



Learn English Through Stories

Panchatantra Tales

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41. The Fortune Teller



Once upon a time in India, long ago, there lived a man with his wife. He was a woodcutter by profession and everyday he would sell the wood he chopped and bring back a few copper coins to his wife. One day however, his wife was very upset and she said that she did not want these copper coins anymore. She then compared her husband to the man next door who brought gold coins daily to the house as he was a fortune teller. The wife then forced her husband who was a woodcutter to become a fortune teller. The man pleaded and argued, but the wife blackmailed him by saying that she would leave him unless he became a fortune teller and brought home gold coins. With no other choice in sight, the man decided to become a fortune teller.

Next day, the man went to the market and bartered his axe for a dice. Taking the dice, he went and sat down in front of a vegetable shop and waited for his first client. After a long day, his first client came up to him and it was a woman. She claimed to be the minister's wife and asked him to find her precious lost ring, which was a gift by the king himself. The man did not know what to do and he gazed at the woman's saree. He suddenly found a hole in the saree and became fixated on it. In this state of mind, he accidentally dropped the dice from his hand and uttered the word "hole". The woman immediately rushed back to her home and in a short while, she came back to the man. She told him that she found the ring in a hole in the wall. The man himself did not know what to make of the situation but he decided to play along. The woman then gave a small bag of gold coins as payment to the "fortune teller" and after thanking him, she went home.

That day, when the man went to his wife and gave her the bag of gold coins, she was very happy and more greed filled her mind. The man then told her that he was lucky to not get caught this time and said that he was not going to tell fortunes from tomorrow. The wife again started to blackmail her husband and without a choice, he returned to his new profession the next day.

At this same time, it so happened that the king's crown went missing from the palace and he was very anxious. The king had already consulted all the famous fortune tellers in his kingdom, but they all were of no use. The king then consulted his minister for advice and at this time, he told the king about the fortune teller who had found his wife's ring. After some thought, the king told the minister to bring him to the palace the next day.

Next morning, the minister brought the "fortune teller" to the court and the king explained to him about what had taken place. The man was nervous and did not know what to do. After this, the king said that if he was unsuccessful, he would chop off his nose and poke his eyes. Now, the man started to sweat and shiver and after accepting the task with no other choice, he left the palace.

The scared man now did not know what to do and in his fear, he decided to hang himself in the forest. As the man walked he kept mumbling the words "eyes" and "nose" to himself in his mother tongue which was Punjabi. The man uttered "Ukhia" and "Nukk" and in this state of delirium, he found some rope and taking it, started to walk towards a big tree.

Under the big tree, two men were lying down with big bags beside them. As soon as they saw a man coming towards them with a rope saying "Ukhia" and "Nukk", they got so frightened that they went and fell at the feet of the man. They held the man's feet and asked for his forgiveness. The man finally returned to his senses and when his eyes fell on the big bags, he asked them to empty its contents onto the ground. After they did so, the man picked up the crown from various other jewels and riches.

The two thieves stood nearby, trembling from head to toe and they watched as the man examined the crown. The man then told them to return the crown to the palace and after that they could take the other wealth along with them and never return to this kingdom again. The two thieves nodded their heads and that night they placed the crown back in the palace and disappeared, never to be seen again. As luck would have it: the names of two men were Ukhia and Nukkia.

Next day, the man went to the palace and told the king that he had been given a choice by a higher power to either get the crown or capture the person who stole it. And so he told the king that he had chosen the crown and at the same moment, the guards brought the crown in front of the king. The king was extremely pleased and taking the crown, he asked him if he would be willing to carry out more such tasks. For this, the man said that all his powers were exhausted in finding the crown and he could no longer tell fortunes. The king could not say anything and so he gave him huge amounts of wealth as a reward and with that the man did not go back to his wife, but instead he went

elsewhere and started a new life. In fact, he obtained Business Visa Permit for the USA. After settling there he got married to a Spanish woman and lived happily ever after!

Moral - Fortune favours the brave. Timely thinking always saves the day.

42. How the Tiger got its Stripes



Once upon a time, long before people started writing stories, there was an orange coloured animal called the tiger. The tiger was god's greatest creation and he was very proud of himself. But his pride knew no bounds and it soon developed into arrogance.

The tiger would daily go to the river and drink water. Apart from drinking water, he would admire himself by looking at his reflection in the river. He would flex his body in various poses and inflate his own ego. He thought of himself to be the most perfect creature in every way possible, until one day, another animal came to the river.

That day, a big bull came to the river to drink some water and the tiger was stunned to see someone else much bigger than him. Naturally, he grew jealous and asked him many questions. He found out that the bull spent his time in some field and decided to check it out. After the bull finished drinking water, he followed the bull to the field and saw that a human was using the bull to plough the field. The tiger then thought to himself how unfortunate it must be, to be used by someone weaker than oneself, like a servant. He then walked away from there and decided to talk to the bull the next day.

The next day, the bull came at the same time to the river and the tiger asked him as to why he was being used like a servant by humans who were weaker than him. The bull then told the tiger that he was foolish for thinking that physical strength was the only parameter in evaluating creatures. He said that humans had wisdom and that being strong mentally was more necessary than being strong physically. The tiger was however not smart enough to understand this and he refused to accept what the bull said.

He then asked the bull as to where he could get wisdom and to this the bull said that, he must directly ask a human. And so, the tiger decided to get the wisdom of humans by asking one directly all by himself!

A few days later, the tiger followed the human (who was ploughing the field with the bull) into the forest. The tiger then sprang in front of the human suddenly and threatened him to hand over the wisdom to him. The man fearing for his life, began to think quickly. He then told the tiger that he had left the wisdom in his house and that he needed to go back home to get it. The tiger agreed to this, but the man then raised a concern. He asked the tiger to give a guarantee that he would not attack him when he was on his way to the house. The tiger reassured the man, saying that he would not attack him, but the man still felt unsure and so he asked the tiger if he could tie his tail to a tree. The tiger agreed without giving a second thought to it.

Next, the man asked if he could tie the tiger's fore paws to the tree and the tiger agreed blindly once again. After this, the tiger's hind paws, neck, body and head were all bound to a tree with thick black ropes. The tiger was now fully tied up to the tree and the man left, never to return again.

After many hours passed, the tiger realised that the man had cheated him and he tried to cut loose from the ropes. But the ropes were tied very tight and so he had to struggle a lot before he was able to break free. When the tiger was free, he felt thirsty and so he rushed to the river to drink some water. It was then that the tiger saw something in his reflection that frightened him. His orange body was covered here and there with black stripes. These stripes were present all over the body and he was so shocked to see his beauty ruined by a few black ropes. He then realised that the black ropes had caused this to his body. The tiger then ran away into a deep part of the forest, too ashamed to look at his own self ever again!

Fun fact - The stripes of the tiger help in camouflaging its appearance when hunting.

A Blessing in Disguise — something that at first appears to be bad or unlucky but is actually good

Moral - Wisdom is the wealth of the wise.

43. The Monkeys and the Bell



Once upon a time, there lived a robber in a village. One day, he stole a temple bell and ran towards the forest. A Tiger heard the jingle of the bell and became curious to locate the sound. As soon as, he saw the robber, he jumped upon him and killed him at once. The bell fell on the ground. After a few days, a group of monkeys passed through that way. They spotted the bell and carried it to their home.

They found the jingle of the bell very interesting. Subsequently every one of them became very fond of the bell and started playing with it. After every tiring day, in the night monkeys would sit on the top of the hill in the forest and enjoy the melodious sound of the bell. The people of the village were afraid of the noise. Soon afterwards, the people from the village found the body of the robber and proclaimed, "Certainly there is an evil spirit around here that kills human beings and then rings the bell to celebrate".

When the people heard this, they thought that some demon was haunting their village. Without giving any second thought, People started leaving the city in terror. There was an intelligent and bold woman in that village. She thought to herself, "I don't believe that some demon is haunting this village. I will find out that who is ringing the bell". At late night, she went into the forest bravely and found that a group of monkeys were playing about and ringing the bell.

Now as the woman knew the secret about the bell, she went to the King and said, "Your Majesty! I'm sure this evil spirit can be conquered by worshipping the Gods. But this will cost money. If you can grant me some money, I will kill the demon and bring happiness to the village". The King, who was too afraid to get rid of the demon, granted the request of the woman.

On receiving the money, the woman bought some peas, groundnuts and fruits. She arranged a worship of the Gods. She made a circle on the ground, placed all the eatables and started worshipping the Gods. After the ritual, she picked up all the eatables and went into the forest. She placed the fruits and other things under a tree near the hill. She kept a watch of the monkeys from a distance.

As and when the monkeys saw the eatables, they dropped the bell just as the old woman had expected out of them. They ran to pick the eatables. The woman picked up the bell quickly and rushed towards the village. She gave the bell in the court of the King. The King was happy with the brave woman and everyone in the village admired her bravery. The pleased King rewarded the woman for her bravery. Since that day, there was no noise and people lived happily ever after.

Moral: One must not be afraid of trifles. Intelligence and courage succeed against all odds.

44. The Unforgiving Monkey

Chandra was a king, whose sons kept a group of monkeys as pets.

These monkeys were treated as royal pets, and were provided with the choicest of foods and the best of care. As they did not have much to do, they had become fat.

The chief of these monkeys was very wise. He followed great philosophers and was learned in many sciences. He always tried to teach the other monkeys, but they had become too absorbed in their lavish lives to follow much of his teachings.

On the other hand, the princes also had two strong rams (billy goats), which used to draw the carriage used by the young princes.

One of the rams was a food lover, and would creep into the kitchen whenever he could and eat whatever he could get there. This made the cooks very angry, and they would keep a watch. The cooks would throw anything they could lay their hand on, to hit the ram, when he would be near the kitchen.

Noticing the cooks trying to hit him with sticks, earthen pots, copper pans and anything they found handy, the chief of the monkeys thought, "This behaviour could lead to accidents, and this entire city may perish. What if they threw something with fire?"

The chief of monkeys summoned the other monkey and said, "The behaviour of the cooks towards the ram can lead to some mishap any day, and we may well be on the losing side, if that is to happen. Let us get away from here, before some accident is to happen."

But, the other monkeys were enjoying their lavish treatment, and did not go back to the jungle. They refused to heed the chief's warnings, and decided to stay. They assumed that the chief was getting old, and having all types of weird thoughts.

Thus, the chief of monkeys decided to leave alone. He said, "You are more fools than crazy not to foresee the danger. I shall leave here, as I value life more than the abundant foods served here!"

After the chief of monkey had departed to the jungle alone, one day, the ram entered the kitchen and ate some food that was being organized to be served to the king.

One of the cooks got very angry, and unable to get anything else handy, threw a half-burnt log from the oven. The log hit the ram. As the ram's body was covered with wool, it instantly caught fire. In the pain of fire on him, the ram ran to the stable. The dry grass for the horses caught fire, and in a moment the whole stable was engulfed in fire.

There was a pandemonium, and by the time, the fire was extinguished by the palace workers, the horses suffered grave burnings. When the news reached the king, he was very depressed that such a thing had happened to his favourite horses, and summoned veterinary surgeons to prescribe him remedy.

After referring many scriptures, the veterinary surgeons advised, "O King, the wounds caused by fire will recover fast, if they are applied with monkey's fat."

Thus, the king ordered all the pet monkeys be caught, and killed immediately. The fat from their bodies were then used to treat the horse's wounds.

When this news reached the chief of the monkeys, he was very sad. He thought, "The monkeys were foolish not to heed the warnings, but the king is wicked for doing this to his pets. I will make him pay for his actions!"

He had not eaten food, or drunk water for several days as he was heart-broken. Absent-mindedly, he came to a lake full of beautiful lotus. He was thirsty, and decided to drink some water. As he came near the lake, he noticed that there were many footprints of both men and animals, that led to the lake, but not a single footprint led away from the lake.

He became aware, and concluded there must be something wrong in this beautifully decorated lake. He fetched some hollow stems of lotus plant nearby, and using them as a pipe, drank water from a distance.

As he was doing so, a monster emerged from the lake. He had a necklace of jewels around his neck. He said, "I am a monster who lives in this lake. Whoever enters this lake to bathe or drink water, ends up in my tummy. For so many years, I have not seen anybody as wise as you! You drink water from the lake, but maintain a distance where I cannot touch you. I am so pleased with

you, that I shall grant any wish you may want!"

The chief of monkey immediately remembered that he had a revenge to take, and said, "Tell me, how many can you eat? I have a certain king as my enemy. If you give me your necklace, I shall use it to persuade the king and his men to enter the lake."

The monster replied, "If they enter the lake, I can eat thousands of them. Go ahead and bring as many as you can!"

The chief of monkey wore the necklace in his neck and jumped from tree to tree to reach the palace as early as possible. He went straight into the king's court.

When the king and everybody else saw the chief of monkeys wearing a beautiful necklace of jewels, they became curious. They asked the chief of monkeys all sort of questions.

The chief of monkey said to the king, "O king, while wandering in the jungle, I have come across a large treasure that *Kuber* (God of treasures) has hidden. It is secretly hidden inside a lake. Anyone, who takes a bath in the lake on a Sunday, can have as much treasure as he can carry. This necklace is nothing compared to the other treasures there! The diamonds in the lake would even put the sun to shame!"

When the king heard this, he said, "Hey Monkey Chief, if this lake really exists, please take lead us to it. I will come to see it myself, and even bring everybody in the palace along with me."

It was decided, and in the early morning of the very next Sunday, the king and the chief of the monkeys set to travel inside the jungle. They were followed by the princes, queens, ministers, household workers and everybody else in the palace.

When they reached the place, everybody was awe-struck to see the lake full of lotus. The chief of monkeys said, "Everybody should enter the lake at the same time, or only the first few will received the blessings. As for you, my king, you should wait. I will show you a special place to enter the lake after they have gone into the lake."

The greedy king, and everybody else followed his instructions and got into the lake. One by one, they started to disappear. The king kept anxiously waiting for them to return with treasures.

When his people and relatives did not come out of the lake after a long time, the king asked, "O Monkey Chief, why do they not come out? Why is it that they take so long time?"

The chief of the monkeys jumped to the top of a tree and replied, "O wicked king, a monster lives in this very lake that has eaten all your court members, and relatives. I have now killed all your family, as you have killed mine. The scriptures say, "it is not a sin to return evil for evil deeds."

He continued, "I have saved you, for you were once my master! You may return to your palace, empty-handed and alone."

Thus, the king returned to his palace after losing all his relatives and household members, while the chief of monkeys had his revenge.

The wise indeed say:

Greed surely brings disaster and destruction in the end.