followed her. Under her influence, they also practised the Dharma successfully and became free from all causes of suffering. ૱

Her power to have such influence came from previous lives, said the Buddha. Formerly, she was born in a family where lying was practised and encouraged. But as the wife in the family, she never told a lie and always spoke the truth. As she had never told a lie in her previous life, her speech in this life had a powerfully magnetic quality, and the princes spontaneously followed whatever she said.

This is the result of abstaining from the non-virtue of lying, and upholding the virtue of speaking the truth.



# How Asanga Met Maitreya Bodhisattva

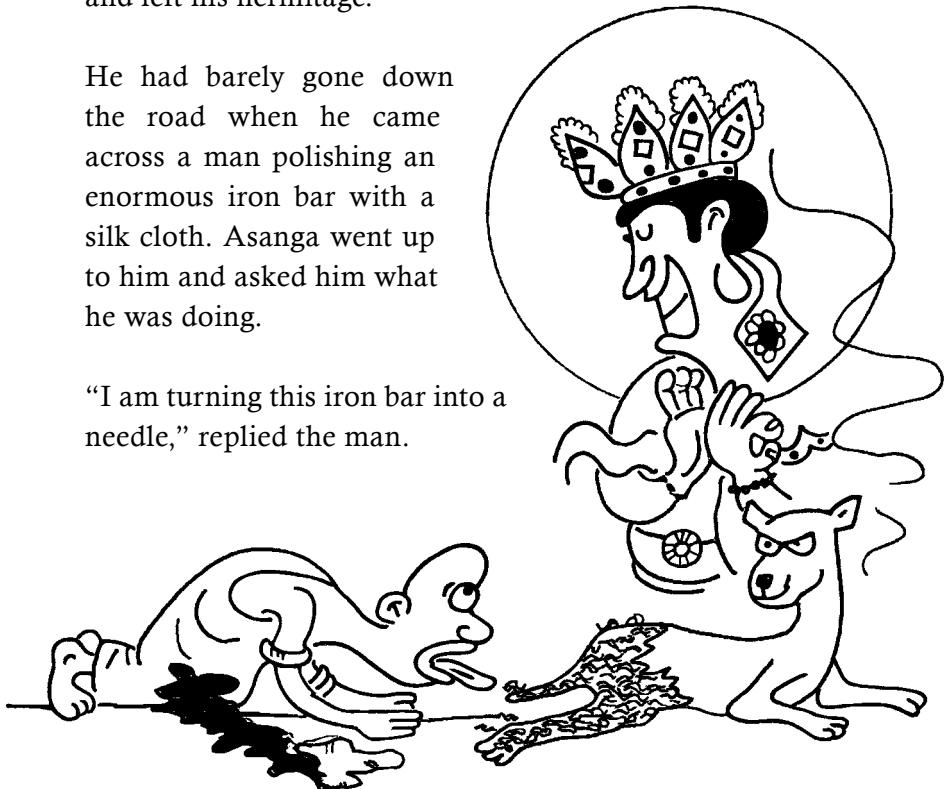
Retold by: Esther Thien

Asanga, one of the greatest Indian Buddhist scholars and practitioners who lived in the fourth century, wanted to have a vision of Maitreya Bodhisattva. He went to the mountains to do a solitary retreat, meditating on this Buddha-to-come with the aspiration to receive teachings from him.

For six years, Asanga meditated in extreme hardship. But he did not have even one auspicious dream about the Bodhisattva. Disheartened and thinking that he would never meet Maitreya Bodhisattva, he abandoned his retreat and left his hermitage.

He had barely gone down the road when he came across a man polishing an enormous iron bar with a silk cloth. Asanga went up to him and asked him what he was doing.

"I am turning this iron bar into a needle," replied the man.



Asanga stared at him, stunned. And he thought, “If this guy has the perseverance to make a needle by rubbing an iron rod with a silk cloth, I should be more dedicated in my spiritual practice for what I am doing is really beneficial for all.”

So he went back to his mountain cave and continued with his retreat.

Another three years went by, and still Asanga received no sign from Maitreya Bodhisattva. Crestfallen and certain that he was never going to succeed in his aspiration, he left the mountains once again. This time, he saw a huge rock at the bend of the road. It was so large that it seemed to touch the sky. A man was busily rubbing the rock with a feather soaked in water.

“What are you doing?” Asanga asked.

“This gigantic rock is blocking sunshine from getting into my house, so I’m trying to get rid of it,” answered the man.

Taken aback by the man’s unfaltering energy, and ashamed at his own lack of dedication, Asanga returned to his retreat.

Three more years passed in meditation, to no avail. This time, he decided, once and for all, that it was hopeless, and he left his retreat for good. On his way down, he saw a dog lying by the side of the road. Except for its front legs, the lower half of its body was rotting and covered with maggots. Despite its pitiful condition, the dog was snapping at passers-by and pathetically trying to bite them by dragging itself along the ground with its two good legs.

Asanga was overwhelmed with a vivid and unbearable feeling of compassion. Something in his heart just couldn't bear the anguish the dog was going through.

"I've got to take the maggots out of this dog," he thought.

But as he bent down to pluck off the maggots that were consuming the dog's body, he suddenly realised that he might hurt the maggots if he tried to pull them out with his fingers, and that they would die if he left them on the ground. He realised that the only way to remove them would be by using his tongue. So Asanga cut off a piece of his own thigh, knelt on the ground, and looking at the horrible festering, writhing mass, closed his eyes. He leant forward and stretched out his tongue. The next thing he knew, his tongue was touching the ground. He opened his eyes and looked up. Lo and behold! Instead of the dog, in its place was Maitreya Bodhisattva, radiating a shimmering aura of light.

"At last," said Asanga, "why did you never appear to me before?"

Maitreya Bodhisattva spoke gently, "It is not true that I have never appeared to you before. I was with you all the time, but your negative karma and obscurations prevented you from seeing me. Your twelve years of meditation dissolved them somewhat so that you were finally able to see the dog. Then, thanks to your strong, genuine and heartfelt compassion, all those obscurations and negative karma were completely purified and you can see me before you with your very own eyes. If you don't believe that this is what has happened, place me on your shoulder and ask if anyone else can see me."

Asanga did as he was told and went around asking in the streets of the marketplace what he had got on his shoulder.

“Nothing,” answered most people quickly before hurrying off. Only one old lady replied that he had got the rotting corpse of an old dog because her karma was a little bit better.

Asanga at last understood the boundless power of compassion that had purified and transformed his karma, and so made him a vessel fit to receive the vision and instruction of Maitreya Bodhisattva. Then this next Buddha-to-come, whose name means “loving-kindness,” took Asanga to a heavenly realm, and there gave him many sublime teachings that are among the most significant in the whole of Buddhism. ✍



This story clearly illustrates that what we perceive is related to our karma.

What we perceive is not always right. We have a lot of karmic obscurations and preconceptions and our own way of seeing things, thus the big picture is to observe all of that and then let go of them.

If we are so entrenched in our own perceptions, and think we know everything already, how can we ever improve?



## Self-induced Karma

Retold by: Esther Thien

In another story, King Prasenajit had a daughter who was bright and pretty. She was loved by her parents and respected by everyone in the palace.

One day, the king said to her, “My daughter! Born as a princess, you are enjoying this luxury of fine clothes and gourmet food, and loved by all, because of my patronage.”

As the princess had learnt about the Dharma, and understood the law of karma, she replied, “My father! All merits are self-created and are not given by others. What I possess today is the accumulated result of my past karma and not given by you.”

King Prasenajit was very upset at his daughter’s impudence when he received the same answer thrice to what he had said.

“If you really think you have so much merits, I would like to see how much you have,” he replied angrily.

Then he ordered his minister to pick a poor young man from the city to marry his daughter.

“If you’re really blessed with good fortune from your past karma, and did not enjoy your present wealth and respect because of me, your future will be equally good.”

“I have my own store of merits,” answered the princess with confidence, and with that, she left with her penniless husband.

“Are your parents still alive?” asked the princess to her husband.

“No. My father was a venerated elder in Sravasti. Unfortunately, both my parents passed away one after the other, leaving me with no one to rely on. I thus have to beg for a living.”

“Then do you know where your old home is?”

“I know the location, but it is now just a derelict plot of land.”

The princess then followed her husband to see the abandoned land. Walking around, the ground suddenly caved in and exposed treasures of gold and jewels. With these new-found riches, they built a magnificent palace and employed many servants.

One day, King Prasenajit asked about his daughter.

“The princess now owns a palace with wealth comparable to you, my lord,” replied an attendant.

King Prasenajit finally believed that the force of karma is strong and impartial.

“The Buddha’s words are true. We bear the results of what we have done.”

Once again, he visited the Buddha.

“O Lord, what karma had my daughter done in her past to have a royal birth and a beautiful appearance?”

“Ninety-one kalpas ago, there was a Buddha. When that Buddha had gone into Nirvana, a king had built a pagoda made of seven kinds of gems to honour his relics. His queen placed an ornated crown on the head of the Buddha’s image, and also placed pearls from the crown to the sides of the entrance door. Their glitter illuminated the areas around, and the queen made this wish, ‘In my future life, I wish to have a radiant appearance and be rich and noble. I hope I will never fall into the three evil paths or the eight calamities.’

That queen is your daughter now. Then, in the era of Buddha Kashyapa, there lived a woman who wanted to offer exquisite food to the Buddha but was stopped by her husband.

‘Do not stop me. It is because of my offering to the Tathagata that I have obtained my present wealth.’

The husband therefore relented. That man is now the husband of your daughter, and that woman is the princess.

Because of the husband's original intent to hinder the offering, her husband was born in poverty. His subsequent consent to the offering had brought about his eventual wealth as a result of his wife." Having heard this discourse by the Buddha, King Prasenajit deeply understood the law of karma. He became modest but contented, and left in bliss. රු



**Blessings of fortune and longevity are not the making of gods and spirits, nor can they be influenced by a third party. We ourselves have to nurture the cause before the effect of longevity and blessings can be reaped. When the fruition of blessings is timely, it will come unstoppable like the tidal waves. But when the time is inopportune, even fortune that appears right before our eyes will vanish.**

**We have to use this precious human life well and the good conditions we now have, and diligently cultivate a pure heart, doing all that is virtuous and wholesome. In this way, the delicious fruit of good fortune and eventually enlightenment will certainly follow.**



## The Karmic Result of Killing

Retold by: Esther Thien

It is said that during the Qing Dynasty, in the 16th year of Taoguang, there lived an illiterate man called Zhang A-xi. He made a living by catching frogs and teaching others the art of cooking them.

Even though the magistrate of his county had put up a notice prohibiting people from catching frogs, A-xi stubbornly persisted in the livelihood.

Everyone around him advised him, “The frogs are beneficial creatures that protect the crops. Even the government has put up a notice to prohibit us from catching them. Why don’t you earn a living by other means? Why do you insist on hunting them?”

But A-xi wouldn’t listen, and continued with this mode of work.

One day, there was a rainstorm which caused the water level in the river to rise rapidly. As usual, A-xi went to the riverbank to catch frogs. As he was not careful, he slipped, fell and drowned in the river.



Two days later, his corpse was found floating in the river with countless frogs devouring his flesh. ☰

If some woman or man who is a killer of living beings, murderous, bloody-handed, given to blows and violence and merciless to living beings, comes to the human state, he or she is short-lived wherever he or she is reborn.

But if some woman or man, having abandoned the killing of living beings, abstains from killing living beings, lays aside the rod and knife, is considerate and merciful and dwells compassionately for the welfare of all living beings... if he or she comes to the human state, he or she is long-lived wherever he or she is reborn.

- *The Buddha (Cula-kammavibhanga Sutta)*





## The Story of Queen Moonlight

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once, when the Buddha was staying in Kapilavastu, a couple gave birth to a son and daughter. The daughter was named Moonlight. When the children grew up, the father passed away and the daughter became a servant of the king. As Moonlight liked to take her meals in the garden, she would often collect flowers and weave them into garlands.

One day, she caught sight of the Buddha as he was going on an alms round. Immediately, she developed a strong devotion for him.

“I’m such an unfortunate person. Such a noble being of refuge is right here before my very eyes. Yet I don’t have

an opportunity to make offerings. If only I could, I would surely make offerings.”

The Buddha read her mind and with great compassion, approached her and said, “If you have any offerings, place them in my bowl.”

Thrilled, Moonlight filled the bowl completely with garlands.

She then respectfully prostrated at the Buddha’s feet and prayed, “Due to the virtue I have created from this offering, may I never be a servant again.”

Some time later, a Brahmin who was versed in reading signs and a friend of Moonlight’s late father saw her.

“Where is your family?” he asked.

“My father has passed away. My mother and brother have left and are wandering around. I’m now a servant of the king,” she replied.

Perceiving beautiful signs on her face, body and palms, he exclaimed, “Don’t worry, you won’t be a servant much longer. You will become a queen instead!”

Not long after, a king of Kosala came to hunt and saw Moonlight at the garden. He noticed her gentleness and all the significant signs.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I’m Moonlight, a servant of the Shakyan king.” she replied.

“You can’t be a servant, you must be his daughter!”

Shortly after, the Shakyan king invited the king from Kosala to a luxurious banquet in his palace. Again the latter queried about Moonlight.

Upon hearing that she was a servant of the Shakyan king, the king of Kosala protested, “This is no servant, but your daughter. Please give her hand to me in marriage.”

“You can have any of my many beautiful daughters. Why do you want her?” asked the Shakyan king.

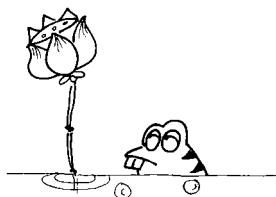
“I want only her,” insisted the king of Kosala.

So the two wedded and Moonlight became his queen. The couple lived happily and peacefully for the rest of their lives.

This story demonstrates the ripening of karma. In this world, karma and its results can be seen all around us. The variety of animals on earth, all those strange and various species, is due to karma.

When you plant a single apple seed, it produces hundreds of apples. It is the same with positive and negative actions. Even a small action, positive or negative, can ripen into a large result, just like a spark can cause a forest fire. Moreover, we cannot get away from the karma of committing negative actions by having others do them for us. ॥

Karma is infallible and ripens without fail. It ripens within the mind of the individual who has accumulated or committed that karma. Karma follows us from lifetime to lifetime and determines what we experience in the future. The potential results depend on the intention and emotions behind the actions. So meditate on the four foundations at all times and turn your mind towards the Dharma.





## The Farmer's Ordination

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once, at the time of the Buddha, a farmer went to Shariputra and requested ordination as a monastic.

Shariputra examined him but discovered no seed and no cause to attain arhartship in that lifetime, so he said, “Sorry, I cannot ordain you as a monastic.”

“People who have created terrible negative karma are allowed to be monastics. Why not me? I have not done anything bad in my entire life,” the farmer cried disappointedly.

The Buddha came by and asked, “What happened? What has upset you?”

The farmer then recounted the incident to the Buddha.

With great compassion, the Buddha took the farmer's hand and said, "Come, I will ordain you. You do have a seed to attain arhatship."

Shariputra became curious and asked, "Lord Buddha, what kind of potential did you see that I couldn't perceive?"

The Buddha clarified, "Thousands and thousands of aeons ago, this man was born as a fly. He was sitting on a pile of cow dung when a sudden gush of water caught the cow dung, along with the fly, and sent them down the river. Downstream, someone had placed a little stupa in the water and that cow dung swirled around and around it. Due to that act of circumambulation, this man now has a seed to attain arhatship in this lifetime." රු



**Cause and effect is so subtle that only omniscient wisdom can perceive every detail. Thus we must be very careful that our actions are truly beneficial. Reciting just one verse of a Sutra or one mantra, protecting the life of even one small insect, or giving a tiny item away – we should not ignore such actions and think that they make no difference if we do them or not. Many inconsequential actions will gather and swell like the ocean, and turn out to have tremendous impact. So reflect on the infallibility of cause and effect often throughout your day.**



## Repentance of the Ugly Princess

Retold by: Esther Thien

Long, long ago, King Prasenajit had a daughter who was very ugly. Although she was of royal birth, nobody wanted her hand in marriage. In desperation, the king found a young man from a slum area. He bestowed upon him a high-ranking post with a good salary on the condition that he must marry the princess.

Ashamed of his wife's appearance, the young man did not take her out with him. As days passed, his friends began to wonder if it was because she was too beautiful to be shown to others. One day, they decided to get him drunk, take his house keys and investigate the truth. Although

she had been locked away, the princess felt sorry for her husband to have to tolerate her looks. She knew that her ugly appearance must have been the result of her past bad karma and devoutly she prayed in repentance before the Buddha's image every day.

Strangely enough, as she repented in earnest, her rough hands began to get smooth and fair, while her tiny eyes slowly turned sparkling and big. As she prayed to the Buddha further, she became elegant and gracious. When the young man's friends saw that his wife was such a beauty, they went back and teased him for being selfish in hiding her from them.

The miraculous transformation of the princess soon reached the ears of the king and queen who were most delighted. To show their gratitude, they came together to the Jetavana Vihara to make offerings to the Buddha and his Bhikshus.

With joined palms, King Prasenajit asked, "O Lord! Would you kindly reveal to me my daughter's past deeds which had caused her to be born as a princess but yet be so ugly?"

The Buddha answered, "Every person's appearance is a result of his or her karma accrued from past deeds. It is no coincidence that rewards and retributions follow us like shadows."

Then the Buddha recounted to the king how the princess had in the past abused and slighted an Arhat, a realised being, and how she subsequently begged for forgiveness. Although part of her negative karma had been eradicated, she still had to suffer an ugly appearance despite a royal

birth. The Buddha's revelation strengthened the faith of all present, and they did not have any more doubt about the law of cause and effect. ප

Life is short, and its transience is often compared to that of foam and bubbles. Some people go after sensual love and pleasures, and live deluded and troubled lives. Others abstain from sensual desires, leading lives of pure, cool solitude. Being noble and modest hinges on one's thoughts. For the benefit of our personal progress and emotional well-being, we need to know the importance of repentance. We must always reflect on what we have done wrong, who we have wronged, and what we have overlooked, etc. If we can do this daily, we will become more accommodating and the spiritual quality of our lives would rise. But if we live day to day in the grip of our passions, chained by the prison of our internal desires and external stimuli, we will be unable to free ourselves from our fears and resentment, and our lives will just be an absolute torture. People who are willing to repent would not only transform their mind, but also their appearance.

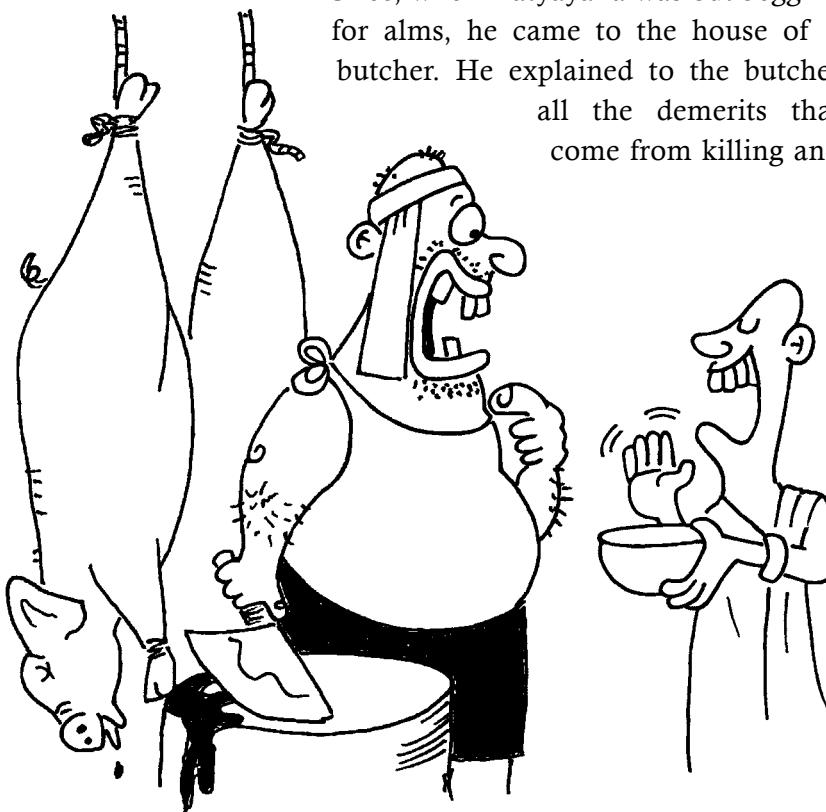


# The Power of Keeping Even One Precept

Retold by: Esther Thien

The Buddha Shakyamuni had many great disciples and each of them had a special skill. Some had miraculous powers, while others had penetrating wisdom, etc. There was one who had the great special skill of being able to tame the minds of people in the uncivilised border areas and he was the highly realised noble being, Katyayana.

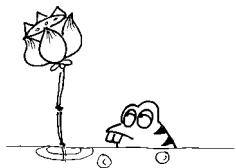
Once, when Katyayana was out begging for alms, he came to the house of a butcher. He explained to the butcher all the demerits that come from killing and



finally the butcher said to him, “I can’t promise to stop slaughtering animals during the day, but I can promise to never kill an animal at night.”

And true to his words, the butcher never did.

When the butcher’s life ended, he was reborn in one of the ephemeral hells, where he was tormented every day in a house built of red-hot metal during the day, but come nightfall, he would enjoy his time in a beautiful palace, happy and comfortable in the company of four goddesses. ☰



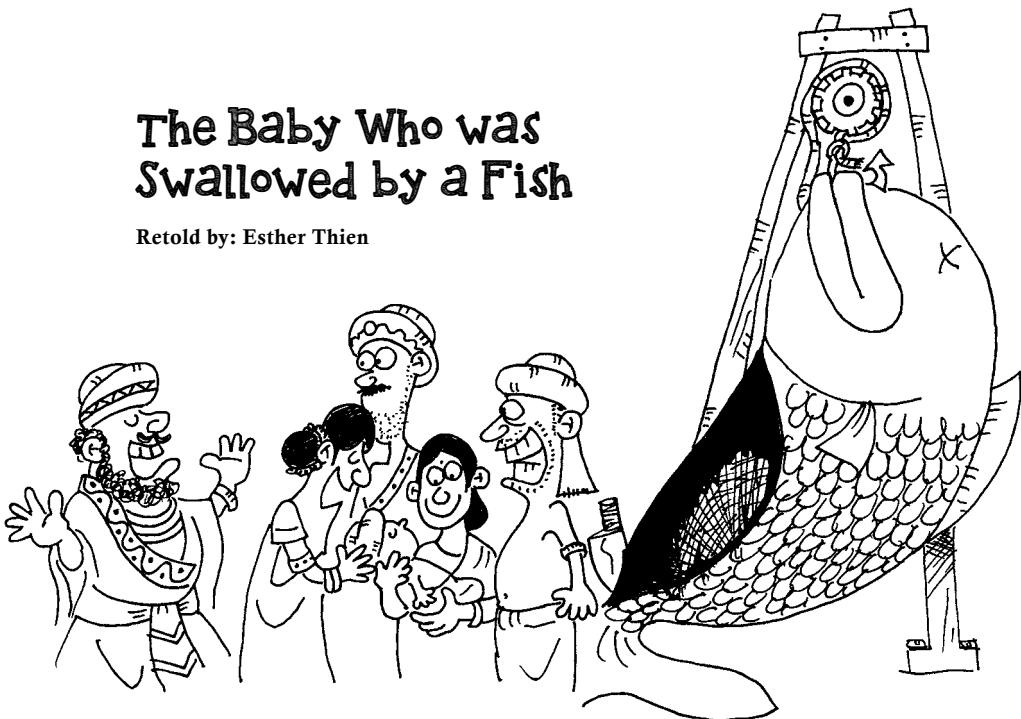
The Buddha explained that as the butcher had taken a vow not to kill at night, but continued slaughtering during the day, he had to suffer in the daytime for the negative karma he had created butchering animals during the day. However, as he kept his precept of not killing at night, he gathered merits and thus everything was lovely and enjoyable at night.

**A** long time ago, there lived a childless couple who earnestly prayed for a baby. Eventually, they conceived a child and bore a fine-looking son. The parents and all their relatives were elated. They held an extravagant party near the bank of a river to celebrate this auspicious occasion. During the celebration, all the well-wishers wanted to hold the baby. Unfortunately, as one woman held him while standing near the river, the child slipped out of her arms into the water. The child sank into the river and was gobbled up by a big fish. But he remained alive throughout.

Not far away was another village. A fisherman from this village happened to be fishing then and caught this big fish. When he sliced through the fish, he was shocked to find a living infant in it. As there was also a childless couple in the second village, the

## The Baby Who was Swallowed by a Fish

Retold by: Esther Thien



fisherman gave the baby to them. This second couple raised the child tenderly and kindly as their own.

News of the astonishing baby found in a fish's belly travelled and finally reached the first village. The real parents heard of the news and embarked on a journey to look for the foster parents.

"Not long ago, our baby fell into the river. It appears your child is really ours. Could you please return him to us?" they implored.

However, the second family was reluctant to give the child up.

"Your child must have drowned. Even if he had been swallowed by a fish, how could he still be alive? It wasn't easy for us to have our prayers answered. This child belongs to us. We won't give him up."

As both parties could not come to a settlement, they went to the king for help to resolve this dispute.

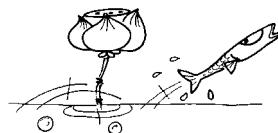
After listening carefully to both sides, the king said, "This child should be raised by both sets of parents."

In this way, the fortunate child had two loving mothers and doting fathers who raised him up with much love and luxury. When the child grew up, he went to both sets of parents and expressed his intention to leave the householder's life.

"When I was a baby, I fell into a river and was gulped down by a fish. Because of this, I had to experience excruciating pain. I can endure samsara no longer. I want to practise the

Dharma wholeheartedly to attain enlightenment. Please allow me to become a monk."

The four parents gave their blessings and permission, and the son ordained as a monk. He successfully practised the Dharma and finally achieved the state of arhatship. ¶

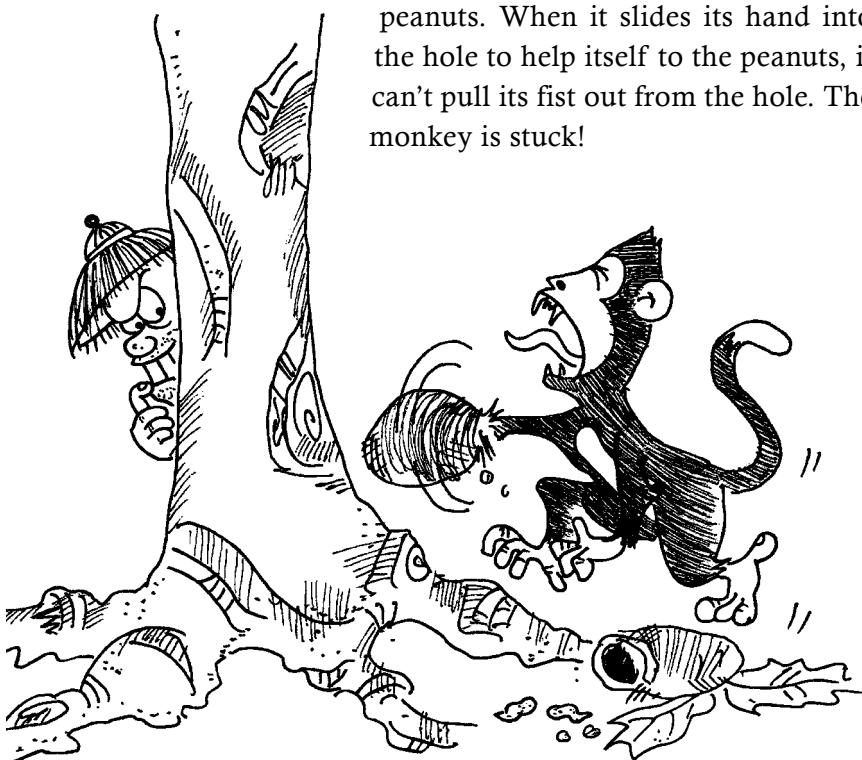


The karma that brought about these results was that in the child's previous life, he had offered a gold coin to a great master and vowed never to take life. Due to this virtue, his life was protected and he was raised in luxury by two sets of affectionate parents. When we encounter stories like these, we too should be inspired not to take life, but to protect and respect other lives, especially those of human beings.

# The Monkey Trap

In Asia, monkeys are caught in a very special way. The trapper first hollows out a coconut, leaving a hole just big enough for a monkey to slip its hand in, but not big enough for the monkey to pull its fist out. He then places some peanuts in the coconut and puts it in a spot where monkeys usually visit. Sometimes, this coconut is attached by a rope to a tree or staked to the ground. Before leaving the coconut behind, he would scatter some peanuts around the coconut.

Sooner or later, a curious monkey would come along. It would first eat the peanuts on the grounds before discovering that the coconut is full of peanuts. When it slides its hand into the hole to help itself to the peanuts, it can't pull its fist out from the hole. The monkey is stuck!



No matter how hard the monkey struggles, it cannot get free. It would cry out loudly and become more and more anxious. Actually all the monkey has to do is to let go of the peanuts, and it will be able to escape. But it does not want to do that. Finally, of course, the trapper catches the monkey easily. ↵



**No one is keeping the monkey captive, except the force of its own attachment. All that it has to do is to release its fist. But so strong is the force of greed in the mind that rarely does the trapped monkey let go.**

**The desires and clinging in our minds keep us trapped. All we need to do is to open up, let go of our attachment and be free.**

*- Adapted from *The Experience of Insight* by Joseph Goldstein*

# A Rose for Guan Yin

By: Professor Chandima Wijebandara &  
Esther Thien



**I**t was a full moon day. Samantha was up early. She would wake up early every full moon day to visit Phor Kark See Monastery to offer fresh flowers to Guanyin Bodhisattva. She loves the beautiful serene face of Guanyin.

Known as the Bodhisattva who heeds the cries of the world, Guanyin embodies the great compassion of all Buddhas. Also known as Avalokiteshvara and Chenrezig, Guanyin has great powers with limitless skilful means and can help all sentient beings by appearing in any form in all the six realms of existence to relieve their suffering.

Samantha also aspired to become a bodhisattva and help everyone just like Guanyin. That morning, she went to her

garden to pick some flowers to take to Guanyin. To her delight, there in the midst of the foliage was a beautiful rose that had just bloomed. Vibrant and dewy in a bright pink hue, it was just what she was thinking of. Elated, Samantha went closer and reached out for the flower. She felt rather sorry to pick it from the bush.

“But it is for the offering, so it is all right,” she thought.

“The rose may enjoy being offered to Guanyin.”

With that thought, she spoke softly to the flower, “Don’t be upset, sweet rose. I’m taking you to Guanyin, the most benevolent Bodhisattva. Only a very fortunate flower has the chance to be offered to Guanyin. You are very meritorious indeed. That is why you are born on this full moon day and will be taken to Guanyin.”

The rose seemed to be listening, and Samantha continued, “I will give you a nice name too. What shall I call you? Well, how about Merit? You love it, don’t you? I’m sure you do.”

The rose remained silent but as if it approved of what Samantha was saying, it nodded gently in the morning breeze.

“Okay, I think you are signalling to me to take you there now, aren’t you?”

Walking cheerfully along Bright Hill Road, Samantha came to the monastery. Walking up to the lovely stone statue, she sat on the lush soft grass close to the feet of the

statue, cupping the flower in her hands. Samantha looked up to see whether Guanyin was pleased. As if in answer, Samantha saw the beautiful and loving smile on Guanyin's face. Samantha felt bliss and joy all over her body.

"What a very blessed morning this is. I'm also growing to be a loving being just like Guanyin," she thought happily.

She put the rose gently near the feet of the Guanyin statue and felt very joyful.

"The little novice monk statues around the Guanyin statue are looking at the rose," thought Samantha.

And she thought the rose also looked as if it were smiling. Samantha knelt on the grass carefully, placed her palms together and started chanting: "*Namo Guan Shi Yin Pusa, Namo Guan Shi Yin Pusa...*"

After her prayer, she murmured, "Dear Bodhisattva, please accept my rose. Her name is Merit."

"I have to go now, sweet rose. Mummy is waiting for me. You will be happy with Guanyin. Remember if anyone asks, your name is Merit, okay?" she said softly to the flower.

After Samantha left, an ant soon came up to the flower.

"What a beautiful and fresh rose this is. Aren't I lucky this morning!" thought the ant.

"May I obtain some nectar from you, sweet rose?" asked the ant.

“Why not? By the way, call me Merit. That is the name I have been given, and Guanyin Bodhisattva knows it too.”

“Surprise, surprise! A rose with a name,” and the ant started sucking sweet nectar from the rose. It wasn’t long before the ant heard a humming sound and saw a bee approaching him.

“This rose is mine. The nectar here is just for me. I will not allow the bee to come to my flower,” thought the ant.

To chase his opponent away, he started singing aloud, “Fragrant and sweet, I’m having a treat. Come no closer, bid a hasty retreat.”

“Who goes there?” asked the bee.

“It’s me, the owner of the rose, who else?” answered the ant. “Owner of the rose? How can anyone own a bloom offered to Guanyin?”

“Well, this is a special flower with a name and it’s mine.”

“Stop this nonsense, my friend, and let us enjoy the sweet nectar together. I’m hungry too,” replied the bee.

The ant was still unwilling to share, and ready to fight. The bee, being a peaceful fellow, wanted no quarrel. He wanted only some nectar.

Merit the Rose intervened, “Please do not fight. There is enough for the both of you. Don’t you know Guanyin wants us to share everything possible and live as friends?”

But the ant wouldn't listen, and he was getting annoyed with Merit too.

"You keep quiet. Let me deal with him. Charity can wait, I want to enjoy my meal first, okay!"

"You are behaving foolishly by being greedy and angry. Be warned that you will regret it one day, and that day may not be far," sighed Merit the Rose.

Listening to the conversation, the bee asked the ant, "The Buddha instructed people to root out greed and anger, and Guanyin Bodhisattva teaches compassion and loving-kindness. You come everyday just to enjoy the nectar? Have you not listened to any teaching at the monastery?"

"I do not care about the Buddha's teachings. I only want you to go away and leave me to eat my meal in peace. Or are you spoiling for a fight?" the ant repeated.

"Why should I get into so much agitation just for some nectar? There are many flowers around here."

And so the bee flew to a red flower that was placed next to the rose. A caterpillar was chewing on a soft petal.

"I heard everything," said the caterpillar.

But the bee merely smiled in reply. The caterpillar continued to enjoy the petals while the bee sucked the nectar. The next moment, thunder roared and raindrops started pelting down. It was as if the heavens above opened the floodgates

and let loose a torrential blanket of rain. The caterpillar found shelter under a petal, whilst the bee flew and obtained solace in the robe folds of the Guanyin statue. But the greedy ant did not want to move. He continued to enjoy the delicious nectar of Merit the Rose. Before long, the rose was steeped with water like a little pond. But to the ant it was like a huge pond. The ant only realised his foolishness when he saw he could not get out of the rose and would drown.

“Help! Help!” he shouted.

“Somebody, help me please! I’m going to die!” he screeched.

Merit the Rose was worried. Even though she felt like asking the ant whether he had realised by now the price to pay for being greedy and selfish, she did not.



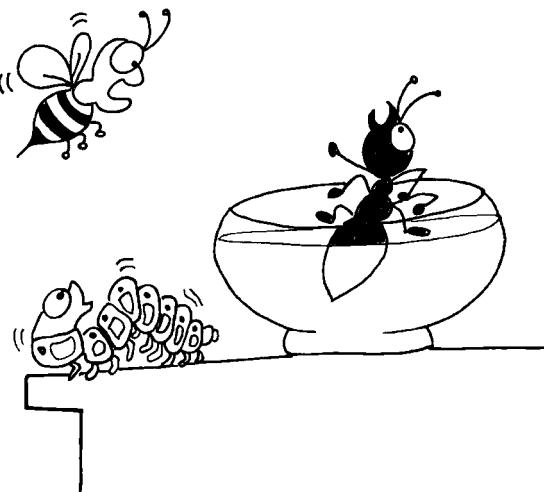
“It is not the time to moralise when someone is in trouble,” she thought.

She wanted to save the ant, but what could she do? Even though saving lives is meritorious, she was only a flower.

“Somebody, please help the ant. He will drown. Please save him, please!” she cried.

The caterpillar heard the plea and immediately rushed to the ant’s aid. He allowed the ant to crawl onto his setaceous body. The ant felt safe out of water. The rain subsided too. Everything was fine except for one thing. The ant was itchy all over his body, as the caterpillar setae were poisonous. They cause itching on contact. Now, the ant was howling in pain.

“It is not as bad as death, is it?” laughed the caterpillar at the ant.



“Please, this is not the time to laugh,” begged the ant.

“Please do something. I might die in pain.”

Having seen what children do when they experienced such problems, the bee suggested the ant anoint oil for relief from the itch.

“My friend, do not worry. There is some oil in a lamp near the shrine. It will heal you in seconds.”

The ant rushed there and dipped himself in oil. No sooner had he done that than the pain disappeared. The ant was smiling again as he was all right now. Everybody had a good laugh at what happened.

But for the ant, he learned a very good lesson about life and benefited much.

“I will never be greedy again,” he promised.

“You must control your anger too,” said the bee.

“And be humble and listen when someone gives a piece of good advice,” added Merit the Rose.

“You must also help others when they are in trouble,” chimed in the caterpillar.

“I promise. In the presence of the compassionate Guanyin Bodhisattva, I will do all that,” pledged the ant solemnly. ﴿

**Good things come to one who has a pure heart.**

**One who is foolish, greedy and angry will only experience bad results.**



# The Miserly Man

Retold by: Esther Thien

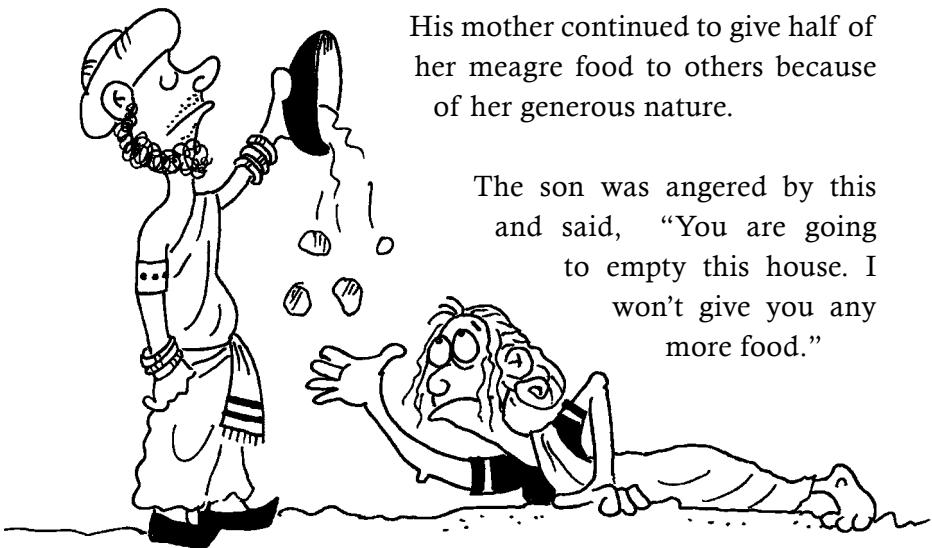
Once, there was a family with the wife very devoted to the Dharma and delighting in the practice of generosity. A son was born into this family, and it soon became apparent that he had a miserly nature. He continually obstructed his mother's desire to give things away. When his father passed away, he assumed responsibility for the household. Whenever his mother tried to give things to others, he always prevented her from doing so.

One day the son said, "It looks like you don't want any wealth in our house, so stay out of our affairs. I will take care of the house by myself."

The son did not allow his mother to have any authority in the house; he only gave her enough food each day to survive.

His mother continued to give half of her meagre food to others because of her generous nature.

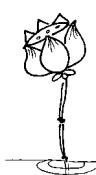
The son was angered by this and said, "You are going to empty this house. I won't give you any more food."



He kept her without food for six days, after which his mother begged for some food. He threw a handful of dust into a bowl of water and gave it to her. The mother drank it but soon died of starvation.

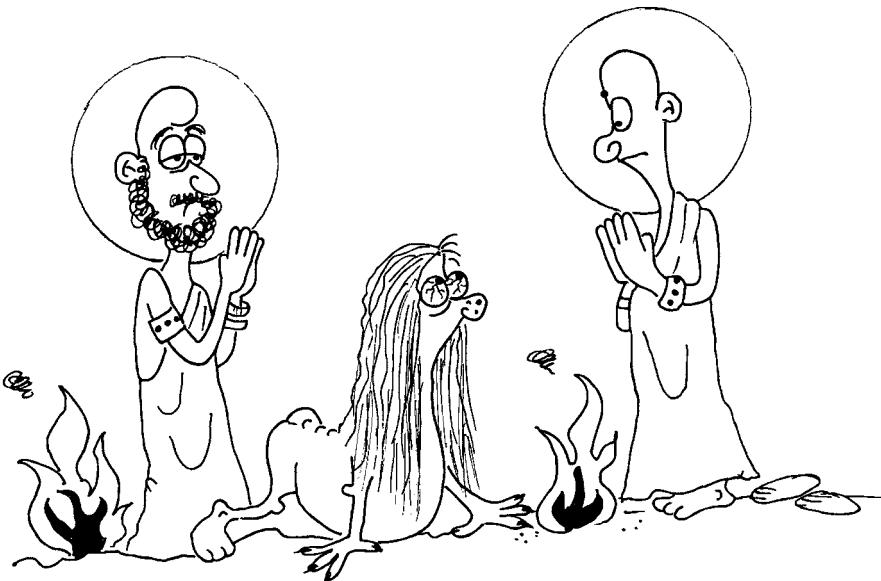
As a result of this karma, the son was reborn in the Howling Hell for many aeons, and then in the hungry ghost realm for many more aeons. Even when he was born again as a human being, he held on to his miserliness, and ended up being reborn as a hungry ghost for still more lifetimes. Finally, he regained another human rebirth, but was born into circumstances where he was always hungry. Once, he saw a monk, who was a Prateyekabuddha, receiving offerings on his alms round, and this aroused jealousy and miserliness in his mind. He stole the monk's begging bowl and threw it on the ground. Due to that karma, he was repeatedly born into poverty.

After many such lifetimes, Buddha Kashyapa appeared on earth and the man felt devotion for the Buddha. Due to that connection, he was born as a human during Buddha Shakyamuni's time and had the opportunity to meet the Buddha. Understanding what the Buddha taught, he did everything he could to purify his negative thoughts and habitual tendencies. He succeeded in purifying his negative mental patterns and achieved a high level of realisation. །



**This story demonstrates the possibility of purification, even after many lifetimes of misdeeds. We should be inspired by this story to purify all our negative thoughts and sincerely practise the Dharma.**

*- Khenchen Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche*



## The Story of the Hungry Ghost

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once, when the Buddha was staying in Rajgir, Maudgalyayana and Shariputra generated and sincerely practised bodhicitta. Wanting to benefit sentient beings, they then went to the lower realms and encountered a female hungry ghost. An old woman, she had a belly as large as a valley and a mouth as small as the eye of a needle. Hair covered her entire body and fire blazed from her mouth. She was in great suffering, moaning and weeping in anguish. Food and drink appeared to her as blood and pus. Yet, even then she did not have the good fortune to be able to eat or drink at all, not even the excrement and urine she perceived.

“What karma did you create that led you to endure such terrible suffering?” asked the two great Venerables.

“Please ask the Buddha that question,” replied the pitiful hungry ghost.

They went to the Buddha who told them the cause:

In the past, many lifetimes ago, there lived a rich merchant who owned a huge sugar cane factory. At that time, a solitary realiser with very few possessions resided in a nearby forest. Suffering from an unquenchable thirst, the solitary realiser (Pratyekabuddha) sought treatment from a doctor and was advised to drink sugar cane juice. So he went to ask some from the merchant. The merchant agreed. But as he was rushing to attend to an important business, the merchant instructed his servant to offer the juice.

The merchant's helper was very stingy.

"If I give him enough juice now, he would come back again and again, asking for more," she thought disdainfully.

So to prevent this from happening, the helper disrespectfully filled the alms bowl with goat's urine and placed some bubbles of sugar cane juice on top, and returned it to the solitary realiser. The noble one understood her nature and threw it on the ground.

This was the act that caused her to be reborn as a hungry ghost, explained the Buddha. །



**Considering this story, we should purify our mental stinginess and greed. We should practise the virtue of generosity and regard wealth – our own or others' – without attachment.**

*- Khenchen Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche*



## A Parable about a Yaksha

Retold by: Esther Thien

Buddha Shakyamuni often told his disciples to be respectful and forgiving towards one another, so as to live harmoniously and be able to concentrate on their spiritual cultivation. Still, disputes and conflicts could not be avoided due to differences in individual opinions.

One day, two monastics had an argument that developed into a serious quarrel. When mediation by the rest of the community proved unsuccessful, the matter was brought before the Buddha. Seeing the fiery rage on the angry faces of the two monks, the Buddha assembled his disciples and told the following story:

Once there was a yaksha who was small and hideous. One day, this yaksha came to the Heaven of the Thirty-three and audaciously sat on the throne that belonged to King Sakka. The moment he sat down, all the celestial beings of this heaven were furious and reprimanded him bitterly for his insolence. As the scolding and ranting continued, the yaksha grew taller in stature and became better looking. When the heavenly beings saw the change, they became even more livid, while the yaksha continued morphing into a fine-looking, well-built form.

Not knowing what to do with the situation, the divine beings highlighted the matter to King Sakka.

“This yaksha must be someone extraordinary!” thought King Sakka immediately.

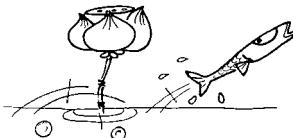
Respectfully and with clasped hands, King Sakka came before the yaksha and said, “Virtuous one, I am King Sakka, the king of the Heaven of Thirty-three.”

Due to the heavenly king’s humility, the yaksha became conceited. As his arrogance soared, his previous ugly face and tiny stature resumed until he finally vanished.

King Sakka then ascended his throne and said to his retinue, “From now on, you must never breed anger. If someone is hostile to you or treats you unkindly, be cautious with your reaction. Do not add anger onto anger. If someone should offend you, do not seek to get even; instead, treat the offender with kindness. Learn from those who do not have anger or hostility in them, for they are the virtuous and saintly ones. All those who are hot-headed are clouded by arrogance. Have

emotional awareness. Exercising a little control over your own egoistic emotions that have run wild is like reining in an unruly horse. This is the Dharma of kindness.”

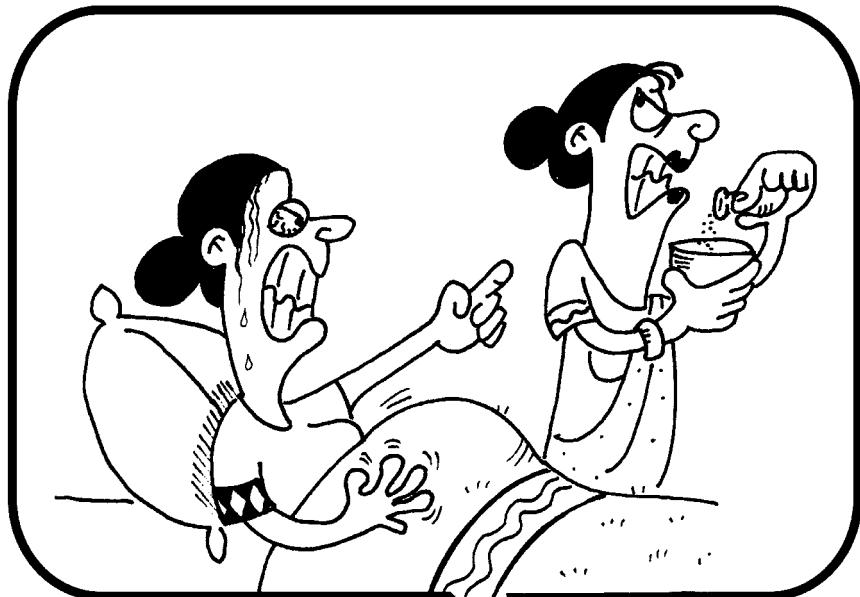
The Buddha looked at his disciples and continued, “A heavenly god who is used to enjoying exceptional pleasures and powers could restrain his anger and extol kindness and gentleness. Shouldn’t all of you be even more good-natured since you are cultivating spiritually? You must really learn from this example of King Sakka of the Heaven of Thirty-three!” රු



**To resolve hostility by being angry is like adding oil to fire – it will never cease. Only when the cool water of compassion is sprinkled would the flame of anger be doused.**

# The Lady and the Ogress

Retold by: Esther Thien



**O**nce upon a time, there lived a man who longed for children. He was getting impatient with his wife for not being able to bear him any children of his own. At the same time, his wife was getting increasingly anxious as she was not able to give him the offspring he yearned for.

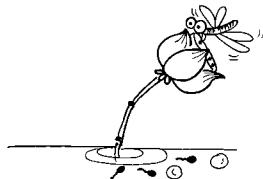
Fearing that her husband would one day forsake her, she coaxed him into taking another wife. But each time she realised that the second wife was pregnant, she caused her to miscarry by putting some drugs into her food. The second wife eventually figured out what was going on, but it was too late to do anything, for she was already near death's door from being poisoned so often.

Before exhaling her last breath, however, the second wife vowed revenge for all the suffering she had endured at the hands of the first wife should their paths cross again in future lives. And indeed their paths did cross again.

Once, they were reborn as a cat and a hen, and another time, as a leopardess and a doe, and each time one was after the other's offspring, which only created more and more hatred between them. Finally, they were reborn as the daughter of a nobleman and an ogress.

One day, the ogress in all her fury was chasing after the nobleman's daughter and her baby. The mother, in desperation, fled to the monastery where the Buddha was staying and begged the Buddha to save her child from the hungry ogress. Instead, the Buddha admonished her and the ogress for the folly of their unabated vengeance. He then recounted to them how their mutual hatred began and how, because of that hatred, they had been slaughtering

each other's babies in their successive lifetimes. He made them realise that hatred only fuelled more hatred, and that hatred could cease only through goodwill and compassion. The lady and the ogress felt great remorse for their past actions and asked each other for forgiveness. Finally, after many lifetimes of unbroken rivalry filled with hatred, they made peace with each other. ග



**Hatred in the world is indeed never appeased by hatred.  
It is appeased only by loving-kindness.  
This is an ancient law.**

*- The Buddha (Dhammapada)*



## The Tail

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once upon a time, there was a princess who had a small sore in her eye that she felt was really bad. As she was the king's daughter, she was rather spoiled and would lament all the time about her eye problem.

Ironically, when the doctors wanted to treat her, she would always refuse medication. Instead, she would constantly rub the sore spot on her eye until it became worse.

One day, the king proclaimed a large reward for anyone who could cure his daughter. Some time later, a man who claimed to be a famous physician came to the palace. Actually he was not even a doctor. He declared that he could definitely heal the princess and was allowed into her chamber.

After he had examined her, he exclaimed, “Oh, I’m so sorry!”

“What is it?” The princess curiously asked.

The man replied, “There is nothing terribly wrong with your eye, but there is something else that is really serious.”

The princess was alarmed and asked anxiously, “What on earth is so serious?”

He faltered and said, “It is really bad. I shouldn’t tell you about it.”

No matter how much she insisted, he refused to leak a word, saying that he could not speak without the king’s permission.

When the king arrived, the man was still hesitant to disclose his diagnosis.

Finally, the king demanded, “Tell us what is wrong. Whatever it is, you have to tell us!”

At last, the man replied, “Well, the eye will get better within a few days – that is no problem. The big problem is that the

princess will grow a tail, which will become at least 54 feet long. It may start growing very soon. If she can detect the first moment it appears, I might be able to prevent it from growing.”

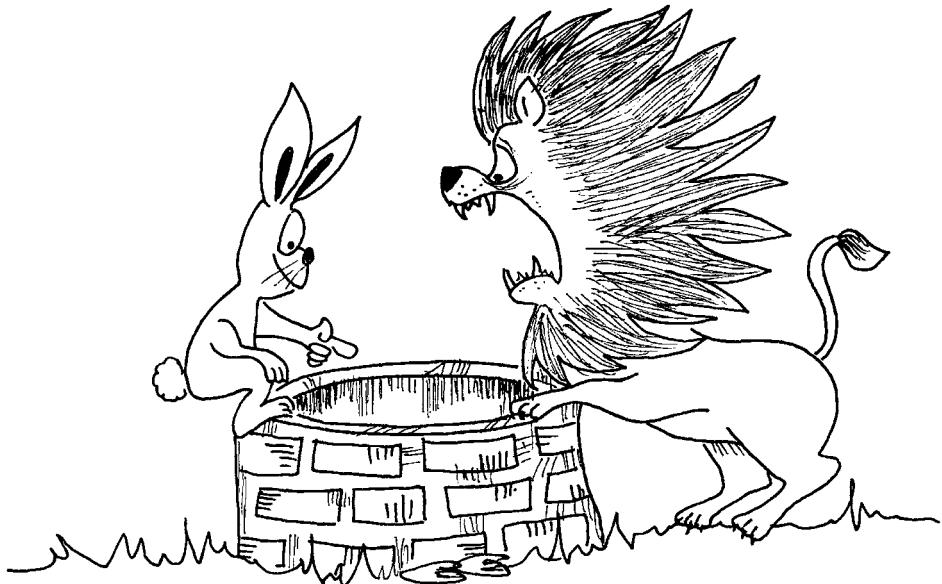
Hearing this news, everyone was deeply concerned. And what did the princess do? She stayed in bed, day and night, directing all her attention to detecting when the tail might appear, of course. Thus, a few days later, her eye recovered. ✍



This shows how we typically react. We zoom in on our little problems until they become the focal point around which everything else revolves. We have done this time after time, life after life, constantly thinking, “My wishes, my interests, my likes and dislikes come first!”

As long as we operate on this basis, we will remain in the status quo. Driven by impulses to seek the desirable and reject the undesirable, we will tread the paths of samsara without finding a way out. As long as attachment and aversion are motivators in our lives and impel us onward, we cannot rest.

- *Adapted from the story told in Daring Steps towards Fearlessness: The Three Vehicles of Buddhism, by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche*



## The Lion and the Rabbit

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once, there lived a lion that would hunt an animal from his territory each day for food. One day, it was the rabbit's turn to be eaten by the lion. The rabbit was petrified, and pondered long and hard on how she could avoid this untimely death.

Pacing around anxiously, the rabbit noticed a well nearby. When she popped her head over, the rabbit saw her own reflection. When she shook her head, her reflection did the same. Likewise, when she bared her teeth and made funny faces so did the reflection. Suddenly, an idea struck her!

Soon after, the rabbit presented herself to the lion as lunch. The lion was fuming mad and demanded to know why the rabbit was late.

“I was late because I encountered a ferocious creature on my way here. That creature has come to challenge you,” the rabbit replied timidly.

“What! Who could that be? Show him to me!” the lion roared.

The rabbit took him to the well and said, “Look down and you will see the creature clearly.”

The lion looked over, and of course, saw his own reflection. The creature in the well did whatever the lion did – shaking his head and baring his fangs.

The lion became so consumed with anger that he pounced at the creature and leapt to his death in the well. ↵



**This story demonstrates the disadvantages of being angry. It destroys our ‘world’ and environment, and causes us to see everyone as our enemy. Overpowered by anger, the wisdom eye is blinded. It burns our virtues, robs us of our peace of mind and leads us onto a path of more negative actions. Therefore, examine anger and its faults very carefully and purify them with Dharma practice of cultivating love, compassion and gratitude for all beings, even for one’s enemies.**



## The Lion and the Jackal

Once upon a time, when the Buddha was still a Bodhisattva, he was born as a lion. He had a wife and two children – a son and a daughter. His son was called Manoja. When Manoja grew up, he got himself a mate. To feed the family of five, Manoja killed wild buffaloes and other animals.

One day, the young Manoja came suddenly upon a jackal.

Unable to escape the young lion's claws, the jackal said, "Please, my lord, could you take me to your den, and let me live with you and your mate? I wish to serve you."

Pleased at being addressed "my lord", the lion took him back to his den where his family lived.

Now, Manoja had been advised by his father not to befriend any jackal. So when the Bodhisattva saw the jackal, he reminded his son to stay away from them as jackals were wily and sly and gave wrong advice. But the young lion thought he knew better than his father, and so the jackal remained.

One day, the jackal craved for the taste of horse meat, so he said to the young lion, "Sir, there is nothing we have not eaten except horse flesh; let us hunt for a horse."

"But where are the horses?" asked Manoja.

"You can find small ponies by the river bank," replied the jackal.

Taking the jackal's advice, the young lion went with him to the river bank where the ponies were bathing. Manoja caught a small pony, and throwing it on his back, ran swiftly back to his den.

His father said, "My son, those ponies are the property of the king. A king has many skilful archers. Lions that eat ponies belonging to the king do not live long. Therefore, do not take another pony."

Unfortunately, the young Manoja had developed a liking for horse meat, so he caught and killed pony after pony.

Before long, the king heard that a lion was killing his horses when they went to bathe in the river.

“Build a tank inside the town,” instructed the king.

“The lion will not get the ponies there.”

But, Manoja killed the ponies as they bathed in the tank.

Next, the king ordered that the ponies be kept in stables. However, the lion went over the wall, and killed the ponies in their stables.

Finally, the king called for an archer who shot like lightning.

“Do you think you can shoot this lion?” asked the king. The archer answered he was sure he could.

“Very well,” said the king, “take your place in the tower on the wall, and shoot him.”

Accordingly, the archer waited there in the tower.

In time, Manoja and the jackal came to the wall. The jackal did not go over the wall but waited to see what would happen. Manoja sprang over the wall. Very quickly, he caught and killed a pony and was hauling the animal away when the archer let loose an arrow.

“I am shot,” roared Manoja.

Hearing the lion's roar, the jackal said to himself, "The lion has been shot, and soon he will die. There is no friendship with the dead. I will now return to my old home in the woods." With that, he ran off.

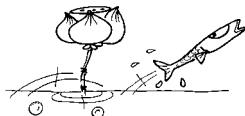
Manoja, on the other hand, managed to get back to his den with the horse before he fell down dead. Seeing the blood streaming from his wounds, his family spoke the following:

*The fortune of one, whom wicked folk entice, is not prosperous –  
See Manoja lying there due to the jackal's advice.*

*Sorrow befalls mothers whose children mix with bad company –  
See Manoja lying there all covered in blood.*

*Thus fares the man, in low estate he lies,  
If he follows not the counsel of the true friend and the wise.*

*Who follows outcasts is himself cast out;  
Who courts his equal never will be betrayed,  
Who bows before the noblest rises fast;  
Look therefore to those superior for support. රු*



**Do not associate  
With evil companions;  
Do not seek the fellowship of the vile.  
Associate with good friends;  
Seek fellowship of noble men.**

- Dhammapada no. 78



## The Lovesick King

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once upon a time, there lived a king who loved his queen very dearly. Queen Ubbari was charming, graceful, and as beautiful as a fresh rosebud. When the queen died, the king was plunged into deep grief. He had the body laid in a coffin, embalmed with oil and ointment, and kept beneath their marital bed. And on this bed he lay, going without food, weeping and wailing.

His parents, relatives, friends, royal subjects and priests came to comfort him, telling him not to grieve since it is the natural law that all things pass away. But, still in sorrow, he lay until seven days had passed.

Now at that time, there was an ascetic with supernatural powers who lived at the foot of the Himalayas. With his supernatural vision, he scanned around India and saw the king mourning. Straightaway, he thought of helping him.

By his miraculous power, he flew in the air until he came to the king's park. He descended from the sky and sat down on the ceremonial stone, like a golden image.

A young priest entered the park, greeted the ascetic and sat down. The ascetic then struck a conversation with the young priest.

"Is the king a just ruler?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir, the king is just," replied the young priest.

"But his queen had just passed away, and he is in deep misery. It has been seven days he's grief-stricken. Can you free the king from his great sorrow?"

"If the king comes to me and asks me, I can show him where his queen has been reborn, and let her talk to him," answered the holy man.

"Oh, holy one, please stay here and I will bring the king to see you."

The young priest hastened his steps until he was in the king's presence and he quickly recounted the incident and urged the king to visit the ascetic.

The king was overjoyed at the thought of seeing his beloved queen once more. Riding in his chariot, he came to the park, greeted the holy man and sat down before asking, "Is it true, holy one, that you know where my queen has been reborn?"

"Yes, I do, my lord king. So enamoured was she of her own

beauty that she failed to live a virtuous and wholesome life. She is now a little dung worm in this very park," replied the ascetic.

"I don't believe you!" exclaimed the king in disbelief.

"Then I will show her to you, and make her speak."

With his powers, the ascetic made two dung worms appear. Pointing at one of the two, the holy man said, "This is your queen Ubbari, O king! She is following her husband, the other dung worm."

As the king was still incredulous, the ascetic by his power gave that dung worm speech.

"What was your name in your former life?" asked the ascetic.

"My name was Ubbari," answered the dung worm in a human voice.

"I was the queen of King Assaka."

"Who do you love best now – King Assaka or this present dung worm of a husband?" asked the ascetic again.

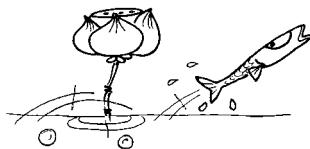
"Oh holy one, that was my former life. What is the king to me now? I would even sacrifice King Assaka's life in honour of my present husband, the dung worm."

In a poetic verse, the dung worm continued, "Once with the great King Assaka, who was my husband dear, loving and beloved, I walked about in this garden here.

But now new sorrows and new joys have made old ones flee, and far dearer than Assaka is this dung worm who is here with me."

When the king heard this, he was awakened on the spot. At once, he instructed the queen's body to be removed from underneath the bed and washed his hair. After bidding the ascetic farewell, he went back to his palace in the city. He married another queen and ruled his kingdom in righteousness.

The holy man, having freed the king from his sorrow, returned to the Himalayas. ¶



**All things, good or bad, pass away and become like a dream of the previous night.**

*- Adapted from The Jataka Tales, Story 207*



## The Story of Patacara

Retold by: Esther Thien

Long ago, there lived a young lady by the name of Patacara. She was the daughter of a very wealthy family at Shravasti in the Kingdom of Kosala. She was such a stunning beauty that, at the age of sixteen, her parents had to confine her to the top floor of a seven-storey tower surrounded by guards to keep her suitors at bay. Despite this, she fell in love with one of the guards, and when she heard that her parents had arranged to marry her off to a young man of the same social class, she eloped with her lover.

Now married and living in a village far away, the two soon found life difficult as they had little to live on. Her husband

farmed while Patacara did all the menial household chores which formerly had been done by her parents' servants.

When she became pregnant, Patacara pleaded with her husband to accompany her back to her parents' home to give birth, as was the custom of her time. But her husband was reluctant, for he felt her parents would surely torture or imprison him. Unable to convince him, she set off alone. When her husband found her gone, fearing for her safety, he caught up with her. But before they could reach their destination, the baby was born. And so they turned back and resumed their life in the village.

Sometime later, Patacara became pregnant again. Yearning to return to her parents' home for the birth, she set out on the journey with her son in tow when her husband refused her request once again. Her husband caught up with her but was unable to persuade her to return to the village.

Suddenly, birth pains set in, just as lightning flashed and thunder crashed. Patacara asked her husband to look for shelter. While searching for shelter, a poisonous snake bit him and he died instantly. As the heavy rainstorm raged on, Patacara gave birth to her second son. The next morning, she found her husband lying dead, his body stiff. Distraught, she blamed herself for his death.

Feeling helpless, she hurried on with her two children towards her parents' home. Too weak to cross a river swollen by the heavy storm with both her children, she left the older child on the shore and carried the newborn infant over first. She hid the baby under some leaves before wading back into the river to fetch her elder child. While

she was in midstream, a hawk swooped down and carried off the baby.

In frantic grief, Patacara screamed and waved her hands wildly. Thinking that Patacara was beckoning him to come, the elder son entered the river and was swept off by the swift current.

Having lost her entire family in the span of just two days, she continued with a heavy heart towards her parents' house alone, weeping and lamenting. On her way, she encountered a man who informed her, much to her great dismay, that her parents and brother had been killed after their house collapsed during the storm.

Agony of the most excruciating kind gnawed at Patacara's heart. Unable to accept the sudden loss of all her loved ones and overcome with grief, she went mad. Patacara ran naked through the streets of Shravasti. At that time, the Buddha was staying at the Jetavana, Anathapindika's monastery. Disconsolate, she sought refuge in the monastery. Some people tried to prevent her from entering but the Buddha stopped them. Going before the Buddha, she prostrated at his feet.

"Sister, regain your mindfulness," said the Buddha.

His compassionate words calmed her and she regained control of her mind. After a kind person in the crowd gave her a shawl to cover her body, she described her family tragedies.

"Patacara, be troubled no more. This is not the first time you have wept over the loss of a husband. This is not the first

time you have wept over the loss of parents and of brothers. Just as today, so also through this cycle of birth and death, you have wept over the loss of so many countless husbands, countless sons, countless parents and countless brothers, that the tears you have shed are more abundant than the waters of the four oceans," counselled the Buddha gently.

As the Buddha spoke these words of wisdom and consolation, Patacara's grief lessened until it eventually vanished. Realising that she had lived countless lives, suffered bereavement countless times, and that death occurs again and again, she understood the nature of impermanence in all compounded phenomena.

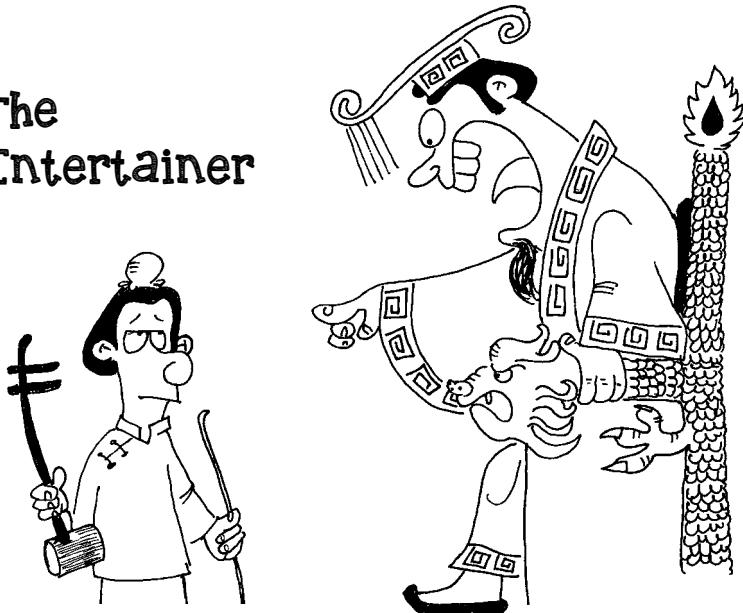
By the time the Buddha concluded his discourse, she became a stream-enterer (*sotapanna*), the first stage of arhatship. When her insight was complete some time later, she became an arhat. ☰



**Diverse sufferings are like a child's death in a dream.  
Apprehending illusory appearances as real, one becomes weary.  
Therefore, when encountering disagreeable circumstances,  
viewing them as illusory is the bodhisattva's practice.**

**- The 37 Practices of Bodhisattvas, verse 24**

# The Entertainer



A long time ago, an entertainer was summoned to the palace to play music for the emperor with the promise of receiving a reward of a thousand pennies. Happily, he performed before the king. When it was over, he asked for his payment. But the emperor reneged on his words and said, "It is true that you played music, but it only gave me pleasure. If I give you your reward, it would only give you pleasure." ↗



The world's rewards are like this. In the human world or even in the heavenly realm, the little pleasures one gets are illusory. They do not bring an end to life's difficulties and pain. Fleeting and impermanent, these pleasures, however great, are as empty as the music the entertainer played before the king.

- Story adapted from *The One Hundred Parable Sutra*

# The White Elephant and the Owl

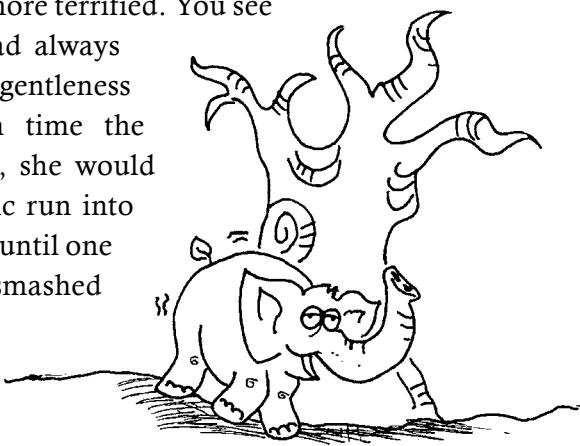
Retold by: Esther Thien

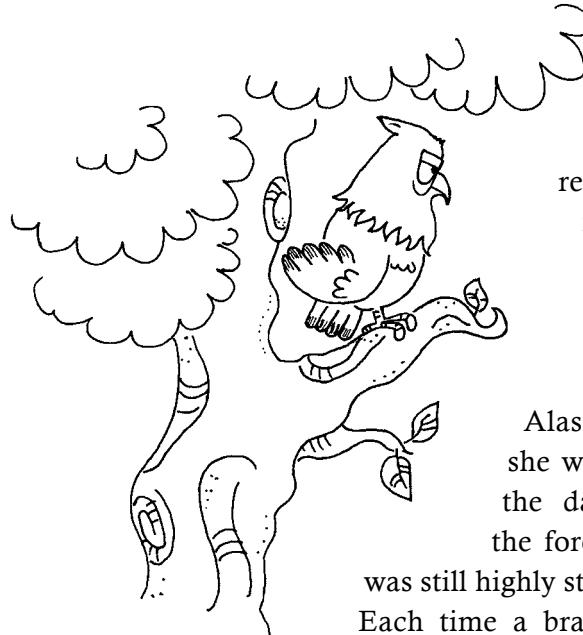
Long, long ago, there lived a beautiful, magnificent white elephant near the Himalayan Mountains. Always joyful, she was very happy to live there with her mother and other animal friends.

One day, news of her extraordinary beauty travelled to the ears of the king's elephant trainer. Hearing how gorgeous the elephant was, he decided he would capture and tame this lovely creature for the enjoyment and pleasure of the king. Hurriedly, he set off to find the elephant. When he found her, he tied a thick rope around her neck and lugged her all the way back to the training grounds.

Once there, the trainer forced her into a pen, where he jabbed, pushed and beat her repeatedly as he tried relentlessly to make the elephant do his bidding.

As the days passed, the white elephant became more and more terrified. You see in the wild, she had always been treated with gentleness and respect. Each time the trainer approached, she would break into a frenetic run into the sides of the pen until one day she finally smashed through it. So afraid was the poor elephant that she did





not stop  
running  
until she  
was in the deep  
recesses of the  
forest where she  
could never  
be found by  
humans again.

Alas, even though she was back safely in the dark shadows of the forest, the elephant was still highly strung and fearful. Each time a branch broke, or a rock tumbled from a hillside, she cowered in fear. Even the wind blowing through the trees gave her great distress.

Now, all this while, a wise old owl high up in the trees had been watching the daily activities of this fine-looking elephant. One day, the owl decided to speak to the elephant. When she flew down towards the elephant, the white elephant was startled.

"Don't be alarmed, I only want to talk to you," said the owl gently. Quivering, the elephant stood and listened.

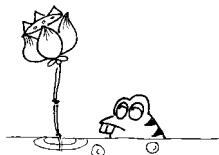
"I'm just a small bird, nothing for an enormous beauty like you to be frightful of. There are also no men near us. We are only surrounded by trees, shrubs and forest animals," assured the kind owl.

As the elephant appeared to relax a little, the owl continued, “All the fear you are experiencing stems from your own mind. Yet you are allowing it to control and destroy you.”

“You know, it is in your power to restrain your thoughts and to keep your fear in check.”

The elephant thought carefully about what the owl had said and realised she was correct. With utmost sincerity and gratitude, she thanked the owl for her kind guidance and from that day onwards, tried to rein in her fear.

The beautiful white elephant was still very frightened at the beginning, but slowly, as the days went by, everything began to seem a little less menacing. Through the power of her own thoughts, she gradually controlled her fear. Before long, she slipped back to the happy life she had once enjoyed before the ordeal. ග



**Wonderful, indeed, it is to subdue the mind,  
so difficult to subdue, ever swift,  
and seizing whatever it desires.  
A tamed mind brings happiness.**

- **Dhammapada verse 35**

# The Man and His Five Sons

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once, there was a man who lived in the woods. He started growing crops with his five sons in a clearing about a mile from their home village. He erected a small shack at the clearing and would often take his sons to stay there.

One morning, he ignited a fire in the shack and told his sons to watch over the fire, as he was going to hunt for food in the forest.

"If the fire goes out," he said, "get some fire from my bamboo tube and start it up again."

With this instruction, he set out to forage for food.

After he had left, his sons were so mesmerised with their games that when they finally went to look at the fire, they found that it had fizzled out. So they decided the eldest one should get some fire to start it up again. The eldest son walked over and tried knocking on the bamboo tube. However, no fire was seen. So the second child tried, by opening the bamboo tube. He too didn't see any fire inside. All he saw were two bamboo chips but he didn't know what to do with them.





When it was the third son's turn to get some fire, he took a knife and cut the tube into two halves. Still, he didn't see any fire. The fourth boy went over and, seeing the two halves lying there, shaved them down into thin strips to locate the fire in them. But just like his elder siblings, he could see no fire at all.

Finally, it was up to the fifth son to get some fire. Before he went over, he said to his brothers, "What's the matter with all of you? Can't you get any fire from the bamboo tube? What a bunch of fools you are! I'll go get it myself."

With that, he went to look at the bamboo tube and found it ripped into strips lying in a pile.

Realising what his brothers had done, he thought, “What a bunch of hare-brains,” and reached out for a mortar and pestle and started to grind up the bamboo strips to find the fire in them. By the time he ran out of strength, he had ground them into powder, but he still hadn’t found any fire. So he slipped off to play by himself.

Eventually, the father came back from the forest and found that the fire had been snuffed out. So he queried his sons about it, and they recounted to him how they had looked for fire in the bamboo tube without finding any.

“Idiots!” he thought, “They’ve taken my fire-starter and pounded it to bits. For that, I won’t fix them any food. Let them starve!”

As a result, the boys didn’t get anything to eat the entire day. ☺



The Dharma is something subtle and fine. Those of us who aren’t acquainted with the brightness of the Dharma – ‘Dhammo padipo’ – within us, who don’t believe that the Dharma has value for ourselves and others, are lacking in discernment, just like the boys looking for fire in the bamboo tube. Thus we bring about our own ruin in various ways, wasting our lives: born in darkness, living in darkness, dying in darkness, only to be reborn in more darkness all over again. Even though the Dharma lies within us, we can’t get any use from it and thus

will suffer for a long time to come, like the boys who ruined their father's fire-starter and so had to go without food.

We have to look within if we are to find what is truly good. But before we can know ourselves in this way, we first have to know - through study and practice - the principles taught by the Buddha. The important point is to actualise the Dharma through the complete practice of virtue, concentration and discernment.

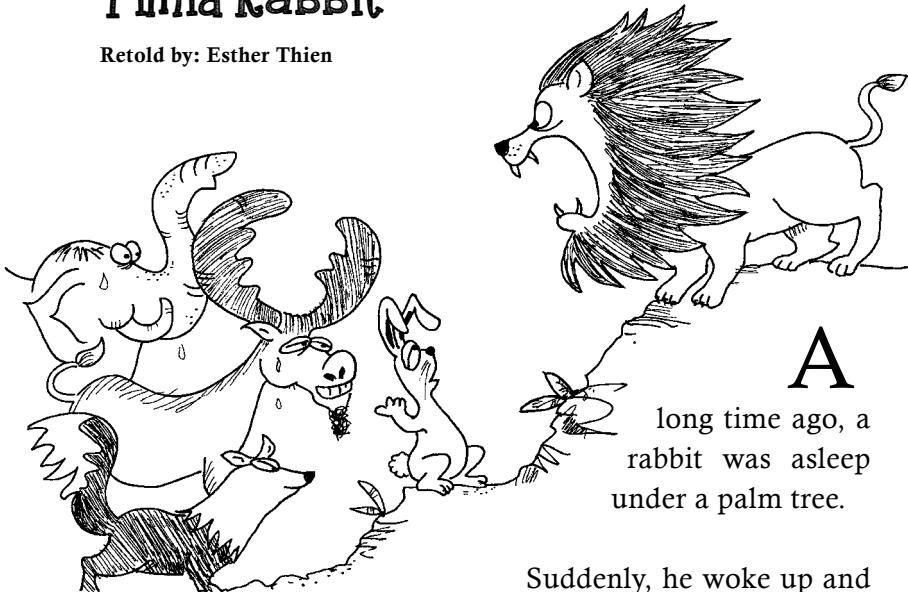
This is an essential part of the religion, which forms the inner part of all those who practise correctly and well. Whether the religion will be good or bad, whether it will prosper or decline, depends on our practice, not on the recorded doctrine, because the recorded doctrine is merely a symbol.

So if we aim at goodness, we should focus on developing our inner quality through the Dharma of practice (*patipatti dhamma*). As for the main point of Buddhism, that's the Dharma of attainment (*pativedha dhamma*), the transcendent quality: *Nirvana*

- Ven. Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo

# The Foolish, Timid Rabbit

Retold by: Esther Thien



A

long time ago, a  
rabbit was asleep  
under a palm tree.

Suddenly, he woke up and  
thought, "What if the world  
should break up? What would then become of me?"

At that moment, some monkeys dropped a coconut. It so happened that the coconut fell onto the ground just behind the rabbit.

Hearing the noise, the rabbit said to himself, "The earth is breaking up!"

At once, he jumped up and hopped as fast as he could, without even looking back to see what had caused the noise.

Another rabbit saw him hopping, and called after him, "Why are you in such a hurry?"

“Don’t ask me!” he cried.

But the other rabbit hopped after him, begging to know what the matter was.

The first rabbit replied, “Don’t you know? The earth is breaking up!”

And on he hopped, with the second rabbit following closely.

The next rabbit they met too hopped with them when he heard that the earth was breaking up. One rabbit after another joined them, until there were hundreds of rabbits hopping as quickly as they could. They passed by a deer, and shouted to him that the earth was breaking up. The deer then ran with them. The deer informed a fox to come along because the earth was breaking up. On and on they ran, even an elephant joined them.

At last, the king of the forest, the lion saw the animals running, and heard their cry that the earth was breaking up. He thought there must be some mistake, so he ran to the foot of a hill in front of them and roared three times. This halted the fleeing animals, for they knew the voice of the King of Beasts, and they feared him.

“Why are all of you running so swiftly?” queried the lion.

“Oh, King Lion,” they answered him, “the earth is breaking up!”

“Who saw it breaking up?” asked the lion.

“I didn’t,” replied the elephant. “Ask the fox. He told me about it.”

“I didn’t,” answered the fox.

“The rabbits told me about it,” said the deer.

One after another, the rabbits said, “I did not see it, but another rabbit told me about it.”

At last, the lion came to the rabbit that started this panic.

“Is it true that the earth is breaking up?” the lion asked.

“Yes, O King, it is,” answered the rabbit.

“I was asleep under a palm tree when I woke up and thought, ‘What would become of me should the earth break up?’ At that very moment, I heard the sound of the earth breaking up, and I hopped away.”

“Then,” said the lion, “you and I will go back to the place where the earth is breaking up, and see it for ourselves.”

So, the lion put the little rabbit on his back, and away they went like the wind. The other animals waited for them at the foot of the hill. When they reached the place, the rabbit pointed out the place where he had slept. The lion investigated the area and saw the fallen coconut nearby.

The lion contemplated the scene and then said to the rabbit, “You must have heard the sound of a falling coconut hitting the ground. You foolish rabbit!”

And the lion ran back to the other animals and told them all about it.

If it had not been for the wise King of Beasts, they might still be running. ☯



**Whatever harm an enemy may do to an enemy,  
or a hater to a hater,  
an ill-directed mind  
inflicts on oneself a greater harm.**

- Dhammapada verse 42



## The Little Girl's Dilemma

By: Ng Pei Fuen

Once there was a little girl. She always had two voices in her head. One told her to go left, the other told her to go right. Sometimes the left voice was louder, so she went left. At other times, the right voice was louder, so she went right.

One day, both voices were heard again at the same time. This time, both were equally loud. She did not know which to follow. After five minutes, they started screaming for her to take action. But the more they screamed, the more frustrated she became. She felt confused and afraid because she did not know which of the two voices was right. And they were torturing her incessantly with language that became increasingly abusive.

Unable to bear the abuses, the little girl broke down in the middle of a road junction. Soon, people were coming up to her.

“What’s wrong, my dear girl? Why are crying?” They asked.

When she heard this concerned remark more than once, she replied tearfully, “I don’t know whether I should turn left or right! And the voices are driving me crazy! Can you help me?”

Almost all at once, the concerned crowd chipped in their comments.

“Of course to the left! That will lead you to the police station so you can get yourself sent home safely,” said one.

“No, to the right! That’s where I stay. If she comes with me, I will take good care of her,” uttered another.

“No, no, the right path is so isolated. What if she gets hurt? The left path is safer. Especially if I’m around,” came a third reply.

Slowly, the comments started getting personal. One guy started a shove, and got a push in return. In a matter of minutes, the crowd became a riot. Frightened out of her wits, the little girl tearfully crawled out from the fighting crowd.

When she was far enough from the crowd, she stood up slowly and rubbed her eyes. She felt so tired because she

had been crying the whole day, and the crawling had hurt her knees. She saw a bench nearby and slowly made her way there. After a few minutes, she fell into a deep slumber. In her sleep, she felt safe. There were no voices there. She saw a bright stream of light in front of her. It looked so warm and inviting that she was naturally drawn to it. Floating on a fluffy cotton-like cloud beneath her, she headed towards the light. She was filled with great bliss and joy in that tunnel of brightness. Coming to the end of the tunnel, she saw the hazy figures of a few people. Then it became more like an assembly. These people looked very different. Most of them had no hair, but there were also others at the periphery of the semi-circle who had. The little girl did not understand why most of the bald people had a bare left shoulder.

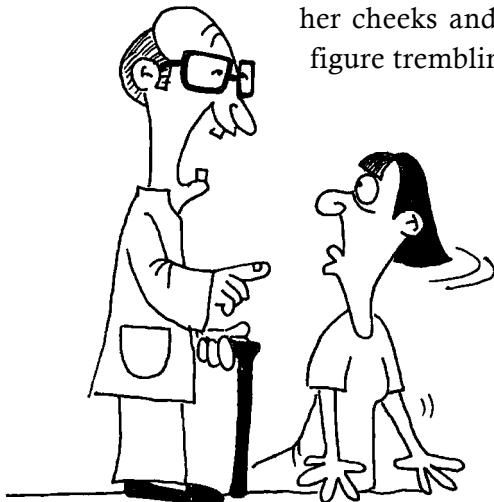
“Don’t they get cold?” she wondered.

Still floating, she was brought to the front of the assembly and left gently on an empty seat. Interestingly, no one noticed her arrival. She looked around in amazement. She had never seen so many people in her entire life! There seemed to be more than a thousand people in this assembly. They all looked beyond her to a figure seating on a raised platform. She followed their gaze and put her palms together like she saw them doing.

The person on the platform was emitting a light so bright that she was dazzled. She was enthralled by whom she saw sitting on the platform. He was tall and had sharp features. He must be a very intelligent and capable being. His whole figure exuded so much love that the little girl suddenly remembered her mother who loved her very much. She

was moved to tears. But this time, they were tears of joy and gratitude. She did not know who this man was. But she knew that she liked him and perhaps he could tell her which way to go.

A gentle yet firm voice suddenly filled the entire space. A cool breeze suddenly swept past, waking the little girl with its chill. She felt sorely disappointed and upset that she woke up before she could hear the answer. Hot tears rolled down her cheeks and she sobbed, her little figure trembling in the dusk.



Down the road, an old man came by and cheerfully cried out to her, "Aren't you going home yet, little girl?"

The little girl sulked and crossed her arms.

A little grin broke out on the wrinkled, seasoned face of the elderly passer-by.

He leaned down to touch her arm and with the gentlest voice asked her after hearing her story, "But did you tell them where you want to go?"

"What do you mean where I want to go? It's either left or right!" replied the little girl.

The old man took a more serious tone and squatted next to the little girl.

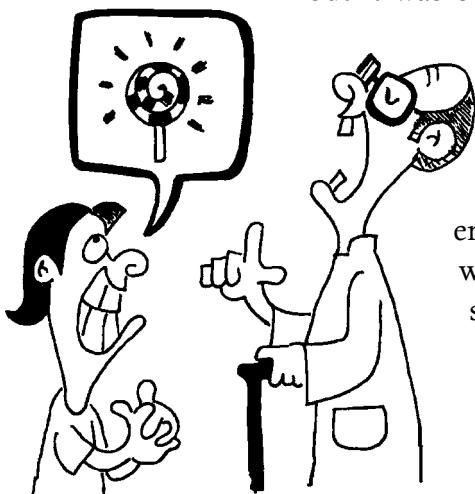
“You know, it’s not about left or right all the time. It depends on where you want to go. After you decide the destination, you choose the path. The path sometimes turns left, and sometimes turns right. Sometimes you need to turn more than once on the path!”

The little girl looked up and met the eyes of the kind old man.

She said nervously, “So it’s not left or right from the onset?”

Already she felt a huge burden heaved off from her chest.

She touched her chest as if to find something there, but it was only a feeling. She felt better already.



“So where did you want to go?” The little girl felt her face warm with embarrassment. “I... I think what I want is to buy myself some sweets.”

The elderly man could not take it anymore. He burst out laughing and wiped away the tears from his eyes. He had not felt so amused in a long time. The little girl laughed along, relieved that her problem was coming to an end.

Still laughing, the old man took the little girl's hand and said, "Oh well, let's go get those sweets and we'll send you right home."

As the two walked down the road towards the junction where the riot had broken out earlier, the little girl had no problem deciding which way to turn.

She knew only too well that the candy store was located to the left of the junction. ↗



**Should one find a man who points out faults and who reproves,  
let him follow such a wise and sagacious person  
as one would a guide to hidden treasure.  
It is always better, and never worse,  
to cultivate such an association.**

- Dhammapada verse 76

# The Thoughtful Mother

Retold by: Esther Thien



**O**nce, there lived a woman who sold bean sprouts in the market for a living. She and her young son were quite poor, and they could hardly make ends meet.

The burdens of poverty often harden a person's heart but throughout it all, the woman remained kind and upright. Through her conduct and the stories she shared, her son too exhibited those qualities.

Her only wish was to see her son excel in life and to live without hardship or poverty. Hence she worked really hard, rain or shine, to put her son through college.

As she desired, upon graduation, her son landed a cushy job, and married a nice lady who too came from a poor family but had a pure and good heart. The son bought a house and the three of them lived together happily.

Although the son was now successful and married, the mother still sold bean sprouts at the market as she did not want to be a burden to the young couple.

Six months later, her son was sent to work on a project in the Middle East for two years, leaving his wife alone in Korea.

Without her husband around, the young homemaker started playing card games to while the time away. Before long, she was spending most of her husband's pay and bonuses on her gambling habit.

The mother tried all means to stop her daughter-in-law's gambling ways. She cajoled and berated the young woman but the latter was so addicted to gambling that she couldn't

stop no matter what her mother-in-law did. Eventually, the elder woman had no choice but to move out.

A year later, the son returned earlier than expected. The young wife panicked. Not only had she gambled away all the money that she was supposed to save, she did not know what had become of her mother-in-law.

Desperate, the young woman lied to her husband, “Your mother just moved out one day. I wasn’t home and I looked everywhere, but I couldn’t find her. I didn’t inform you as I know you would definitely worry,” she said, her voice trailing off.

Her husband stormed out and went to the market to look for his mother’s old friends. He finally found his mother. When he brought her home, the daughter-in-law fell to her knees and begged for her husband’s forgiveness.

Unexpectedly, the mother turned to her son and said that his wife had not done anything wrong. She left because she did not like being cooped up and wanted to be near her friends at the market.

Later, when her son was not looking, she gave a bank book to her daughter-in-law with the young woman’s name on it. A sizeable figure was displayed on the book, enough that the son wouldn’t suspect his wife of any wrongdoing.

You see, when the mother left the house, she already had a plan. She rented the cheapest room available and did all kinds of odd jobs she could find, besides selling bean sprouts in the market. The mother lived frugally like this

for a year, saving every single cent she could, because she did not want to see her son's family torn apart.

This episode changed the young woman's life. When the young wife realised the toils and tribulations her mother-in-law must have endured to save this sum of money, she hugged her mother-in-law, with uncontrollable tears streaming down her face, awed by the unbelievable kindness and love of the older woman. ☰



**What do you think would have happened if the mother gave in to frustration and resentment? Would things have turned out this well?**

**If you dislike someone and harbour negative and harsh thoughts towards that person, you are the one who will suffer the most ultimately. Therefore, maintain a kind and gentle frame of mind at all times, even when you are confronted with unfavourable circumstances.**

**No matter how angry or betrayed you feel, do your best to avoid speaking or acting rashly. Think about the situation from the other person's perspective, and deeply reflect upon your own behaviour and assumptions.**

**This is the wisdom that can change the world. If you can live with such wisdom, how can your family and society not be happy and peaceful?**

**A single, tiny thought can change the world. Everything begins with the thoughts we generate. So how can there be anyone whose thoughts do not matter?**

**- Zen Master Daehaeng**

# The Tea Lady

Retold by: Esther Thien



Lord Buddha taught the Dharma in different ways to different people, depending on their understanding and ability. He was like a doctor who prescribes various medicines for different ailments. Here is a story, recounted by Venerable Hue Can, that shows us this essence.

Life is hard for China's poor peasants. Once there was a peasant girl who had no skills to make a living. She could not find a husband and was not even able to secure a job as a servant.

Unattractive and unwanted, she was thrown out by her family. Desperate to survive, she went to the border. She managed to find a kettle and some



cups. She then began to brew tea and sell it to the travellers crossing the border. Many of these people were tired and bad-tempered and often treated the poor woman unkindly, complaining that the tea was too cold or too hot. Sometimes they even threw the tea at her. The woman passed her days in shame and misery. She thought of suicide, believing that life was not worth living.

One day, a monk came to the border post. When he saw the unhappy tea lady, his compassionate heart was moved, and he sat down to talk to her. The woman, unused to kindness, poured out her heart to him. The monk told her gently that suicide was not the answer.

If she wished to find happiness in this life, she should repay cruelty with kindness. If her customers did not like the tea and threw it down or at

her, then she should not be upset, but give them another cup of tea more acceptable to them. Most importantly, at the end of each day, she should spend some time reverently and mindfully repeating the chant: *Namo Amitabha Buddha*.



For the first time, the woman had hope and meaning in her life. She began to change her attitude and started chanting. From that day onwards, her life was transformed. But she had not heard the monk quite correctly and was in fact chanting *Namo Amitabha Buddhi*. A very slight difference

in pronunciation but one that made the word “Buddha” meaningless.

Many years passed. The tea lady remained at the border, graciously and contentedly attending to her customers. Every evening, she chanted.

One day, another monk approached the border post. With sensitivity gained through long years of meditation, he became aware of an aura of enlightenment surrounding the area before him. He searched the crowd there,



finding some who were polite and friendly, but none who might account for the strong feeling that he had of being in the presence of great spirituality.

“Surely,” he thought, “there must be a powerful Zen master here.”

Eventually, his eyes fell upon the tea lady. He noticed the calm and assured way she worked, and was impressed. But he didn’t think that she could be the source of the holiness which he detected. As evening approached and travellers no longer came, the woman folded her hands and began

to chant softly. Convinced now, the monk approached her and asked how she attained her state of emancipation. The woman recounted the monk she had met long before, of his instruction to change her attitude, and the chant she was to do: *Namo Amitabha Buddhi*.

The monk was shocked and explained to her that her chanting was incorrect and could not, therefore, be effective. "Buddha," he said sternly, "not Buddhi."

After he went his way, the woman, now distressed, began trying to pronounce the word "Buddha" correctly. But it was difficult for her. Despite the happiness of her simple life, she was not educated, and was like many peasants, illiterate.

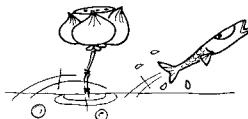
The monk, feeling that he had been of service to the woman, continued on his way. But when he looked back to the border post, he noticed that the wonderful aura was gone. The monk stopped and considered. He realised that although the woman's chant had been technically incorrect, it had worked for her and had been the cause of her emancipation. By insisting on the exact pronunciation of a



word, he had caused her confusion and sorrow. He hurried back to the tea lady, and found her struggling unhappily with the “wrong” word.

The monk went to her and said, “I played a trick on you. The words you were chanting were correct in every way.”

Greatly relieved, the woman went back to her old way of chanting and once again, she radiated tranquility and bliss. ↗



**Emancipation does not depend upon words or letters but on the sincere and heartfelt practice of the pure mind.**

**This story is a very popular Buddhist tale. In fact, there are a few versions to it. But the moral of the story is always the same – sincerity in practice is fundamental on the path to emancipation.**



## Little Kathy & Little Sister Plant

By: Ng Pei Fuen

**L**ittle Kathy was enjoying her newfound freedom with a pair of wings that she had just grown. It was refreshing to flutter around with beautiful wings after having been trapped so long in the tight little cocoon that was a rite of passage for all aspiring butterflies. Her parents were proud of her: their beautiful caterpillar daughter had transformed into a dazzling, fluttering display of colour.

How wonderful youth and vitality is! As Kathy basked in her strength, she flew as far from home as she could, enjoying the sights and sounds. She saw other cocoons and older butterflies that were beginning to fade in their colour and strength.

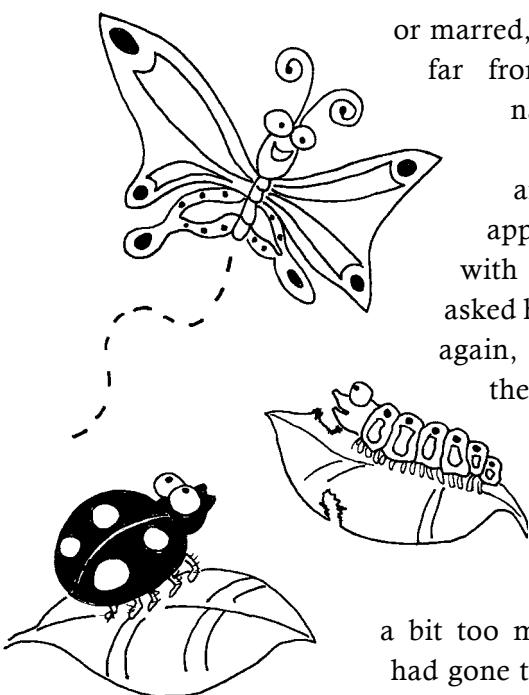
She stopped on every other lovely sweet flower for a sniff, saying, “Look at me! Look at my graceful flight, enjoy my beauty!”

Her heart leapt each time a passing bee, fly or beetle slowed down to look at her. Sometimes, a passing human child tried to scoop her up in their giant hands. But with her young, strong wings, she was too quick for them!

She flew home proud and amazed that she was turning heads and feelers. She began to stick her head up when she saw poor caterpillars crawling about waiting for their turn to morph.

“Oh dear, how slow you are going! Let me teach you how to become a beautiful butterfly like me!”

As caterpillars gathered to listen to her, she impressed them with accounts of how she stayed perfectly still in the cocoon so that her wings would not be scratched or marred, or how she chose a place, far from fumbling beetles and nasty grasshoppers, to hang her cocoon. The young and envious caterpillars applauded her fluent speeches with their rows of legs and asked her to fly around, again and again, so that they could admire the beauty of her wings and set goals for their own transformation.



Meanwhile, her arrogance was getting a bit too much for her elders. Fame had gone to her head as she began to

think that she was far superior to them, that she knew all the tricks to being a gorgeous butterfly which her jaded, lacklustre seniors did not.

One day, Kathy was flying around, showing off her wings as usual. She was so engrossed in the act that she did not see a spider weaving his web right in her flying tracks. She whammed straight into the sticky web. Within moment, the veteran spider was moving in for his meal.

Seeing the impending danger, alarm bells went off in Kathy's head, but her pride remained. She screamed, "Look what you have done! My wings are all stuck and crumpled! Do you know who you are dealing with! I'm Kathy! *The* Kathy! Wait till all my butterfly and caterpillar friends come and get you! You still have a chance to get me disentangled from this mess. NOW!"

Spidey grinned and rubbed his four pairs of legs in glee.

"Struggle! The more you struggle, the tighter the grip! Ha! Ha! This is an invincible formula passed down through the spider clan. Struggle! See how your mind flutters just like your silly little wings!"

By now, Kathy was paralysed with fear. She truly felt that the more she struggled, the tighter and more enmeshed her wings and filmsy tube of a body got caught in the web. The invincible and invisible trap. Her mind went blank.

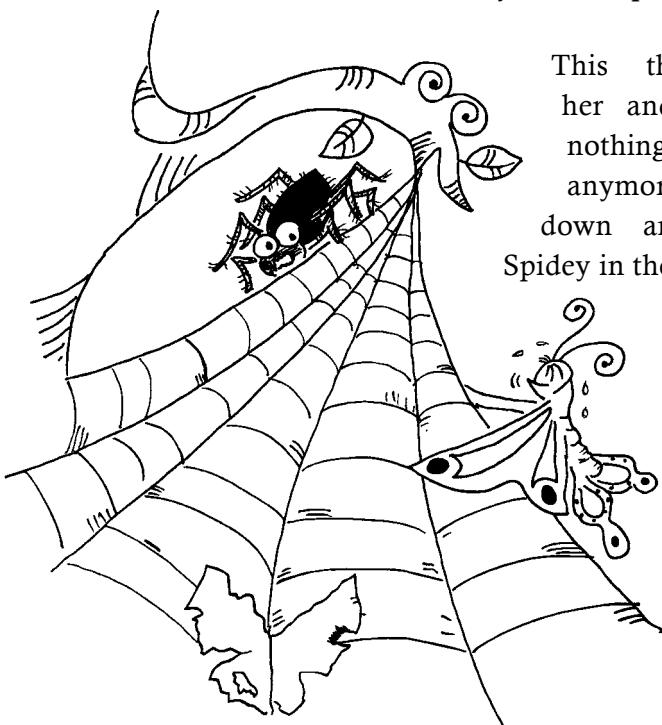
At this time, a familiar voice rang out. "Oh Kathy... if only I had told you the story of little sister plant earlier. Then you may have escaped this tragic fate today."

Spidey and Kathy looked up to see the branch that the web was latched on speaking with regret and compassion.

Branch continued, “The day you grew wings, I feared for you. I have seen so many newly morphed butterflies become pompous, flaunting and proud. You grew too big for your head, and flew too high for your wings...well, not just you, but every other young butterfly that has ever flown my way. They all think they are the best and the most beautiful. Look below me. What do you see?”

Kathy stole a glance and saw a pile of faded, broken butterfly wings at the root of the old tree. It sent a shudder through her tiny spine. She knew her time was up.

“My time is up.”



This thought struck her and she realised nothing mattered anymore. She calmed down and looked at Spidey in the eye.

“Do you have enough compassion to let me hear a last story before you eat me?”

Spidey looked at the entwined, helpless Kathy and thought,  
“Well, she can’t escape anyway!”

He nodded smugly at Kathy and Branch.

Branch sighed and started, “If little sister plant were around today, she would be able to tell you her story. But since she has long gone back to the elements, I’ll relate her story to you. We were such close friends.... Sigh! Anyway....”

Branch looked like he was melting away into his memories of the past.

“The first time I met little sister plant, she was young. So very young. She was a bright shade of green, a little pale and when she first broke through the soil, she could not stand properly. I doted on her so I sheltered and took her into the shade.

Soon, she grew strong and stood proudly upright. I was proud of her too! In the beginning, she would stay close to me and thank me for protecting her. When she grew taller and farther off the ground, she saw more of the outside world and in no time, was longing to move out of my cover.

Other ignorant young plants she met also advised her to extend her roots farther out so that she could get out of my shadow.

She did just that. And shortly, she was exposed to the elements. The thunderstorm, the mighty blast of a wind, the whispering breeze, the sweltering heat of the midday sun, the seasons, etc. At first, she fought. When the

thunderstorms pelted on her, she resisted their heavy drops and stood up tall while the more mature plants relaxed and let the drops weigh on them. She strained her veins because of this and soon stood a little bent to her left. But she fought on.

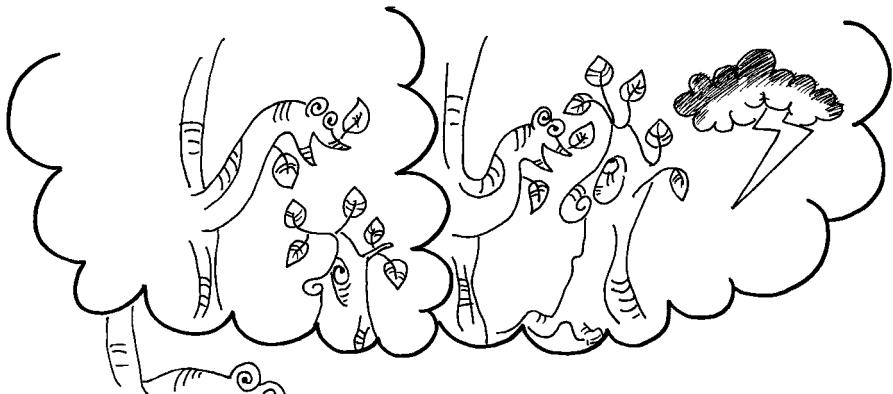
When the sun came and the other plants huddled close to their stems to minimise water loss, she would spread herself out as if challenging the sun to come and evaporate her. She withered her tips in the process and began to go flip-flop in the wind, losing her previous graceful sway.

She resisted everything and tried hard to stand up tall and strong. She liked to be the tallest amongst her fellow plants, but that also meant she was hit the hardest in the rain, dehydrated the most in the hot sun and trampled from a higher height by human feet.

One morning, she found that she could not stand with her stem straight. She was bent and weary. Poor little sister plant! She became depressed and stopped eating and drinking. At her lowest point, she collapsed on the bare earth staring at the roots of other plants, wondering why all her efforts to be the best had brought her to such a sorry state.

She looked around at her fellow plant friends. They were green, cheerful and swaying strong in the wind. She realised they must be right in what they were doing to be able to stay green and strong for so long.

She stopped lamenting. Instead, she began observing and listening to other plants. After days of observation, she smiled.



She finally understood.



She waved weakly at me, smiled and thanked me for always supporting her. In her whispering weak voice, she told me she had learnt the secret of staying everlasting

green and strong: "*I should have let go of my ego, dear brother Branch.*

*I need to bow when the rain comes so that the water flows down naturally.*

*I need to relax when the wind blows so that I don't injure myself struggling against it.*

*I need to be humble and stay low to the ground when humans come, so that I won't be a target for their feet.*

*I've been too brash, too proud and too attention-seeking. Youth comes but once and leads to maturity for the wise but the foolish ones like me pass away before our time, burning ourselves out in*

*reckless pride. We play like we have no tomorrow and think that when tomorrow comes, we are still young!*

*When I stood brazenly tall with my young bones, I looked down on the older, wiser plants. Sometimes they tried to tell me things, but I deliberately braced myself up higher so that they couldn't get to me. How silly!*

*It's too late now... I can feel the water draining down through my roots. I've lost too much water to ever stand again. I've spent my youth, fought too hard for the wrong reasons. Please, brother Branch, do me a favour."*

Drops of water appeared on the tip of Branch.

*"She said, 'Do me a favour. Tell my story to other plants, insects and those who are intoxicated with youth. Tell them, so that they may go on to the next stage of their lives wisely, putting their youthful energy to good use.*

*Tell them to be mindful of their intentions, respectful of their elders, generous in sharing their wisdom and always be humble.*

*Never stand tall. The tallest one always gets hit first because it stands out.*

*Instead, be humble. Bend a little and stoop a little. Or they may end up like me, flat on the ground, brought down to earth not by choice but floored by folly.*

*Thank you brother Branch for your friendship, goodbye..."*

Kathy felt a violent shake beneath her and realised that

Spidey was sobbing, sending vibrations across the sticky web. She felt tears welling up in her eyes too.

“What great advice, but it came too late!” she thought.

As she cried, her tiny tears dropped onto the invincible web.

It was her good karma that the invincible web was not waterproof.

With Spidey’s vigorous shaking and her own flowing tears, Kathy felt the web loosen. For a moment, her mind geared into alertness. She slowly wriggled her wings – space!

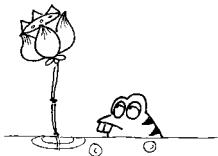
She glanced quickly at the emotional Spidey who was still absorbed in his own thoughts, and with all the strength she could summon, heaved her wings violently away from the web.

And she was free!

Branch cheered, Spidey was stunned and Kathy was transformed.

Becoming a colourful butterfly was not the real transformation. Being released from a near-death situation, one brought about by her own foolishness, heedlessness and self-infatuation morphed her entire spiritual self.

Now she was truly transformed. ✤



The foolish and ignorant  
indulge in heedlessness,  
but the wise ones keep their heedfulness  
as the best treasure.

Do not give way to heedlessness.  
Do not indulge in sensual pleasure.  
Only the heedful and meditative  
attain great happiness.

- Dhammapada verse 26 & 27



## The Old Monk

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once upon a time, there was a very old man who ordained as a monk when he was pretty advanced in age. He did not know any Dharma. One day, a woman went up to him. She gave him an offering of a very stunning piece of fabric and asked him for some Dharma teaching.

The old monk became anxious for he did not know any Dharma to teach her. However, as he was given an offering, it was necessary for him to say something.

So thinking out aloud, he said, “It is because of my ignorance that I am suffering.”

The woman thought to herself that what he meant was that all suffering arose in the world due to the cause of ignorance. She contemplated carefully and concluded that what he said was very good. Hence, she meditated upon that and was able to understand the first truth of suffering and achieved great insight.

News travelled and soon many people heard about her offering of the beautiful cloth, including a robber. He coveted it and wanted it for himself. So he went to the monk’s house and stood at the door asking for the cloth.

Frightened, the old monk said, “Go to the side of the window if you want it.”

The thief did as he was told. He sauntered to the side of the window and stuck one of his hands in.

“Now give me that cloth,” he said gruffly.

The old monk replied, “When this piece of cloth was offered to me, it was given with both hands. So if you want it, extend both hands and I will give it to you.”

As soon as the robber did as he was told, the old monk bound his hands with a rope and tied them to a pillar in the

house. Then he went out, took a stick and started beating the thief very strongly.

With every stroke that he delivered, he would recite one verse of the refuge prayer: *"I go to the Buddha for refuge, I go to the Dharma for refuge, I go to the Sangha for refuge."*

He continued whacking and reciting the refuge prayer until the robber's legs were nearly broken. He howled in great pain and finally, the old monk let him go.

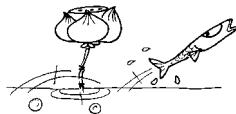
The robber hobbled off as fast as he could to get away from the old monk. Someone saw him hobbling and asked him why he was limping. The robber replied that he was trying to rob the old monk of the beautiful cloth but was instead caught and beaten up. He also recounted how the old monk recited the refuge prayer while walloping him, and added that the Buddha was truly great because the entire refuge prayer comprised three lines. Had the Buddha made it longer, he would be dead by then.

Now, the robber had the habit of dwelling underneath a bridge. During the night, many non-humans such as spirits would cross that bridge. However, one night when they went up to the bridge, they couldn't cross it. They felt a strong force holding them back and preventing them from getting across. They were curious and began to search for the cause. They found the robber underneath the bridge mumbling. When they asked him what he was mumbling, he answered that he was reciting the prayer of taking refuge in the Triple Gem.

"How great and powerful indeed is the Triple Gem to be able to stop us from crossing the bridge," thought the spirits and unseen beings to themselves.

Thus they decided to take refuge in the Triple Gem. It is said that by the power of taking refuge in the Triple Gem, these beings were able to gain rebirth in the higher realms.

The robber, on the other hand, gained great faith in the Triple Gem and took full ordination as a monk in the later part of his life. ග



**He who reveres those worthy of reverence,  
the Buddhas and their disciples,  
who have transcended all obstacles and  
passed beyond the reach of sorrow and lamentation;  
he who reveres such peaceful and fearless ones,  
his merit none can compute by any measure.**

- Dhammapada verses 195-196.



## Practising the Dharma

Retold by: Esther Thien

Once, there was a man who decided that he was going to practise the Dharma. So he started to circumambulate.

His teacher came along and said, “Oh, it’s very good that you are circumambulating the stupa but it would be better if you practise the Dharma.”

So he thought, “I will do prostrations then.”

The next day, in front of the stupa, he started to prostrate. Up and down he went, perspiring profusely.

Then his teacher appeared and remarked, “Oh, it’s very good that you are prostrating but it would be better if you practise the Dharma.”

“Hmmm,” thought the man.

“Perhaps I should be reciting the Dharma text?”

The next day, he was out there reading aloud his Dharma text, thinking that he was doing something holy.

Again, his teacher came by and quipped, “Oh, it’s very good that you are reciting the Dharma text but it would be better if you practise the Dharma.”

By then, the man was utterly confused and perturbed.

“Am I not practising the Dharma? I was circumambulating, prostrating and reciting the Sutra. What, then, is practising the Dharma?”

His teacher smiled and replied, “Transform your mind.” ☰



**This story tells us that the focal point is not on the external activities. Rather it is the mind, or the mental state that one has when doing things that determines if one is practising the Dharma. We can never judge whether an action is Dharma or not, just by the action itself. We have to look at the mind that's doing it.**

That's why in Buddhism, one's inner motivation is emphasised again and again. In this way, we cut out all hypocrisy. If we are not mindful of our motivation and we think being religious simply means doing all these external activities, then we get really lost. We may be doing something externally, but if we still have the same old mind and habitual tendencies to cling and reject, we are not practising Dharma.

So always be mindfully aware and ask yourself, "Why am I practising? Why am I doing this?" Always look internally, at the mind that is doing it.



## The Little Drops of Dharma

By: Ng Pei Fuen

Once upon a time, there was a little boy who was very naughty. But when he stepped into a Buddhist Sunday School, little drops of Dharma seeped into his heart, nourishing his seeds of goodness. He couldn't say it, but how he yearned to be good!

Yet it was hard to be good when everyone around tried to be rebellious, clever and strong, sometimes to the extent of harming others. To fit in with the crowd, it was easier for him to be naughty.

Then he learnt that what gave him happiness now could also give him suffering. One cup of ice-cream was bliss, but ten tubs would be yucky hell.

He learnt that when he treated his parents kindly, with respect and humility, they were angry less often and treated him with the same kindness and love.

He learnt not to judge his friends, or to call them names, and not to look only at their bad points because that would be very mean. For he knew how that felt like, having been treated the same way before, which wasn't nice at all.

He learnt that he wasn't perfect, but that's okay, because the Buddha started out that way too! But if he kept polishing his mind and behaviour every day, one day it would be shining bright.

He learnt that if he couldn't be with good and wise friends, it would be better to be on his own.

He enjoyed being good, being helpful, being respectful to his elders. He enjoyed doing good service, being a good and caring friend, and listening to the Dharma. He appreciated his teacher, his fellow brothers and sisters and all those who nourished his heart richly with the Dharma.

He rejoiced in the Dharma.

He rejoiced in his virtues.

He learnt that it was okay to fail, and that it was okay too if others did not understand or misunderstood him sometimes. Because as long as he knew himself, with patience, he could show by his behaviour that he had changed. That is what is most important, to use the Dharma mirror upon oneself.

When he realised that he had learnt all these truths, little drops of joy trickled quietly from the corner of his eyes.

“Mummy, Daddy, I’m sorry for all the misdeeds I have done in the past, for all the heartache and troubles I have given you. Thank you for taking care of me, teaching and guiding me all this while.”

“I will be a good boy now,  
I will grow stronger with the Dharma,  
I will plant good seeds everyday.  
I will send love to those who have done me wrong.”

“Please help me and be patient with me as I try my best to be good.”

“Thank you, Lord Buddha, the fully Enlightened One, Light of the World, Teacher of Gods and Men.”

“*Nathi me saranam annam, Dhammo me saranam varam!*”

“No other refuge do I seek, the Dharma is my true refuge!” ප



Think not lightly of good, saying it will not come to me.  
Drop by drop is the water pot filled.  
Likewise, the wise man gathering little by little,  
fills himself with good.

- *Dhammapada verse 122*

## GLOSSARY

**Ananda:** Ananda was a cousin of Shakyamuni Buddha and one of his ten principal disciples. Amongst the Buddha's disciples, Ananda stood out for having the most retentive memory.

**Arhat:** One who has destroyed dualistic ego-grasping/clinging and achieved liberation from cyclic existence.

**Attachment:** Attachments refer to the investments of our mental and emotional energy on people, things, experiential states, or our own thoughts and perceptions, which keep us in suffering, and yoked to the wheel of rebirth.

**Bodhisattva:** One who, motivated by great compassion, has generated bodhicitta, and is committed to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

**Buddha:** The Fully Awakened or Enlightened One. A Buddha is one who has attained liberation from all suffering, attaining True Happiness, Perfect Wisdom and Perfect Compassion, among all other virtues for the sake of helping all sentient beings. "The Buddha" refers to the historical Shakyamuni Buddha, who is the founder of Buddhism in our world.

**Bodhicitta:** It is an enlightened attitude and mind that strives towards awakening, borne from the basis of love and compassion to benefit all sentient beings, and cause one to become a bodhisattva.

**Compassion:** Active sympathy or a willingness to bear the pain of others.

**Dhammapada:** The Dhammapada is a collection of the Buddha's sayings in verse form and is one of the most widely-read and best-known Buddhist scriptures.

**Devadatta:** Devadatta was a Buddhist monk, a cousin of Shakyamuni Buddha, and brother of Ananda, a principal student of the Buddha.

**Eight worldly concerns:** These keep us from the path and yoke us to cyclic existence; they are attachment to gain, pleasure, praise, fame and aversion to loss, pain, blame, and a bad reputation.

**Enlightenment:** Same as Buddhahood, or full awakening. It is the highest level of development, in which one has eliminated all defilements and karmic imprints forever, and has developed all good qualities and wisdom to the fullest extent.

**Four foundations:** Also known as the four thoughts that turn the mind towards the Dharma, which are precious human rebirth, impermanence and death, infallibility of cause and effect (known as *Karma*) and the suffering of cyclical existence (*samsara*).

**Generosity:** The practice of cultivating unattached and unconditional giving.

**Impermanence:** All compounded things are constantly changing, as a result or effect of changing causes and conditions. All living and non-living elements are thus subject to decay and renewal.

**Karma:** The moral law of cause and effect which states that we experience the consequences of what we had done, and what we do will result in what we shall experience.

**Liberation:** State after removing the defilements and Karma which cause uncontrolled rebirth in cyclic existence.

**Loving-kindness:** It is the wish for the happiness and well-being of others. *Metta* in Pali.

**Lower realms:** The realms of animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings.

## GLOSSARY

**Manjusri Bodhisattva:** He is a bodhisattva of wisdom.

**Maitreya Bodhisattva:** Maitreya is a bodhisattva who will appear on Earth in the future, achieve complete enlightenment, and teach the Dharma. According to the scriptures, Maitreya will succeed the present Shakyamuni Buddha.

**Maudgalyayana:** He was one of Shakyamuni Buddha's closest disciples who was considered the second of the Buddha's two foremost male disciples (foremost in supernatural powers), together with Shariputra. Maudgalyayana was able to use his powers of mind-reading in order to give good and fitting advice to his students, so that they could attain results quickly.

**Meditation:** A practice to habituate ourselves to positive and realistic states of mind.

**Merits:** Blessings, positive potential. Imprints of positive actions on the mindstream leading to future happiness.

**Mindfulness:** An aspect of the 'Noble Eightfold Path' — the quality that enables us to remember, and keep our awareness and attention on what is beneficial to one and all in terms of thought, speech and action.

**Nirvana:** It is the ultimate spiritual goal in Buddhism to be free from cyclical rebirths.

**Patriarch:** Founding Master. A title that describes the lineage from Bodhidharma to Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch.

**Prateyabuddha:** Solitary realiser. One who attains enlightenment on his own, without the guidance of teachers but who dies without proclaiming the truth to the world. Said to arise only in ages where there is no Buddha and the Dharma is lost.

**Precepts:** The basic guidelines of moral conduct.

**Pureland:** A pureland is the celestial realm or pure abode of a Buddha or Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism.

**Samsara:** This world of rebirth and suffering.

**Sentient beings:** Beings with consciousness in the six realms of hells, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demi-gods and gods.

**Shariputra:** An Arhat "foremost in wisdom" renowned for his teachings, who is one of two chief male disciples of the Buddha along with Maudgalyayana.

**Stupa:** A hemispherical structure containing relics.

**Suffering:** The physical and mental feeling of dissatisfaction.

**Sutra:** The recorded teachings of the Buddha.

**Tathagata:** An honorific title of a Buddha.

**Three Evil Paths:** The paths of hell, hungry ghosts and animals.

**Triple Gem:** The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

**Venerable:** An honorific form of address for a Buddhist monastic.

**Virtues:** Blessings which transcend birth and death and lead to Buddhahood. Depending on the mind of the practitioner, that is, whether he is seeking mundane rewards (merit) or transcendence (virtue), the same action can lead to either merit or virtue.

**Zen:** A school of Buddhism. Also known as *Chan*.

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