



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F77

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The Horse

By Rabindranath Tagore

The work of creating the universe was nearly over when a new idea struck the Creator's mind.

He summoned an assistant and said, "Bring me some more materials, I shall make a new species of animal."

The assistant knelt down and replied, "Father, when, under the creative zeal, You made elephants and whales, lions and pythons, You barely thought of the quantity of substance they cost. Little is left of the heavier and harder stuff. But of the lighter there is still enough in store."

The Creator reflected for a moment: "Well, bring Me whatever you have."

This time the Creator took care to employ only a little of the harder materials. To the new animal he made, he gave neither horns nor claws; He gave it teeth that could chew but not bite. The energy He gave it was enough to make it useful on the battle-field, but He gave it no taste of its own for battles. The animal came to be known as the horse.

The Creator had spent in its making enough of such stuff as the air and the sky are made of. The result was that its mind was full of the desire for freedom. It would run a race with the wind, it would dash to the point where sky touched earth. Other animals ran with a purpose, but the horse raced about for no apparent reason, as though it were eager to fly away from its own self. It did not fight, it did not pounce on a prey, but loved only to run and to run. Wise men say that such a thing happens when you have too much of the wind and sky stuff in you.

The Creator was delighted with His own work. To some animals He gave forests to live in, to some He gave dens. But as He liked to see the horse running an aimless race, He assigned to it an open field.

Beyond that field lived Man. He was bent under the weight of the burdens he had accumulated. As he saw the horse, he knew that he would be able to shift his burden on to its back if, somehow, he could capture it.

One day he cast his nets and captured the horse. He put a saddle on its back and a curb in its mouth, and kept it confined in a prison.

The tiger remained in its forest home and the lion in its den; but the horse lost its home, the open field. In spite of its deep love for freedom it could not escape bondage.

When life became unbearable, it kicked wildly at its prison walls. That did less injury to the wall than to the horse's hoofs. But after constant kicks bits of plaster began to fall off. It made Man angry. "This is what I call ingratitude," he said; "I feed it, I have engaged servants to look after it; but the wretched animal does not see my kindness."

Firm measures were taken to tame the horse. At last Man could say proudly that there wasn't a creature more faithful to him.

Claws and horns it had not; nor did it have teeth which could bite. Even kicking it had to give up for fear of the whip. All that was now left to it was to neigh.

One day the Creator heard the distressed neighing. He woke up from His meditation and looked down at the open fields of the earth. The horse was not there.

He summoned Death and said: "This is your doing; you have got hold of My horse."

Death said, "Eternal Father, You always look upon me with suspicion; but be good enough to cast Your eye on the house of Man."

The Creator looked down again and saw the horse standing in a narrow, walled space, neighing weakly.

His heart was filled with pity, and He said to Man: "Unless you set the horse free, I shall give it teeth and claws like the tiger's."

Man said, "Father, this creature of Yours does not deserve freedom. Look what a nice stable I've built for its comfort and well-being!"

But the Creator insisted that the horse should be set free.

Man said, "I shall obey Your will. But I am sure you will change Your mind in a week and agree that my stable is the best place for it."

Man then corded together the front legs of the horse and set it free. Thus tied, it could only hop about in the manner of a frog.

From heaven the Creator could see the horse, but not the cord. He grew red with shame. So, that was the sort of creature He had made! He admitted to Himself that it was one of the worst blunders into which He had ever fallen.

Man said, "What is to be done with it? Are there no fields in Heaven where it might be sent to roam?"

The Creator answered, "I have had enough of it. Take the creature back to your stable."

Man said, "But, Father, what a burden it will be to me!"

The Creator answered, "Yes, but by accepting the burden you will show your greatness of heart."

Questions:

Question 1: What new idea struck the Creator when the work of creating the universe was nearly over?

Question 2: Why did the assistant say there was little left of the heavier and harder materials?

Question 3: What did the Creator give the horse instead of horns, claws, or strong biting teeth?

Question 4: What kind of "stuff" did the Creator use a lot of when making the horse, and what effect did it have on the horse's mind?

Question 5: Why did the horse love to run, according to the story?

Question 6: Where did the Creator assign the horse to live, and why?

Question 7: How did Man capture the horse and what did he do to control it?

Question 8: What did Man call the horse's wild kicking at the prison walls?

Question 9: What did the Creator threaten to give the horse if Man did not set it free?

Question 10: How did Man "set the horse free," and what happened as a result?

Answers:

Answer 1: He decided to make a new species of animal (the horse).

Answer 2: Because the Creator had used up most of the heavier and harder materials while making large animals like elephants, whales, lions, and pythons.

Answer 3: He gave it teeth that could chew but not bite, and enough energy to be useful in battle but no taste for fighting.

Answer 4: He used a lot of the lighter stuff, like the materials of air and sky, which filled the horse's mind with a strong desire for freedom.

Answer 5: The horse loved to run for the joy of running itself — racing with the wind and dashing toward the horizon — not for any purpose like hunting or fighting.

Answer 6: The Creator assigned the horse an open field (with no walls or restrictions), because He enjoyed watching it run freely and aimlessly.

Answer 7: Man cast nets to capture the horse, then put a saddle on its back, a curb (bit) in its mouth, and confined it in a stable (prison).

Answer 8: Man called it ingratitude, saying he fed the horse and cared for it, but the horse did not appreciate his kindness.

Answer 9: The Creator threatened to give the horse teeth and claws like the tiger's.

Answer 10: Man tied the horse's front legs together with a cord and released it, so it could only hop awkwardly like a frog instead of running freely.

Vocabulary Questions:

Question 1: What does the word "zeal" mean in the assistant's reply: "when, under the creative zeal, You made elephants and whales, lions and pythons..."?

Question 2: In the sentence "He put a saddle on its back and a curb in its mouth," what does "curb" refer to in this context?

Question 3: What does "bondage" mean when the story says: "In spite of its deep love for freedom it could not escape bondage"?

Question 4: What does the word "ingratitude" mean in Man's complaint: "This is what I call ingratitude"?

Question 5: In the Creator's words at the end: "by accepting the burden you will show your greatness of heart," what does "greatness of heart" mean here?

Vocabulary Answers:

Answer 1: "Zeal" means great enthusiasm, passion, or energetic eagerness — it describes the intense creative energy and excitement the Creator had while making the earlier large animals.

Answer 2: "Curb" refers to a bit (a metal bar or device) placed in the horse's mouth as part of a bridle, used to control or restrain the horse by applying pressure (often a curb bit with leverage action).

Answer 3: "Bondage" means captivity, slavery, or being held captive/restrained against one's will — here, it describes the horse's loss of freedom after being captured and confined by Man in a stable.

Answer 4: "Ingratitude" means a lack of thankfulness or appreciation for kindness received — Man uses it angrily to accuse the horse of not recognizing or being grateful for the food and care provided, despite the imprisonment.

Answer 5: "Greatness of heart" means generosity, kindness, or nobility of spirit — the Creator ironically suggests that by taking back the burden of caring for the horse, Man will demonstrate a supposedly magnanimous or big-hearted character (though the story highlights human domination instead).