



Spark Tales

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Contents

Intro.....	4
Old Tales.....	5
The Golden Plate.....	5
Grey and beauty.....	7
The Wind and the Moon	9
Two Stupid Children.....	11
One smart antelope	13
The Magician and the thieves	15
.....	15
The Bad Gardener	20
A Bull Named Joy	22
Buried Treasure.....	25
How old are we	27
Playing Hooky.....	29
Looking for water.....	30
Best Friends.....	32
The forest fire and the dove	35
The significance of a Mouse.....	37
Lucky Fish	40
The Bamboo Cage	42
Two cows and a pig.....	44
Salt and Liquor	46
A Prince without a King.....	47
The demon's power	50
Temptation in the Desert.....	53
The Drunken Elephant	56
Recent Tales	57
Where dragons hide.....	57
Feeding the wolf	60
How To Ride A Bike	61
Cooking With Spice	62
The Frog in The Well	63

The Elephant and the blind men..... 65
Stop The Noise In Your Head 67
The Mirror 69
The Sun And The Wind..... 70
The Sun And Darkness 71
Dragon Tales 72

Intro



These stories are meant to be pondered over. They are not just stories. There is a meaning behind them all.

This is the definition of the word ponder.

verb

think about (something) carefully, especially before making a decision or reaching a conclusion.

Come gather around the fire where ever you are. Each spark represents a precious story to be told. Come and be mesmerized. These stories have been told in some shape and fashion for eternity. Our world would be in a better place if we embraced the great storytelling from our wonderful past.

Old Tales

The Golden Plate



Spark Tales The Golden Plate

Fletcher Soul Traveler

1

Once upon a time in a place called Seri, there were two salesmen of pots and pans and hand-made trinkets. They agreed to divide the town between them. They also said that after one had gone through his area, it was all right for the other to try and sell where the first had already been.

One day, while one of them was coming down a street, a poor little girl saw him and asked her grandmother to buy her a bracelet. The old grandmother replied, "How can we poor people buy bracelets?" The little girl said, "Since we don't have any money, we can give our black sooty old plate." The old woman agreed to give it a try, so she invited the dealer inside.

The salesman saw that these people were very poor and innocent, so he didn't want to waste his time with them. Even though the old woman pleaded with him, he said he had no bracelet that she could afford to buy. Then she asked, "We have an old plate that is useless to us, can we trade it for a bracelet?" The man took it and, while examining it, happened to scratch the bottom of it. To his surprise, he saw that underneath the black soot, it was a golden plate! But he didn't let on that he had noticed it. Instead, he decided to deceive these poor people so he could get the plate for next to nothing. He said, "This is not worth even one bracelet. There's no value in this. I don't want it!" He left, thinking he would return later when they would accept even less for the plate.

Meanwhile the other salesman, after finishing in his part of town, followed after the first as they had agreed. He ended up at the same house. Again the poor little girl begged her grandmother to trade the old plate for a bracelet. The woman saw that this was a nice tender looking merchant and thought, "He's a good man, not

¹ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_03.htm

like the rough-talking first salesman." So she invited him in and offered to trade the same black sooty old plate for one bracelet. When he examined it, he too saw that it was pure gold under the grime. He said to the old woman, "All my goods and all my money together are not worth as much as this rich golden plate!"

Of course, the woman was shocked at this discovery, but now she knew that he was indeed a good and honest fellow. So she said she would be glad to accept whatever he could trade for it. The salesman said, "I'll give you all my pots and pans and trinkets, plus all my money, if you will let me keep just eight coins and my balancing scale, with its cover to put the golden plate in." They made the trade. He went down to the river, where he paid the eight coins to the ferryman to take him across.

By then the greedy salesman had returned, already adding up huge imaginary profits in his head. When he met the little girl and her grandmother again, he said he had changed his mind and was willing to offer a few cents, but not one of his bracelets, for the useless black sooty old plate. The old woman then calmly told him of the trade she had just made with the honest salesman, and said, "Sir, you lied to us."

The greedy salesman was not ashamed of his lies, but he was saddened as he thought, "I've lost the golden plate that must be worth a hundred thousand." So he asked the woman, "Which way did he go?" She told him the direction. He left all his things right there at her door and ran down to the river, thinking, "He robbed me! He robbed me! He won't make a fool out of me!"

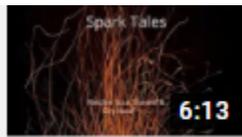
From the riverside, he saw the honest salesman still crossing over on the ferry boat. He shouted to the ferryman, "Come back!" But the good merchant told him to keep on going to the other side, and that's what he did.

Seeing that he could do nothing, the greedy salesman exploded with rage. He jumped up and down, beating his chest. He became so filled with hatred towards the honest man, who had won the golden plate, that he made himself cough up blood. He had a heart attack and died on the spot!

The moral is: "Honesty is the best policy."

Grey and beauty

2



Spark Tales Beauty and Grey

Fletcher Soul Traveler

Once upon a time, there was a deer who was the leader of a herd of a thousand. He had two sons. One was very slim and tall, with bright alert eyes, and smooth reddish fur. He was called Beauty. The other was Grey, also slim and tall, and was called Grey.

One day, after they were fully grown, their father called Beauty and Grey to him. He said, "I am now very old, so I cannot do all that is necessary to look after this big herd of deer. I want you, my two grown-up children, to be the leaders, while I retire from looking after them all the time. We will divide the herd, and each of you will lead 500 deer." So it was done.

In India, when the harvest time comes, the deer are always in danger. The rice is at its tallest, and the deer cannot help but go into the paddies and eat it. To avoid the destruction of their crops, the human beings dig pits, set sharp stakes in the ground, and build stone traps - all to capture and kill the deer.

Knowing this was the season, the wise old deer called the two new leaders to him. He advised them to take the herds up into the mountain forest, far from the dangerous farmlands. This was how he had always saved the deer from being wounded or killed. Then he would bring them back to the low lands after the harvest was over.

Since he was too old and weak for the trip, he would remain behind in hiding. He warned them to be careful and have a safe journey. Beauty set out with his herd for the mountain forest, and so did Grey with his.

The villagers all along the way knew that this was the time the deer moved from the low lying farmlands to the high countryside. So they hid along the way and killed the deer as they passed by.

² http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_12.htm

Grey did not pay attention to his father's wise advice. Instead of being careful and traveling safely, he was in a hurry to get to the lush mountain forest. So he moved his herd constantly, during the night, at dawn and dusk, and even in broad daylight. This made it easy for the people to shoot the deer in Grey's herd with bows and arrows. Many were killed, and many were wounded, only to die in pain later on. Grey reached the forest with only a few deer remaining alive.

The tall sleek red-furred Beauty was wise enough to understand the danger to his moving herd. So he was very careful. He knew it was safer to stay away from the villages, and from all humans. He knew it was not safe in the daytime, or even at dawn or dusk. So he led his herd wide around the villages and moved only in the middle of the night. Beauty's herd arrived in the mountain forest safe and sound, with no one killed or injured.

The two herds found each other and remained in the mountains until well after the harvest season was over. Then they began the return to the farmland country.

Grey had learned nothing from the first trip. As it was getting cold in the mountains, he was in a hurry to get to the warmer low lands. So he was just as careless as before. Again the people hid along the way and attacked and killed the deer. All Grey's herd were killed, later to be eaten or sold by the villagers. Grey himself was the only one who survived the journey.

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

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

The moral is: A wise leader puts the safety of his followers first.



4

Once upon a time, two very good friends lived together in the shade of a rock. Strange as it may seem, one was a lion and one was a tiger. They had met when they were too young to know the difference between lions and tigers. So they did not think their friendship was at all unusual. Besides, it was a peaceful part of the mountains, possibly due to the influence of a gentle forest monk who lived nearby. He was a hermit, one who lives far away from other people.

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

The argument got stronger and stronger. Neither could convince the other. They could not reach any conclusion to resolve the growing dispute. They even started calling each other names! Fearing for their friendship, they decided to go ask the learned forest monk, who would surely know about such things.

Visiting the peaceful hermit, the lion and tiger bowed respectfully and put their question to him. The friendly monk thought for a while and then gave his answer. "It can be cold in any phase of the moon, from new to full and back to new again. It is the wind that brings the cold, whether from west or north or east. Therefore, in a way, you are both right! And neither of you is defeated by the other. The most important thing is to live without conflict, to remain united. Unity is best by all means."

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

³ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_19.htm

4

The moral is: Weather comes and the weather goes, but friendship remains.

Two Stupid Children

5



Once upon a time, there was an old carpenter with a shiny bald head. On sunny days, his head shined so brightly that people shaded their eyes when talking to him!

On just such a sunny day, a hungry mosquito was attracted to the old carpenter's bright bald head. He landed on it and started biting into it.

The carpenter was busy smoothing a piece of wood with a plane. When he felt the mosquito biting him, he tried to chase him away. But the hungry mosquito would not leave such a good looking meal. So the man called over his son and asked him to get rid of the stubborn pest.

Unlike his father's shiny head, the son was not so bright. But he was hardworking and obedient. He said, 'Don't worry Dad, be patient. I'll kill that bug with just one blow!'

Then he picked up a very sharp ax and took careful aim at the mosquito. Without thinking, he came down with the ax and split the mosquito in two! Unfortunately, after slicing through the mosquito, the ax also split the old carpenter's shiny bald head in two.

Meanwhile, an adviser to the king happened to be passing by with his followers. They saw what had just happened, and were quite shocked that anyone could be so stupid!

⁵ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_47.htm

The king's adviser said, "Don't be so surprised by human stupidity! This reminds me of a similar event that occurred just yesterday.

"In a village not far from here, a woman was cleaning rice. She was pounding it in a mortar with a pestle, to separate the husks. As she worked up a sweat, a swarm of flies began buzzing around her head. She tried to chase them away, but, the thirsty flies would not leave.

"Then she called over her daughter and asked her to shoo away the bothersome bugs. Although she was a rather foolish girl, the daughter always tried her best to please her mother.

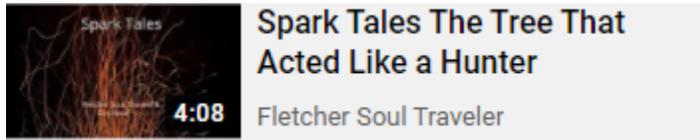
"So she stood up from her mortar, raised her pestle, and took careful aim at the biggest and boldest of the flies. Without thinking, she pounded the fly to death! But of course, the same blow that killed the fly also ended her mother's life.

"You all know what they say," said the adviser, finishing his story, "'With friends like these, who needs enemies!'"

The moral is: A wise enemy is less dangerous than a foolish friend.

One smart antelope

6



Once upon a time, there was an antelope who lived in the deep forest. He ate the fruits that fell from the trees. There was one tree that had become his favorite.

In the same area, there was a hunter who captured and killed antelopes and deer. He put down fruit as bait under a tree. Then he waited, hiding in the branches above. He held a rope noose hanging down to the ground around the fruits. When an animal ate the fruit, the hunter tightened the noose and caught him.

Early one morning the antelope came to his favorite tree in search of fruits to eat. He did not see that the hunter was hiding in it, with his noose-trap ready. Even though he was hungry, the antelope was very careful. He was on the lookout for any possible danger. He saw the delicious looking ripe fruits at the foot of his favorite tree. He wondered why no animal had yet eaten any, and so he was afraid something was wrong.

The hiding hunter saw the antelope approaching from a distance. Seeing him stop and take great care, he was afraid he would not be able to trap him. He was so anxious that he began throwing fruits in the direction of the antelope, trying to lure him into coming closer.

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

He spoke in the direction of the tree. "Oh my dear fruit tree, you used to give me your fruits by letting them fall straight down to the ground. Now, throwing them towards me, you do not act at all like a tree! Since you have changed your habits, I

⁶ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_23.htm

too will change mine. I will get my fruits from a different tree from now on, one that still acts like a tree!"

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

The antelope realized that, by getting so angry, the hunter had given himself away a second time. So he spoke in the direction of the tree again. "Not only don't you act like a tree, but you act like a hunter! You foolish humans, who live by killing animals. You do not understand that killing the innocent brings harm also to you, both in this life and by rebirth in a hell world. We antelopes are far wiser than you. We eat fruits, we remain innocent of killing others, and we avoid the harmful results."

So saying, the careful antelope leaped into the thick forest and was gone.

The moral is: The wise remain innocent.

The Magician and the thieves



78

Once upon a time in Benares, there was a king named Brahmadata. In one of the kingdom's remote villages, there was a priest who had magical power. He knew a special magic spell which was a secret given to him by his teacher.

This spell could be used only once a year when the planets were lined up in a certain way. Only then, the priest could say the secret magic words into his open palms. Then he looked up into the sky, clapped his hands, and a shower of precious jewels came down on him.

The magic priest was also a teacher. He had a very good student, who was intelligent and able to understand the most difficult ideas. He was obedient and faithful, always wishing to honor and protect his master.

One day, the priest had to go on a trip to a faraway village, to perform animal sacrifice. Since he had to take a dangerous road, the good student went with him.

Along this road there happened to be a gang of 500 bandits. They were known as the 'Kidnapper Gang'. They captured people and demanded ransom money in return for letting them live.

Lo and behold, the magic priest and his good student were captured by the Kidnapper Gang. They set the ransom at 5,000 gold coins and sent the student to go get it, to save his master's life.

Before leaving, the student knelt before his teacher and bowed respectfully. He said to him quietly, so the bandits could not hear, "Oh master, tonight is the one night of the year when the planets will be lined up perfectly. Only then can your magic spell be used to shower you with jewels from the sky. However, I must warn you, my beloved and respected teacher, that to use such a power to save

⁷ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_50.htm

⁸

yourself from such greedy men as these would be extremely dangerous. Obtaining great wealth so easily must lead to disaster for men like them. And if you think only of your safety, bringing such harm to them will cause danger to you as well.

"Therefore, I warn you, do not give in to the desire to make the spell of jewels. Let the lucky night pass by for this year. Even if these bandits harm you, trust your faithful student to save you, without adding to your danger." So saying, he took his leave.

That evening, the kidnappers tied up the magic priest tightly and left him outside their cave for the night. They gave him nothing to eat or drink.

After the moon came out, the priest saw the planets lining up so his spell could work. He thought, "Why should I suffer like this? I can magically pay my ransom. Why should I care if harm comes to these 500 kidnappers? I am a magic priest. My life is worth much more than theirs. I care only for my own life. And besides, this lucky night only comes but once a year. I cannot waste the chance to use my great power!"

Having decided to ignore the advice of the good student, he called the kidnappers and said, "Oh brave and mighty ones, why do you want to tie me up and make me suffer?"

They replied, "Oh holy priest, we need money. We have many mouths to feed. We must have money, and lots of it!"

The magic priest said, "Ah, you did this for money? Is that all there is to it? In that case, I will make you rich beyond your wildest dreams! I am great and powerful. As a holy priest, you can trust me. You must untie me, wash my head and face, dress me in new clothes, and cover me with flowers. Then, after so honoring me properly, leave me alone to do my magic."

The kidnappers followed his instructions. But, not trusting him completely, they hid in the bushes and secretly watched him.

This is what they saw. The washed and flower-covered priest looked up into the sky. Seeing that the planets were lined up in the special lucky pattern, he lowered his head and muttered the magic spell into his hands. They were sounds that no

one could understand, something like this: "Nah Wah Shed-nath. Eel Neeah Med-rak. Goh Bah Mil-neeay."

Then he gazed into the sky and clapped his hands. Suddenly he was showered with the most beautiful jewels!

The Kidnapper Gang came out from hiding and grabbed all the precious stones. They wrapped them up in bundles and went off down the road, with the magic priest following behind.

On the way, they were stopped by another gang of 500 robbers. They asked them, "Why are you stopping us?" "Give us all your wealth!" the others demanded.

The kidnapers said, "Leave us alone. You can get all the riches you want from this magic priest, just as we have done. He says magic words, looks up into the sky, claps his hands, and the most fabulous jewels come down!"

So they let the Kidnapper Gang go, and surrounded the priest. They demanded that he make a shower of precious stones for them as well.

He said, "Of course I can give you all the jewels you want. But you must be patient and wait for one year. The lucky time, when the planets are lined up properly, has already come this year. It will not happen again until next year. Come see me then, and I will be happy to make you rich!"

Robbers are not exactly known for their patience. They became angry at once. They shouted at him, "Ah, you tricky lying priest! You made the Kidnapper Gang wealthy, but now you refuse to do the same for us. We'll teach you to take us so lightly!" Then they cut him in two with a sharp sword and left both halves of his body in the middle of the road.

The robbers chased after the Kidnapper Gang. There was a terrible bloody battle. After hours of fighting, they killed all 500 kidnapers and stole the wonderful jewels.

As soon as they left the battleground, the 500 robbers began quarreling over the wealth. They are divided into two rival groups of 250 each. These fought another bloody battle until only two were left alive one from each side.

These two collected all the valuable jewels and hid them in the forest. They were very hungry. So one guarded the treasure, while the other started cooking rice.

The one doing the guarding thought, "When the other is finished cooking, I will kill him and keep all this loot for myself?"

Meanwhile, the one doing the cooking thought, "If we divide these jewels in two, I will get less. Therefore, I will add poison to this rice, kill the other, and keep all the jewels for myself. Why share, when I can have it all!"

So he ate some of the rice, since he was so hungry, and poisoned the rest. He took the rice pot to the other and offered it to him. But he immediately swung his sword and chopped off the cook's head!

Then the hungry killer began gobbling up the poisoned rice. Within minutes, he dropped dead on the spot!

A few days later, the good student returned with the ransom money. He could not find his teacher or the Kidnapper Gang. Instead, he found only the worthless possessions they had left behind after getting the jewels.

Continuing down the road, he came to the two halves of his teacher's dead body. Realizing that the magic priest must have ignored his warning, he mourned his cruel death. Then he built a funeral pyre, covered it with wildflowers, and burned the body of his respected teacher.

A little further down the road, the good student came upon the 500 dead bodies of the Kidnapper Gang. Further still, he started seeing the dead robbers, until he counted 498.

Then he saw the footprints of the last two going into the forest. He realized that they too must fight over the treasure, so he followed them. Finally, he came to the dead body slumped over the rice pot, the other one with his head chopped off, and the bundles of valuable jewels. He could tell immediately what had happened.

He thought, "It is so sad. My teacher had great knowledge, but not enough common sense. He could not resist using his magical power, regardless of the results. By causing the deaths of the one-thousand greedy gangsters, he doomed himself as well."

The good student took the treasure back to the village and used it generously for the benefit of many.

The moral is: When power has no conscience, and greed has no limit - the killing has no end.



It was just before New Year's in Benares, in northern India. Everyone in the city was getting ready for the three-day celebration, including the gardener of the king's pleasure garden.

There was a large troop of monkeys living in this pleasure garden. So they wouldn't have to think too much, they always followed the advice of their leader, the monkey king.

The royal gardener wanted to celebrate the New Year's holiday, just like everybody else. So he decided to hand over his duties to the monkeys.

He went to the monkey king and said, "Oh king of monkeys, my honorable friend, would you do a little favor for me? New Year is coming. I too wish to celebrate. So I must be a way for three full days. Here in this lovely garden, there are plenty of fruits and berries and nuts to eat. You and your subjects maybe my guests, and eat as much as you wish. In return, please water the young trees and plants while I'm gone."

The monkey king replied, "Don't worry about a thing, my friend! We will do a terrific job! Have a good time!"

The gardener showed the monkeys where the watering buckets were kept. Feeling confident, he left to celebrate the holiday. The monkeys called after him, "Happy New Year!"

The next day, the monkeys filled up the buckets and began watering the young trees and plants. Then the king of the monkeys addressed them: "My subjects, it is not good to wastewater. Therefore, pull up each young tree or plant before watering. Inspect it to see how long the roots are. Then give more water to the

⁹ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_48.htm

ones with long roots and less water to the ones with short roots. That way we will not wastewater, and the gardener will be pleased!"

Without giving it any further thought, the obedient subjects followed their king's orders.

Meanwhile, a wise man was walking outside the entrance to the garden. He saw the monkeys uprooting all the lovely young trees and plants, measuring their roots, and carefully pouring water into the holes in the ground. He asked, "Oh foolish monkeys, what do you think you're doing to the king's beautiful garden?"

They answered, "We are watering the trees and plants, without wasting water! We were commanded to do so by our lord king."

The man said, "If this is the wisdom of the wisest among you - the king - what are the rest of you like? Intending to do a worthwhile deed, your foolishness turns it into a disaster!"

The moral is: Only fools can make good deeds into bad ones.

A Bull Named Joy



10

Once upon a time, in the country of Gandhara in northern India, there was a city called Takkasila. In that city, the Enlightenment Being was born as a certain calf. Since he was well-bred for strength, he was bought by a high-class rich man. He became very fond of the gentle animal, and called him 'Joy'. He took good care of him and fed him only the best.

When Joy grew up into a big fine strong bull, he thought, "I was brought up by this generous man. He gave me such good food and constant care, even though sometimes there were difficulties. Now I am a big grown-up bull and there is no other bull who can pull as heavy a load as I can. Therefore, I would like to use my strength to give something in return to my master."

So he said to the man, "Sir, please find some wealthy merchant who is proud of having many strong bulls. Challenge him by saying that your bull can pull one-hundred heavily loaded bullock carts."

Following his advice, the high-class rich man went to such a merchant and struck up a conversation. After a while, he brought up the idea of who had the strongest bull in the city.

The merchant said, "Many have bulls, but no one has any as strong as mine." The rich man said, "Sir, I have a bull who can pull one hundred heavily loaded bullock carts." "No, friend, how can there be such a bull? That is unbelievable!" said the merchant. The other replied, "I do have such a bull, and I am willing to make a bet."

The merchant said, "I will bet a thousand gold coins that your bull cannot pull a hundred loaded bullock carts." So the bet was made and they agreed on a date and time for the challenge.

¹⁰ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_29.htm

The merchant attached one-hundred big bullock carts. He filled them with sand and gravel to make them very heavy.

The high-class rich man fed the finest rice to the bull called Joy. He bathed him and decorated him and hung a beautiful garland of flowers around his neck.

Then he harnessed him to the first cart and climbed up onto it. Being so high class, he could not resist the urge to make himself seem very important. So he cracked a whip in the air, and yelled at the faithful bull, "Pull, you dumb animal! I command you to pull, you big dummy!"

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

The merchant laughed and demanded his winnings from the bet. The high-class rich man had to pay him the one thousand gold coins. He returned home and sat down, saddened by his lost bet, and embarrassed by the blow to his pride.

The bull called Joy grazed peacefully on his way home. When he arrived, he saw his master sadly lying on his side. He asked, "Sir, why are you lying there like that? Are you sleeping? You look sad." The man said I lost a thousand gold coins because of you. With such a loss, how could I sleep?"

The bull replied. "Sir, you called me 'dummy'. You even cracked a whip in the air over my head. In all my life, did I ever break anything, step on anything, make a mess in the wrong place, or behave like a 'dummy' in any way?" He answered, "No, my pet."

The bull called Joy said, "Then sir, why did you call me 'dumb animal', and insult me even in the presence of others? The fault is yours. I have done nothing wrong. But since I feel sorry for you, go again to the merchant and make the same bet for two thousand gold coins. And remember to use only the respectful words I deserve so well."

Then the high-class rich man went back to the merchant and made the bet for two-thousand gold coins. The merchant thought it would be easy money. Again he set up the one hundred heavily loaded bullock carts. Again the rich man fed and bathed the bull, and hung a garland of flowers around his neck.

When all was ready, the rich man touched Joy's forehead with a lotus blossom, having given up the whip. Thinking of him as fondly as if he were his child, he said, "My son, please do me the honor of pulling these one hundred bullock carts."

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

The merchant, with his mouth hanging open in disbelief, had to pay the two thousand gold coins. The onlookers were so impressed that they honored the bull called Joy with gifts. But even more important to the high-class rich man than his winnings was his valuable lesson in humility and respect.

The moral is: Harsh words bring no reward. Respectful words bring honor to all.

Buried Treasure

11



Once upon a time, there was an old man who lived in Benares. He had a very good friend, who was known to be wise. Luckily, or perhaps unluckily, he also had a beautiful young wife.

The old man and his young wife had a son. The man came to love his son very much. One day he thought, "I have learned that my beautiful young wife cannot always be trusted. When I die, I am sure she will marry another man, and together they will waste the wealth I have worked so hard for. Later on, there will be nothing left for my son to inherit from his mother. So I will do something to guarantee an inheritance for my deserving son. I will bury my wealth to protect it for him."

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

Before long, the old man died. Several years later, his son completed his education. He returned home to take his place as the head of the family. His mother said, "My son, being a suspicious man, your father has hidden his wealth. I am sure that his faithful servant, Nanda, knows where it is. You should ask him to show you. Then you can get married and support the whole family."

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

Then the two of them took a basket and a shovel into the forest. When they arrived at the place the treasure was buried, all of a sudden Nanda became puffed up with how important he was. Although he was only a servant, he had the

¹¹ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_41.htm

power of being the only one to know the secret. So he became conceited and thought he was better than the son. He said, "You son of a servant girl! Where would you inherit a treasure from?"

The patient son did not talk back to his father's servant. He suffered his abuse, even though it puzzled him. After a short time, they returned home empty-handed.

This strange behavior was repeated two more times. The son thought, "At home, Nanda appears willing to reveal the secret of the treasure. But when we go into the forest carrying the basket and shovel, he is no longer willing. I wonder why he changes his mind each time."

He decided to take this puzzle to his father's wise old friend. He went to him and described what had happened.

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

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

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

The moral is: A little power soon goes to the head of a one not used to it.



Spark Tales The Birth of a Banyan Tree

Fletcher Soul Traveler

Once upon a time, there was a big banyan tree in the forest beneath the mighty Himalayas. Living near this banyan tree were three very good friends. They were a dove, a monkey, and an elephant. Each of them was quite smart.

Occasionally the three friends got into a disagreement. When this happened, they did not consider the opinion of anyone of them to be more valuable. No matter how much experience each one had, his opinion was treated the same as the others. So it took them a long time to reach an agreement. Every time this happened, they had to start from the beginning to reach a solution.

After a while, they realized that it would save time, and help their friendship, if they could shorten their disagreements. They decided that it would certainly help if they considered the most valuable opinion first. Then, if they could agree on that one, they would not have to waste time, and possibly even become less friendly, by arguing about the other two.

Fortunately, they all thought the most valuable opinion was the one based on the most experience. Therefore, they could live together even more peacefully if they gave higher respect to the eldest among them. Only if his opinion were clearly wrong, would they need to consider others.

Unfortunately, the elephant and the monkey and the dove had no idea which one was the oldest. Since this was a time before old age was respected, they had no reason to remember their birthdays or their ages.

Then one day, while they were relaxing in the shade of the big banyan tree, the dove and the monkey asked the elephant, "As far back as you can remember, what was the size of this banyan tree?"

¹² http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_39.htm

The elephant replied, "I remember this tree for a very long time. When I was just a baby, I used to scratch my belly by rubbing it over the tender shoots on top of this banyan tree."

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

The monkey and the elephant asked the dove, "As far back as you can remember, what was the size of this banyan tree?"

The dove said, "When I was young, I was looking for food in a nearby forest. In that forest, there was a big old banyan tree, which was full of ripe berries. I ate some of those berries, and the next day I was standing right here. This was where I let my droppings fall, and the seeds they contained grew up to be this very tree!"

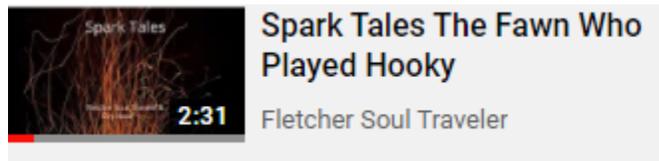
The monkey and the elephant said, "Aha! Sir dove, you must be the oldest. You deserve our respect and honor. From now on we will pay close attention to your words. Based on your wisdom and experience, advise us when we make mistakes. When there are disagreements, we will give the highest place to your opinion. We ask only that you be honest and just."

The dove replied, "I thank you for your respect, and I promise to always do my best to deserve it." It just so happened that this wise little dove was the Bodhisatta the Enlightenment Being.

The moral is: Respect for the wisdom of elders leads to harmony.

Playing Hooky

13



Once upon a time, there was a herd of forest deer. In this herd was a wise and respected teacher, cunning in the ways of deer. He taught the tricks and strategies of survival to the young fawns.

One day, his younger sister brought her son to him, to be taught what is so important for deer. She said, "Oh brother teacher, this is my son. Please teach him the tricks and strategies of deer." The teacher said to the fawn, "Very well, you can come at this time tomorrow for your first lesson."

At first, the young deer came to the lessons as he was supposed to. But soon, he became more interested in playing with the other young bucks and does. He didn't realize how dangerous it could be for a deer who learned nothing but deer games. So he started cutting classes. Soon he was playing hooky all the time.

Unfortunately, one day the fawn who played hooky stepped in a snare and was trapped. Since he was missing, his mother worried. She went to her brother the teacher, and asked him, "My dear brother, how is my son? Have you taught your nephew the tricks and strategies of deer?"

The teacher replied, "My dear sister, your son was disobedient and unteachable. Out of respect for you, I tried my best to teach him. But he did not want to learn the tricks and strategies of deer. He played hooky! How could I possibly teach him? You are obedient and faithful, but he is not. It is useless to try to teach him."

Later they heard the sad news. The stubborn fawn who played hooky had been trapped and killed by a hunter. He skinned him and took the meat home to his family.

The moral is: Nothing can be learned from a teacher, by one who misses the class.

¹³ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_17.htm



Once upon a time, a certain tradesman was leading a caravan to another country to sell his goods. Along the way, they came to the edge of a severe hot-sand desert. They asked about it and found that during the daytime the sun heats the fine sand until it's as hot as charcoal, so no one can walk on it - not even bullocks or camels! So the caravan leader hired a desert guide, one who could follow the stars, so they could travel only at night when the sand cools down. They began the dangerous night-time journey across the desert.

A couple of nights later, after eating their evening meal, and waiting for the sand to cool, they started again. Later that night the desert guide, who was driving the first cart, saw from the stars that they were getting close to the other side of the desert. He had also overeaten so that when he relaxed, he dozed off to sleep. Then the bullocks who, of course, couldn't tell directions by reading the stars, gradually turned to the side and went in a big wide circle until they ended up at the same place they had started from!

By then it was morning, and the people realized they were back at the same spot they'd camped at the day before. They lost heart and began to cry about their condition. Since the desert crossing was supposed to be over by now, they had no more water and were afraid they would die of thirst. They even began to blame the caravan leader and the desert guide - "We can do nothing without water!", they complained.

Then the tradesman thought to himself, "If I lose courage now, in the middle of this disastrous situation, my leadership has no meaning. If I fall to weeping and regretting this misfortune, and do nothing, all these goods and bullocks and even the lives of the people, including myself, may be lost. I must be energetic and face the situation!" So he began walking back and forth, trying to think out a plan to save them all.

¹⁴ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_02.htm

Remaining alert, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a small clump of grass. He thought, "Without water, no plant could live in this desert." So he called over the most energetic of his fellow travelers and asked them to dig up the ground on that very spot. They dug and dug, and after a while, they got down to a large stone. Seeing it they stopped and began to blame the leader again, saying "This effort is useless. We're just wasting our time!" But the tradesman replied, "No no, my friends, if we give up the effort we will all be ruined and our poor animals will die - let us be encouraged!"

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

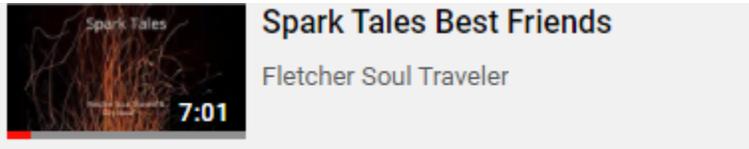
The boy lifted the hammer over his head and hit the rock as hard as he could - and he was the most surprised when the rock split in two and a mighty flow of water gushed out from under it! Suddenly, all the people were overjoyed. They drank and bathed and washed the animals and cooked their food and ate.

Before they left, they raised a high banner so that other travelers could see it from afar and come to the new spring in the middle of the hot-sand desert. Then they continued safely to the end of their journey.

The moral is: Don't give up too easily - keep on trying until you reach the goal.

Best Friends

15



Before the time of this story, people in Asia used to say that there would never be a time when an elephant and a dog would be friends. Elephants simply did not like dogs, and dogs were afraid of elephants.

When dogs are frightened by those who are bigger than they are, they often bark very loudly, to cover up their fear. When dogs used to do this when they saw elephants, the elephants would get annoyed and chase them. Elephants had no patience at all when it came to dogs. Even if a dog were quiet and still, any nearby elephant would automatically attack him. This is why everybody agreed that elephants and dogs were 'natural enemies', just like lions and tigers, or cats and mice.

Once upon a time, there was a royal bull elephant, who was very well fed and cared for. In the neighborhood of the elephant shed, there was a scrawny, poorly fed, stray dog. He was attracted by the smell of the rich sweet rice being fed to the royal elephant. So he began sneaking into the shed and eating the wonderful rice that fell from the elephant's mouth. He liked it so much, that soon he would eat nowhere else. While enjoying his food, the big mighty elephant did not notice the tiny shy stray dog.

By eating such rich food, the once underfed dog gradually got bigger and stronger and became very handsome looking. The good-natured elephant began to notice him. Since the dog had gotten used to being around the elephant, he had lost his fear. So he did not bark at him. Because he was not annoyed by the friendly dog, the elephant gradually got used to him.

Slowly they became friendlier and friendlier with each other. Before long, neither would eat without the other, and they enjoyed spending their time together. When they played, the dog would grab the elephant's heavy trunk, and the

¹⁵ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_28.htm

elephant would swing him forward and backward, from side to side, up and down, and even in circles! So it was that they became 'best friends', and wanted never to be separated.

Then one day a man from a remote village, who was visiting the city, passed by the elephant shed. He saw the frisky dog, who had become strong and beautiful. He bought him from the mahout, even though he didn't own him. He took him back to his home village, without anyone knowing where that was.

Of course, the royal bull elephant became very sad, since he missed his best friend the dog. He became so sad that he didn't want to do anything, not even eat or drink or bathe. So the mahout had to report this to the king, although he said nothing about selling the friendly dog.

It just so happened that the king had an intelligent minister who was known for his understanding of animals. So he told him to go and find out the reason for the elephant's condition.

The wise minister went to the elephant shed. He saw at once that the royal bull elephant was very sad. He thought, "This once happy elephant does not appear to be sick in any way. But I have seen this condition before, in men and animals alike. This elephant is grief-stricken, probably due to the loss of a very dear friend."

Then he said to the guards and attendants, "I find no sickness. He seems to be grief-stricken due to the loss of a friend. Do you know if this elephant had a very close friendship with anyone?"

They told him how the royal elephant and the stray dog were best friends. "What happened to this stray dog?" asked the minister. He was taken by an unknown man," they replied, "and we do not know where he is now."

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

The king said, "Friendship is one of life's most wonderful things. My minister, how can we bring back my elephant's friend and make him happy again?"

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

This was done, and when the villager heard of it, he released the dog from his house. He was filled with great happiness and ran as fast as he could, straight back to his best friend, the royal bull elephant.

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

Meanwhile, the king was very pleased by his elephant's full recovery. He was amazed that his minister seemed to be able to read the mind of an elephant. So he rewarded him appropriately.

The moral is: Even 'natural enemies' can become 'best friends.'

The forest fire and the dove



16

Once upon a time, the Enlightenment Being was born as a tiny dove. Although he had little feet and wings, he could not yet walk or fly. His parents worked hard bringing food to the nest, feeding him from their beaks.

In that part of the world, there were usually forest fires every year. So it happened that a fire began in that particular year. All the able birds flew away at the first sign of smoke. As the fire spread, and got closer and closer to the nest of the baby dove, his parents remained with him. Finally, the fire got so close, that they too had to fly away to save their lives.

All the trees, big and small, were burning and crackling with a loud noise. The little one saw that everything was being destroyed by the fire that raged out of control. He could do nothing to save himself. At that moment, his mind was overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness.

Then it occurred to him, "My parents loved me very much. Unselfishly they built a nest for me, and then fed me without greed. When the fire came, they remained with me until the last moment. All the other birds who could have flown away a long time before.

"So great was the loving-kindness of my parents, that they stayed and risked their lives, but still they were helpless to save me. Since they could not carry me, they were forced to fly away alone. I thank them, wherever they are, for loving me so. I hope with all my heart they will be safe and well and happy.

"Now I am all alone. There is no one I can go to for help. I have wings, but I cannot fly away. I have feet, but I cannot run away. But I can still think. All I have left to use is my mind - a mind that remains pure. The only beings I have known in my short life were my parents, and my mind has been filled with loving-kindness

¹⁶ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_37.htm

towards them. I have done nothing unwholesome to anyone. I am filled with newborn innocent truthfulness."

Then an amazing miracle took place. This innocent truthfulness grew and grew until it became larger than the baby bird. The knowledge of truth spread beyond that one lifetime, and many previous births became known. One such previous birth had led to knowing a Buddha, a fully enlightened knower of Truth - one who had the power of Truth, the purity of wholesomeness, and the purpose of compassion.

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

And so it was.

The moral is: Truth, wholesomeness, and compassion can save the world.

The significance of a Mouse



17

Once upon a time, an important adviser to a certain king was on his way to a meeting with the king and other advisers. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a dead mouse by the roadside. He said to those who were with him. "Even from such small beginnings as this dead mouse, an energetic young fellow could build a fortune. If he worked hard and used his intelligence, he could start a business and support a wife and family."

A passerby heard the remark. He knew this was a famous adviser to the king, so he decided to follow his words. He picked up the dead mouse by the tail and went off with it. As luck would have it, before he had gone even a block, a shopkeeper stopped him. He said, "My cat has been pestering me all morning. I'll give you two copper coins for that mouse." So it was done.

With the two copper coins, he bought sweet cakes and waited by the side of the road with them and some water. As he expected, some people who picked flowers for making garlands were returning from work. Since they were all hungry and thirsty, they agreed to buy sweet cakes and water for the price of a bunch of flowers from each of them. In the evening, the man sold the flowers in the city. With some of the money, he bought more sweet cakes and returned the next day to sell to the flower pickers.

This went on for a while, until one day there was a terrible storm, with heavy rains and high winds. While walking by the king's pleasure garden, he saw that many branches had been blown off the trees and were lying all around. So he offered to the king's gardener that he would clear it all away for him if he could keep the branches. The lazy gardener quickly agreed.

¹⁷ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_04.htm

The man found some children playing in a park across the street. They were glad to collect all the branches and brush at the entrance to the pleasure garden, for the price of just one sweet cake for each child.

Along came the king's potter, who was always on the lookout for firewood for his glazing oven. When he saw the piles of wood the children had just collected, he paid the man a handsome price for it. He even threw into the bargain some of his pots.

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

A week later, he heard that a horse dealer was coming to the city with 500 horses to sell. So he got in touch with the grass mowers and told each of them to give him a bundle of grass. He told them not to sell any grass to the horse dealer until he had sold his. In this way, he got a very good price.

Time passed until one day, in his refreshment shop, some customers told him that a new ship from a foreign country had just anchored in the port. He saw this to be the opportunity he had been waiting for. He thought and thought until he came up with a good business plan.

First, he went to a jeweler friend of his and paid a low price for a very valuable gold ring, with a beautiful red ruby in it. He knew that the foreign ship was from a country that had no rubies of its own, where gold too was expensive. So he gave the wonderful ring to the captain of the ship as an advance on his commission. To earn this commission, the captain agreed to send all his passengers to him as a broker. He would then lead them to the best shops in the city. In turn, the man got the merchants to pay him a commission for sending customers to them.

Acting as a middle man in this way, after several ships came into port, the man became very rich. Being pleased with his success, he also remembered that it had all started with the words of the king's wise adviser. So he decided to give him a gift of 100,000 gold coins. This was half his entire wealth. After making the proper

arrangements, he met with the king's adviser and gave him the gift, along with his humble thanks.

The adviser was amazed, and he asked, "How did you earn so much wealth to afford such a generous gift?" The man told him it had all started with the adviser's own words not so long ago. They had led him to a dead mouse, a hungry cat, sweet cakes, bunches of flowers, storm damaged tree branches, children in the park, the king's potter, a refreshment shop, grass for 500 horses, a golden ruby ring, good business contacts, and finally a large fortune.

Hearing all this, the royal adviser thought to himself, "It would not be good to lose the talents of such an energetic man. I too have much wealth, as well as my beloved only daughter. As this man is single, he deserves to marry her. Then he can inherit my wealth in addition to his own, and my daughter will be well cared for."

This all came to pass, and after the wise adviser died, the one who had followed his advice became the richest man in the city. The king appointed him to the adviser's position. Throughout his remaining life, he generously gave his money for the happiness and well being of many people.

The moral is: With energy and ability, great wealth comes even from small beginnings.

Lucky Fish



Spark Tales The Fortunate Fish

Fletcher Soul Traveler

18

Once upon a time, King Brahmadata had a very wise adviser who understood the speech of animals. He understood what they said, and he could speak to them in their languages.

One day the adviser was wandering along the riverbank with his followers. They came upon some fishermen who had cast a big net into the river. While peering into the water, they noticed a big handsome fish who was following his pretty wife.

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

As they came near the net, the wife fish smelled it. Then she saw it and alertly avoided it at the very last moment. But her husband was so blinded by his desire for her, that he could not turn away fast enough. Instead, he swam right into the net and was trapped!

The fishermen pulled in their net and threw the big fish onto the shore. They built a fire and carved a spit to roast him on.

Lying on the ground, the fish was flopping around and groaning in agony. Since the wise adviser understood fish talk, he translated for the others. He said, "This poor fish is madly repeating over and over again:

"My wife! My wife! I must be with my wife!

I care for her much more than for my life!

'My wife! My wife! I must be with my wife!

¹⁸ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_36.htm

I care for her much more than for my life!"

The adviser thought, "Truly this fish has gone crazy. He is in this terrible state because he became a slave to his desire. And he has learned nothing from the results of his actions. If he dies keeping such agony, and the desire that caused it, in his mind, he will surely continue to suffer by being reborn in some hell world. Therefore, I must save him!"

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

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

Then he sat down on the bank. He took the fish, who was still groaning, into his hands. He spoke to him in the language only fish can understand, saying, "You foolish fish! If I had not seen you today, you would have gotten yourself killed. Your blind desire was leading you to continued suffering. From now on, do not let yourself be trapped by your desires!"

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

The moral is: Fools are trapped by their desires.

The Bamboo Cage



Spark Tales Bamboo's Father

Fletcher Soul Traveler

19

Once upon a time, there was a teacher who meditated much and developed his mind. Gradually his fame spread. Those who wished to be guided by a wise man came to hear him. Considering what he said to be wise indeed, 500 decided to become his followers.

One of these 500, who considered his teachings to be wise, was a certain pet lover. He loved pets so much that there was no animal he did not wish to keep as a pet.

One day he came upon a cute little poisonous snake, who was searching for food. He decided he would make an excellent pet. So he made a little bamboo cage to keep him in when he had to leave him alone. The other followers called the little snake, 'Bamboo'. Because he was so fond of his pet, they called the pet lover, 'Bamboo's Father'.

Before long, the teacher heard that one of his followers was keeping a poisonous snake as a pet. He called him to him and asked if this was true. Bamboo's Father said, "Yes master, I love him like my own child!"

The wise teacher said, "It is not safe to live with a poisonous snake. Therefore, I advise you to let him go, for your good."

But Bamboo's Father thought he knew better. He replied, "This little one is my son. He wouldn't bite me. I can't give him up and live all alone!"

The teacher warned him, "Then surely, this little one will be the death of you!" But the follower did not heed his master's warning.

Later on, all 500 of the teacher's followers went on a trip to collect fresh fruits. Bamboo's Father left his 'son' locked up in the bamboo cage.

¹⁹ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_46.htm

Since there were many fruits to collect, it was several days before they returned. Bamboo's Father realized that poor Bamboo had not eaten the whole time he was away. So he opened the cage to let him out to find food.

But when he reached inside, his 'son' bit his hand. Having been neglected for all that time, Bamboo was angry as well as hungry. Since he was only a snake, he didn't know anything about poison!

But his 'father' should have known better. After all, he had been warned by the very teacher he considered wise.

Within minutes of being bitten, Bamboo's Father dropped dead!

The moral is: There's no benefit in following a teacher if you don't listen to what he says

Two cows and a pig



Spark Tales Big Red, Little Red and No squeal

Fletcher Soul Traveler

20

Once upon a time, two calves were part of a country household. At the same home, there also lived a girl and a baby pig. Since he hardly ever made a sound, the pig was called 'No-squeal'.

The masters of the house treated No-squeal very very well. They fed him large amounts of the very best rice and even rice porridge with rich brown sugar.

The two calves noticed this. They worked hard pulling plows in the fields and bullock carts on the roads. Little Red said to Big Red, "My big brother, in this household you and I do all the hard work. We bring prosperity to the family. But they feed us only grass and hay. The baby pig No-squeal does nothing to support the family. And yet they feed him the finest and fanciest of foods. Why should he get such special treatment?"

The wise elder brother said, "Oh young one, it is dangerous to envy anybody. Therefore, do not envy the baby pig for being fed such rich food. What he eats is really "the food of death".

"There will soon be a marriage ceremony for the daughter of the house, and little No-squeal will be the wedding feast! That's why he is being pampered and fed in such a rich fashion.

"In a few days, the guests will arrive. Then this piglet will be dragged away by the legs, killed, and made into a curry for the feast."

Sure enough, in a few days, the wedding guests arrived. The baby pig No-squeal was dragged away and killed. And just as Big Red had said, he was cooked in various types of curries and devoured by the guests.

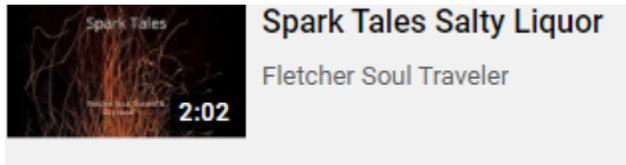
²⁰ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_31.htm

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

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

The moral is: Don't envy the well-off until you know the price they pay.

Salt and Liquor



21

Once upon a time, there was a tavern owner in Benares. He had a hard-working bartender, who was always trying to be helpful by inventing new ways of doing things.

One hot day, the tavern owner wanted to bathe in a nearby river. So he left the bartender in charge while he was gone.

The bartender had always wondered why most of the customers ate a little salt after drinking their liquor. Not wishing to show his ignorance, he never bothered to ask them why they did this. He did not know that they ate the salt to chase away the aftertaste of the liquor. He thought it needed salt to taste good.

He wondered why taverns did not add salt to their liquor. He decided that if he did so, the business would make much higher profits, and the tavern owner would be very pleased. So he added salt to all the liquor!

To his surprise, when the customers came to the tavern and drank the salty liquor, they immediately spit it out and went to a different bar.

When the owner returned from his dip in the river, he found his tavern without customers, and all his liquor was ruined.

So he went and told this story to his friend, an adviser to the king. The adviser said, "The ignorant, wishing only to do good, often cannot help harming."

The moral is: The best intentions are no excuse for ignorance.

²¹ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_49.htm



Once upon a time, the King of Benares went on a picnic in the forest. The beautiful flowers and trees and fruits made him very happy. As he was enjoying their beauty, he slowly went deeper and deeper into the forest. Before long, he became separated from his companions and realized that he was all alone.

Then he heard the sweet voice of a young woman. She was singing as she collected firewood. To keep from being afraid of being alone in the forest, the king followed the sound of the lovely voice. When he finally came upon the singer of the songs, he saw that she was a beautiful fair young woman, and immediately fell in love with her. They became very friendly, and the king became the father of the firewood woman's child.

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

In the fullness of time, the firewood woman gave birth to a cute baby boy. Being a simple shy woman, she was afraid to take him to the fancy court in Benares, but she saved the king's signet ring.

In a few years, the baby grew into a little boy. When he played with the other children in the village, they teased him and mistreated him, and even started fights with him. It was because his mother was not married that the other children picked on him. They yelled at him, "No-father! No-father! Your name should be No-father!"

²² http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_08.htm

Of course, this made the little boy feel ashamed and hurt and sad. He often ran home crying to his mother. One day, he told her how the other children called him, "No-father! No-father! Your name should be No-father!" Then his mother said, "Don't be ashamed, my son. You are not just an ordinary little boy. Your father is the King of Benares!"

The little boy was very surprised. He asked his mother, "Do you have any proof of this?" So she told him about his father giving her the signet ring, and that if the baby was a boy she should bring him to Benares, along with the ring as proof. The little boy said, "Let's go then." Because of what happened, she agreed, and the next day they set out for Benares.

When they arrived at the king's palace, the gatekeeper told the king the firewood woman and her little son wanted to see him. They went into the royal assembly hall, which was filled with the king's ministers and advisers. The woman reminded the king of their time together in the forest. Finally, she said, "Your majesty, here is your son."

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

Again the king was ashamed and denied the truth, saying, "It is not my ring!"

Then the poor woman thought to herself, "I have no witness and no evidence to prove what I say. I have only my faith in the power of truth." So she said to the king, "If I throw this little boy up into the air if he truly is your son, may he remain i

Suddenly, she grabbed the boy by his foot and threw him up into the air. Lo and behold, the boy sat in the cross-legged position, suspended in mid-air, without falling. Everyone was astonished, to say the least! Remaining in the air, the little boy spoke to the mighty king. "My lord, I am indeed a son born to you. You take care of many people who are not related to you. You even maintain countless

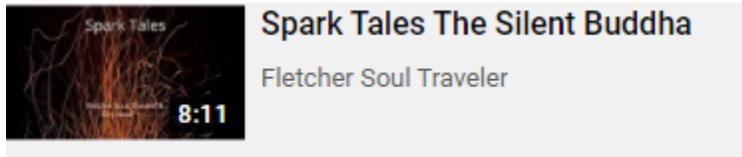
elephants, horses, and other animals. And yet, you do not think of looking after and raising me, your son. Please do take care of me and my mother."

Hearing this, the king's pride was overcome. He was humbled by the truth of the little boy's powerful words. He held out his arms and said, "Come to me my son, and I will take good care of you."

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

In this way, the king and all his court learned the power of truth. Benares became known as a place of honest justice. In time the king died. The grown-up crown prince wanted to show the people that all deserve respect, regardless of birth. So he had himself crowned under the official name, "King No-father!" He went on to rule the kingdom generously and righteously.

The moral is: The truth is always stronger than a lie.



Once upon a time, there was a very rich man living in Benares, in northern India. When his father died, he inherited even more wealth. He thought, "Why should I use this treasure for myself alone? Let my fellow beings also benefit from these riches."

So he built dining halls at the four gates of the city - North, East, South, and West. In these halls, he gave food freely to all who wished it. He became famous for his generosity. It also became known that he and his followers were practitioners of the Five Training Steps.

In those days, a Silent Buddha was meditating in the forest near Benares. He was called Buddha because he was enlightened. This means that he no longer experienced himself, the one called 'I' or 'me', as being in any way different from all life living itself. So he was able to experience life as it is, in every present moment.

Being one with all life, he was filled with compassion and sympathy for the unhappiness of all beings. So he wished to teach and help them to be enlightened just as he was. But the time of our story was most unfortunate, a very sad time. It was a time when no one else was able to understand the Truth, and experience life as it is. And since this Buddha knew this, that was why he was Silent.

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

²³ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_54.htm

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

When the rich man had just sat down to have lunch, he saw the Silent Buddha coming with his alms bowl. He rose from his seat respectfully. He told his servant to go and give alms to him.

Meanwhile, Mara, the god of illusion, had been watching. Mara is the one who is filled with greed for power over all beings. He can only have this power because of the fear of death.

Since a Buddha lives life fully in each moment, he has no desire for future life and no fear of future death. Therefore, since Mara could have no power over the Silent Buddha, he wished to destroy him. When he saw that he was near death from starvation, he knew that he had a good chance of succeeding.

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

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

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

Then the master thought, "There is no doubt that Mara, the god of death, must be trying to prevent my wholesome deed of giving alms-food to the Silent Buddha. Because wholesome deeds are the beginning of the path to enlightenment, Mara wishes to stop me at all costs. But he does not understand my confidence in the Silent Buddha and my determination to give."

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

"Did you create this pit of fire?" asked the man. "I did," said the god. "Why did you do so?" "To keep you from giving alms food, and in this way to cause the Silent Buddha to die! Also to prevent your wholesome deed from helping you on the path to enlightenment, so you will remain in my power!"

The rich man of Benares said, "Oh Mara, the god of death, the evil one, you cannot kill the Silent Buddha, and you cannot prevent my wholesome giving! Let us see whose determination is stronger!"

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

So saying, he forgot himself entirely, and at that moment there was no fear of death. As he stepped into the burning pit, he felt himself being lifted by a beautiful cool lotus blossom. The pollen from this miraculous flower spread into the air and covered him with the glowing color of gold. While standing in the heart of the lotus, the Great Being poured the alms-food into the bowl of the Silent Buddha. Mara, the god of death, was defeated!

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

Still standing on the wonderful lotus, glowing with the color of gold, the generous master taught his followers. He told them that practicing the Five Training Steps is necessary to purify the mind. He told them that with such a pure mind, there is great merit in giving alms - indeed it is truly the gift of life!

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

The moral is: Have no fear when doing wholesome deeds.

Temptation in the Desert



Spark Tales Demons in the Desert

Fletcher Soul Traveler

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Once upon a time, there were two merchants, who were friends. Both of them were getting ready for business trips to sell their merchandise, so they had to decide whether to travel together. They agreed that, since each had about 500 carts, and they were going to the same place along the same road, it would be too crowded to go at the same time.

One decided that it would be much better to go first. He thought, "The road will not be rutted by the carts, the bullocks will be able to choose the best of all the grass, we will find the best fruits and vegetables to eat, my people will appreciate my leadership and, in the end, I will be able to bargain for the best prices."

The other merchant considered carefully and realized there were advantages to going second. He thought, "My friend's carts will level the ground so we won't have to do any road work, his bullocks will eat the old rough grass and new tender shoots will spring up for mine to eat. In the same way, they will pick the old fruits and vegetables and fresh ones will grow for us to enjoy. I won't have to waste my time bargaining when I can take the price already set and make my profit." So he agreed to let his friend go first. This friend was sure he'd fooled him and gotten the best of him - so he set out first on the journey.

The merchant who went first had a troublesome time of it. They came to a wilderness called the 'Waterless Desert', which the local people said was haunted by demons. When the caravan reached the middle of it, they met a large group coming from the opposite direction. They had carts that were mud smeared and dripping with water. They had lotuses and water lilies in their hands and the carts. The head man, who had a know-it-all attitude, said to the merchant, "Why are you carrying these heavy loads of water? In a short time, you will reach that oasis on the horizon with plenty of water to drink and dates to eat. Your bullocks are

²⁴ http://www.buddhanet.net/bt1_01.htm

tired from pulling those heavy carts filled with extra water - so throw away the water and be kind to your overworked animals!"

Even though the local people had warned them, the merchant did not realize that these were not real people, but demons in disguise. They were even in danger of being eaten by them. Being confident that they were helping people, he followed their advice and had all his water emptied onto the ground.

As they continued on their way they found no oasis or any water at all. Some realized they'd been fooled by beings that might have been demons and started to grumble and accuse the merchant. At the end of the day, all the people were tired out. The bullocks were too weak from lack of water to pull their heavy carts. All the people and animals lay down haphazardly and fell into a deep sleep. Lo and behold, during the night the demons came in their true frightening forms and gobbled up all the weak defenseless beings. When they were done there were only bones lying scattered around - not one human or animal was left alive.

After several months, the second merchant began his journey in the same way. When he arrived at the wilderness, he assembled all his people and advised them - "This is called the 'Waterless Desert' and I have heard that it is haunted by demons and ghosts. Therefore we should be careful. Since there may be poison plants and foul water, don't drink any local water without asking me." In this way, they started into the desert.

After getting about halfway through, in the same way, as with the first caravan, they were met by the water-soaked demons in disguise. They told them the oasis was near and they should throw away their water. But the wise merchant saw through them right away. He knew it didn't make sense to have an oasis in a place called 'Waterless Desert'. And besides, these people had bulging red eyes and an aggressive and pushy attitude, so he suspected they might be demons. He told them to leave them alone saying, "We are businessmen who don't throw away good water before we know where the next is coming from."

Then seeing that his people had doubts, the merchant said to them, "Don't believe these people, who may be demons, until we find water. The oasis they point to maybe just an illusion or a mirage. Have you ever heard of water in this 'Waterless Desert'? Do you feel any rain-wind or see any storm clouds?" They all said, "No", and he continued, "If we believe these strangers and throw away our

water, then later we may not have any to drink or cook with - then we will be weak and thirsty and it would be easy for demons to come and rob us, or even eat us up! Therefore, until we find water, do not waste even a drop!"

The caravan continued on its way and, that evening reached the place where the first caravan's people and bullocks had been killed and eaten by the demons. They found the carts and human and animal bones lying all around. They recognized that the fully-loaded carts and the scattered bones belonged to the former caravan. The wise merchant told certain people to stand watch around the camp during the night.

The next morning the people ate breakfast and fed their bullocks well. They added to their goods the most valuable things left from the first caravan. So they finished their journey very successfully and returned home safely so that they and their families could enjoy their profits.

The moral is: One must always be wise enough not to be fooled by tricky talk and false appearances.

The Drunken Elephant



Spark Tales Buddha and the drunk elephant

Fletcher Soul Traveler

Prince instead of buddha

Buddha had a cousin named Dev. Dev was very jealous of the Buddha. He would think to himself why does he get all the attention. I'm just as good as he is. Sometimes we believe what the mind tells us. Dev came up with a master plan. He knew that in a few days Buddha was going to a particular village.

Dev went to this village a day before Buddha was supposed to show up. He got an elephant totally drunk. I mean totally drunk. Then he started to beat the poor old elephant with a stick. He did this once he saw Buddha enter the village. The elephant was in extreme pain and furious. He wanted revenge. Dev then opened up the gate and the elephant saw the Buddha and his followers. Like a mad elephant, he ran towards them. Everyone scrambled for dear life. Everyone except for the Buddha and his close attendant Ananda.

The Buddha didn't even flinch. He was in a complete state of love and compassion. It was like a young puppy dog rushing to its master. Well, the elephant was still angry and drunk. What was going to happen next?

When the drunk elephant was just inches from barreling down and crashing the Buddha, the elephant stopped in his track. It was a sight to be seen. Nobody could believe it especially Dev. The elephant just melted like butter into Buddha's arms and they embraced. The Buddha took away the pain and the state of intoxication of the elephant. They became from that point in time best friends. Whenever the Buddha came to this town the Buddha and the elephant would meet and greet each other. They were the best of friends.

Recent Tales

Where dragons hide



Well, let's continue with this dragon story. The dragons when they first saw the youngsters entering the cave many moons ago weren't interested in the slightest in training man. You see man was one of their major troubles. There was even a dragon slayer profession in the British Isles. Yet at the same time, they could see the potential in these youngsters they were more evolved than them when they were young. Back then the dragons didn't even have a glimmer of light. So they had an internal discussion amongst themselves. "Do you think we can train them?" do you think they can change? You see even in China and Tibet war ruled the land. Anger was the norm. Mind you these youngsters had a combination of light and darkness. They could see both sides of the coin. So the dragons decided to train them.

Now their training wasn't like today. Today children in schools are bored. They are taught to use just memory. They are taught to remember the facts. They are not taught to use their mind and think. The dragons are experts in this field. They are the master wizards of Hogworth today. They are thousands of years ahead in development. Hogwarts teachers would be in nursery school. The dragons would have an advanced Ph.D. study in the universe. They were off the charts.

The dragons had a unique style of teaching. You could say it was revolutionary today. They taught by using games, play, and fireside chats.

The very first game they taught was hide and seek. This was a very practical game. They had a series of talks about the universe. They were taught that the universe existed inside of them. Well, to be frank, that was completely over their heads. They couldn't even understand one word.

So the dragons played a game of hiding and seek. The dragons would hide. The youngsters closed their eyes and counted to 10. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10. Ready or not

here we come. They would open their eyes and all the dragons were gone. The dragons had rules they couldn't leave the cave.

All of the kids were completely shocked when they open their eyes. All the dragons disappeared. They all gasped in surprise. As you know dragons are quite large. They weigh thousands of pounds. This game went on for around six months or so.

Finally, at one fireside chat, the dragons told this practical story. Imagine two young men walking down the road. They were headed to a town five days from their current destination. One of the men was a jeweler. The other man was a thief. The thief knew this man had a very precious jewel that he was carrying. As I said both of them were going to the same town. They decided to travel together. They had a long journey ahead of them. Hours passed. They were quite tired.

Fortunately, there was a simple inn ahead of them. They both decided to spend the night there and share a room. Both of them decided to have dinner together. The jeweler went first and a few minutes later the thief joined him. while the jeweler was holding a table for them the thief was looking all over for the precious jewel. He was quite dumbfounded. He was the greatest thief in the land. They had dinner and went to bed immediately. They weren't in the mood to drink the ale and party into the night.

Well, guess what? This went on for several days. Finally, they reach their destination. By then the thief was confused. He thought this was going to be an easy steal. He said to the jeweler I'm a thief. I'm the king of the thieves. I knew you were carrying a precious jewel. Every night I knew you hide the jewel inside the room.

Every night I would search all over for it. I got quite frustrated when I couldn't find it. Where did you put it? I'm dying for an answer. The jeweler said I knew you were a thief. I knew you wanted to steal the jewel. Each night I would hide it in a place you would never look. The thief said where is that? The jeweler said under your pillow. I thief knew he was outwitted and outsmarted.

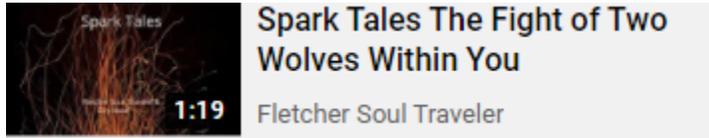
Well, the kids loved this story. They were well acquainted with thieves and jewelers. They went through their town quite frequently.

The dragons said let's play a game of hide and seek again. This time focus on your breath. Close your eyes. To their amazement, the dragons appeared inside of them. They couldn't believe it. How could all the dragons appear to them, inside of their beings? This was the starting point of their incredible adventures.

Now when they played hide and seek they knew where to look. A single but necessary step took place. They knew this was both an inward and outward journey. The youngsters were thrilled.

Each time they play the game the youngsters knew where to look. They love to play this game. All the first-time students had to go through the same baby steps the others went through. You see this path is two steps forward and one step backward. You learn from your progress and your mistakes. Never give up.

Feeding the wolf



An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life:

“A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy.

“It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil—he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.”

He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you—and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather:

“Which wolf will win?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

How To Ride A Bike



Spark Tales Learning How To Ride A Bicycle

Fletcher Soul Traveler

Once upon a time, there was two twin brother named little Ricky and little Johnny. Little Johnny was a genius in picking up and learning new things. While little Ricky was what you would call on the slow side. It took him hundreds of tries to learn new things.

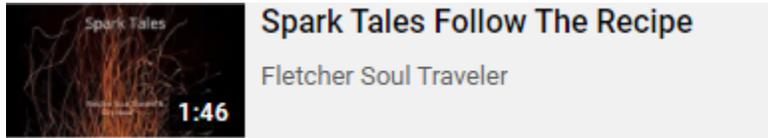
For example one Christmas morning their wonderful parents presented them both with brand-new bicycles. Both of them were so excited. Well, they took them outdoors. Little Johnny hopped on his and immediately started riding down the block. Well, Little Ricky didn't have the same luck. It was kinda funny to see how clumsy he was. He didn't give up. He knew deep down inside he could learn how to ride this. It took him about a month.

The first time he realized that he was riding the bicycle he was filled with joy. He was so grateful. I did t. I did it. I didn't give up.

This incident carried him throughout his life. Every time he had to learn something new he remembered the experience of learning how to ride a bike.

Years later his wife said that he learned things so quickly. Little Ricky just smiled. He knew that life taught him such a precious lesson at such a young age. New give up. Preserve. You can learn anything. It may just take your time.

Cooking With Spice



Little Ricky loved ethnic foods, He was brought up since he was born to eat ethnic foods. He loved them. Yet he never knew how to cook them. One day in high school he enrolled in a cooking class. He wanted to learn how to cook. To his amazement, he learned that there were cooking recipes that you can follow to make each dish. A recipe usually had a list of ingredients along with the actual step-by-step steps needed to make the dish.

He was so excited. From that precious course, he took he learned hundreds of recipes throughout the years. He took the same concept to his personal life. He learned how to use spices like kindness and patience in his life. He would sprinkle these on his daily actions. He knew that life was an incredible adventure. He adds these precious spices to his everyday affair.

Ponder this over. What spices can you use to enhance your life? Kindness, tolerance, patience. Love and compassion. These are incredible spices that the world loves.

Learn how to avoid the spice of anger, being a bully, and fighting. These never are good in the end. They are old habits from the past.

The Frog in The Well



Spark Tales The Frog in The Well

Fletcher Soul Traveler

You are the universe. You just don't know it. This is the central theme of the Dragons. They reached a growth of awareness where they become the sun, moon, and stars and were walking around in dragon bodies. They realized they were eternal. They were beyond time and space.

The dragons also knew that humans had the same capability. They were curious about that. The dragons knew that man came from the stars. They were stardust. Yet the village around them and Tibet and China at that time had no idea of who they truly are.

The dragons were once in the same state of awareness as humans. They were angry, hateful, warring, and full of greed. Yet over time, they realized their potential.

They needed a story that would reflect how large they felt yet how small in reality they live in. So here goes the story.

Once upon a time, a frog lived in a well. This frog thought he was a know it all. This frog thought the water in my well is the largest in the world. This was, in fact, quite a large well. The villagers used it for the community. Anyway, this frog bragged a lot and told all the people who were strangers to the well how vast the water is in the well.

One day a stranger came who lived near the ocean. The frog came up to the stranger and said: "the water in my well is far grander than any water in the well".

The stranger said "Well according to my experience the water in your well is probably one of the smallest I have ever seen.

Well, a fight ensued with the war of words. It was going out of control. Both sides were putting wood on the fire. Finally, they both calmed down. All the villagers came and wondered what was going on. It was quite the scene.

Well, the villagers and frog said to the man "Can you prove it". "Can you show us a place where water is larger than our well"?

So to make a long story short a small group of villagers and the frog traveled to the ocean. They couldn't believe what they saw. An endless body of water everywhere. They were dumbfounded. Never in their world did they see such a precious sight. The stranger laughed and said, "now this is a large body of water". The villagers and the frog couldn't agree more. Their well wasn't even a drop of water compared to the ocean.

The dragons told this story to the youngsters. They reminded the kids of playing hide and seek and peek-a-boo. The dragons would appear inside of them. Well, the dragons said that is the frog in the well. That is the starting point in your incredible journey in life.

Inside of you lies the infinite ocean of love. You have the potential to tap into this. You are this ocean. This is your true nature. You should see how wide the eyes opened from the children. They were completely mesmerized by the story. These weren't just some mumbo-jumbo words The dragons were talking about their own experience.

They were telling the kids that they could ultimately have the same experience. It's a moment-by-moment conscious journey. Baby steps are taken along the way.

The Elephant and the blind men



Spark Tales 3 Blind Men And The Elephant

Fletcher Soul Traveler

When I was young I heard the story about three blind men touching an elephant.

Each man touched a different part of the elephant.

Tail, trunk, legs, skin, ears, tusk

One touched the elephant's ear, another touched his feet, and the last touched the tusk.

They began to discuss their experience and a huge fight began.

I'm right and you're wrong.

I know all the answers.

You are a fool to believe in that.

What a child you are.

Yet they all had their own experience.

It was a piece of the puzzle.

Not the puzzle itself but a piece.

Are we like the blind man touching the elephant?

My religion is better than your religion.

I'm going to heaven while you're going to hell.

I'm going to declare war on you.

I'm going to convert you.

Religion has a piece of the puzzle.

It is not the puzzle itself.

Each religion is different and unique.

The essence is the same.

Which part of the elephant did you touch?

Maybe it's about time to be open to something new.

Your enemy is talking about the same thing you are.

He just has a different piece, a different point of view.

In the end, the essence is the same.

Stop The Noise In Your Head



Spark Tales Stop The Noise In Your Head

Fletcher Soul Traveler

As the children began to learn how to meditate they saw how powerful the mind is. They never noticed that before. They asked the dragons how to stop the noise in my head. Of course, all the dragons laughed. They laughed because everyone goes through this. You see the mind is the most different thing to control in the universe.

The majority of man reacts to every situation. Man is reactive. The wise man learns to be proactive. They understood the basic law it's by will alone that I set my mind in motion. Now that's very easy to say but hard to do. All people who learn how to meditate in the beginning have this problem.

In the east, they call it the monkey mind. The monkey goes from one branch to another. It can't be controlled. Well, when they first started to learn how to mediate they saw this from first-hand experience.

The dragons told a wonderful story each time this subject was brought up. They told a story where a man saves a genie. Nobody knows exactly how this man saved him. Well, the genie told this man you can have as many wishes as you want. The man said wow that's incredible. I love that idea. The genie said well there's a catch. The man said, "what's that". You must always give one wish after another. If you don't I will chop off your head with my sword. Are you sure you want to continue with this? The man hesitates for a moment and says reluctantly sure.

Well, the genie said what's your first wish. The man gives one wish after another. It seems like when one wish is granted he had to give another. He didn't have one opportunity to enjoy even for a second the previous wish. He was getting tired and couldn't even go to sleep. The genie was always harassing him and saying "what's your next wish"?

Well, fortunately, there was a wise man nearby. He went to the wise man and sincerely asked for help. This boon was turning into a curse. The wise man whispered into his ear.

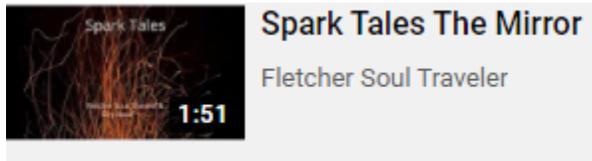
Well, the genie demanded another wish or he will chop off his head. The young man said to go to the forest and find a huge log. Your wish is my command. In a second he returns with a huge log. The genie said with a smile give me a wish or I will chop off your head. As you can see the genie wasn't particularly nice. Well, the young man told the genie to go up and down the pole. When I need you I will give you another command. The young man could relax and enjoy all the wishes he gave to this genie.

The genie knew he was outsmarted by the wise man. The young boy enjoyed his life and helped others in the community. He eventually learned about the dragons and helped tremendously his fellow man.

The dragons said that the genie is the mind. The mind wants to control you versus the other way around. By placing your mind on your breath the genie will go up and down the log and set you free. Meditation is the key to bringing awareness to your mind. Your mind is either your friend or foe.

Everyone in the universe has to learn how to control their mind.

The Mirror



Mirror, Mirror on the wall. Who's the fairest one of all? What if we have an actual mirror that exists inside of us? Wouldn't that be an incredible fairy tale? Now, what if I told you that you are the universe? You just don't know it. How's that for a fairy tale? You see your mirror is dusty. Throughout your life, nobody told you that this mirror exists inside of you.

Well, let the fairytale begin. You can start learning how to clean your precious mirror. You can start by being kind in every moment. The more you are kind the more you will clean your mirror.

Learn how to meditate and enjoy the silence inside of you. At first, you may get bored but the more you practice the more you are cleaning your mirror. Remember this is a play not work.

Cleaning your mirror is like removing huge boulders that you carry around. They weigh you down. Each time you remove a boulder you get lighter and lighter. You see you are your own Prince Charming. You can remove all obstacles inside of you. Now that's a fairy tale. Ponder this over. You are the universe. You just don't know it.

The Sun And The Wind



Spark Tales The Sun And The Wind

Fletcher Soul Traveler

THE WIND and the Sun were disputing which was the stronger. Suddenly they saw a traveler coming down the road, and the Sun said: "I see a way to decide our dispute. Whichever of us can cause that traveler to take off his cloak shall be regarded as the stronger You begin." So the Sun retired behind a cloud, and the wind began to blow as hard as it could upon the traveler. But the harder he blew the more closely the traveler wrap his cloak around him, till at last, the Wind had to give up in despair. Then the Sun came out and shone in all his glory upon the traveler, who soon found it too hot to walk with his cloak on.

"Kindness affects more than severity."

The Sun And Darkness



Spark Tales The Sun And Darkness

Fletcher Soul Traveler

Once upon a time, a wise man was having a conversation with the sun. He told the sun that darkness did not like him. He felt that the sun ruined everything for him. Darkness love to keep everyone in a state of ignorance. Darkness loved to see humanity bickering and fighting with one another.

The sun just loved to shine and give love, kindness, and compassion to all. Well, the sun said to the wise man bring darkness to me and we can have a wonderful conversation.

The wise man said, “I will bring him to you tomorrow”. Well, the sun waited and waited. The next day darkness never came. He waited for over a month. Darkness never showed up. You see darkness is only the absence of light. The sun is always shining so darkness can never appear.

Discover the light inside of you. That is your true nature.

Dragon Tales



Spark Tales Dragons
Fletcher Soul Traveler

Once upon a time many, many moons ago lived the dragons. They lived where the British Isles are today. Now, these dragons weren't exactly nice. They were mean. Dragons in the past were kind and caring. Yet over time, they lost that awareness.

It may seem strange to us but they love to bicker and quarrel. They loved to be angry. They love to create war. That was their form of excitement.

This went on for thousands of years. You see dragons can live to a dear old age. These dragons caused a lot of discomfort in the countryside in the British Isles. Imagine waking up at 3:00 in the morning and seeing your precious cow taken away by the dragons.

Man would hide all valuables and jewels. The dragons had a sixth sense to find them and steal them.

It was true that dragons loved to hoard their wealth. Unfortunately, they couldn't do anything with them. They just loved to sit in their caves and sit on their wealth.

Greed came upon them. They didn't know how to share. Consequently, there was a lot of fighting against one another. It seems like their life was miserable. There was no contentment in their life. No happiness or kindness. Not even love.

All of the dragons were in the same empty boat. They were like ghosts where nothing could fill them up.

No wonder man was fearful of the dragons. They were horrible beings. They were up to no good. A man had good reason to be wary of them. During the crusades, a man had the weapons to start fighting the dragons. It was not a glorious time for men and dragons.

Many of the traits the dragons had man embraced. It seems like man and dragons at this point had misery in common. Both of them lost the true direction to find the hidden jewel inside. You can't blame them they never knew it existed inside.

The years went by and the conflict never got better. It just got worse. The dragons were being hunted down and killed one by one. It wasn't a pretty sight.

One day a baby dragon was born during the darkest times. This dragon couldn't relate to anger, war, and greed. All of the dragons thought he was a misfit. All he wanted to do was to have fun. He was extremely intelligent and had a lot of humor. He made other dragons laugh. The elders disapprove of this. When he learned to fly he would go off alone and soar in the sky.

He was free at that moment. Not a care in the world. He loved that feeling. Somehow he knew that the true nature of a dragon is true freedom. He discovered that kindness, love, compassion, and patience were his true nature.

Well, the elder dragons did not like that at all. They told him he had to stop this nonsense. You see the other young dragons liked what they were seeing. They loved how Zoran the young dragon was turning their lives upside down. They thought that war, anger, and stealing were truly the way. Here is a young dragon. Zoran walked on a different path and didn't have a care in the world.

Zoran's father had a huge pile of precious jewels. Yet Zoran wasn't interested in the slightest. He told his Dad "the greatest jewels in the universe lie inside" Well that didn't go over so well. His Dad was furious. He was already furious. Remember at that time the dragons had quite the temper tantrums. Well, this was placing gasoline on the fire. His Dad exploded. Who do you think you are to say such a thing?

Zoran knew not to say anything. Sometimes it's wise to be silent. All of the other elders talked with one another about this situation. What are we to do with Zoran? He is wreaking havoc with his tribe. They decided to give it a little time to see if anything would change.

Well, it didn't. Zoran was moment by moment learning how to meditate. He was diving deeper than ever inside the infinite ocean within. Now you see these dragons are scared of water. They are fire dragons. Water will extinguish the fire within. Water will extinguish war, anger, and greed. They thought this was their true nature.

Zoran discovered something the entire dragon world didn't know.

You are the universe.

You just don't know it.

Well, this was the final straw. They held a council meeting and decided to throw him out. He was still young for a dragon. He was a hundred years old. You see dragons can live for thousands of years.

So he was told to leave and never return. He was cast out of his home. But there's another story to this. A few young dragons decided to go secretly along with Zoran on his grand adventure.

Zoran at this time was getting guidance within. One dark and moonless night they flew out of the cave never to return. The rest is history.

Zoran hears the east might be a great place to go. They had high and magnificent mountains far from man and other dragons. Up to that time dragons were extremely rare in the east.

They were quite unknown. So they flew away into the darkness of night. The journey was just starting. They had no idea of the steps they were going to take.

Zoran and his friends traveled only during the night. They didn't want other dragons or men to discover them on their flight. When they flew over the lakes, rivers, seas, and oceans they would eat the fish along the way. Fish was extremely plentiful. They discovered it was tastier than cows. Furthermore, they didn't have to be worried about stealing a cow and being captured. Man was slowly learning how to trap the dragons. There were even dragon slayers as a profession. Times have changed.

It took three solid months to arrive at their destination. They landed in the high mountains of Tibet. Far from man and other dragons. It was wintertime. They had to fly in fierce snowstorms and bitter wind. Fortunately, they were fire dragons and could keep warm. A water dragon might have frozen to death.

Zoran and his friends found a beautiful cave to live in. It was huge and had an opening where they could fly in and out. So they set up camp and called it home.

Well, winters last for a long time in Tibet. Especially at high altitudes. You can only have so much external conversation with one another. Zoran taught them how to meditate. It was slow going at first. None of the dragons realize how powerful the mind was. Zoran simply instructed them to follow their breath. The dragons thought this should be easy. They learned that it was more difficult than learning how to fly. You see even for dragons flying took time and effort. You had to work at it.

They say conquering your mind is the most difficult thing in the universe. Well, the young dragons will completely agree. Since it was winter time they had all the time in their lives. Slowly I mean slowly they took small baby steps along the way.

When winter was over they took to the skies. They loved the external and internal feeling of flying. Wow, I'm free. I'm not bound to anything.

The seasons came and went. Winter has arrived again. They spend their time in meditation. Imagine this went on for hundreds of years. Zoran and his friends were discovering they were the universe. The universe existed inside of them. They were truly discovering their true nature. They were becoming wise. They knew how to laugh and play. They truly enjoyed each other's company. These dragons lost their old egos from the past.

They became the first master dragon of their time. Dragons are eternal. They are timeless.

Zoran and his friends discovered that their true essence was the universe.

Well, one day an incident occurred. While the dragons were flying and having a merry good time some small youngsters saw the dragons in the sky. They got very excited. They heard old folk tales from their ancestors about dragons flying in the sky. As youngsters, they didn't want to worry about their parents. Their mom and Dad are already how too much on their plate. You see they were farmers and herders. Life was tough enough as it was. They didn't need another burden.

These youngsters started to see them flying more often during the spring, summer, and fall. During the winter they never saw them. This went on for many seasons. The youngsters married had children and their children had children. It was now a common sight to see. Yet nobody ever saw them in person. They were

like the UFOs that were seen today. You see them but never have a close encounter.

One day during spring a group of youngsters went exploring. They saw this huge cave with a large opening. They decided to go in. They weren't scared but were hesitant. Slowly they walked step by step into the cave. To their amazement, they saw Zoran and his friend meditating. It was a sight to behold. They weren't scared at all. They were so happy and full of love. They had never experienced anything quite like it.

The dragons woke up and saw the children sitting there with their eyes wide open. They couldn't believe what they saw.

Now the dragons didn't speak their language but they had the capability for non-verbal communication. This means without speaking words the children could hear from inside of them what the dragons said.

The children never saw such a thing.

This started a brand new life for the children. They were told don't tell anyone else. Someday when the time is right we will show ourselves to your village.

These children came back day after day. The dragons took them on flying rides which are still being talked about today. Imagine flying on the backs of the dragon. They never experienced such freedom and joy.

The dragons slowly taught them how to meditate. They taught them and showed them that kindness, love, and compassion are the true way to live. They did not preach or try to convince anyone. The dragons were pure and didn't have anything to prove. Yet their essence rubbed off on the youngsters.

Slowly over time, they embraced these qualities. Mind you this was a time in Tibet and China when war was all around. The same problems that existed in the West existed in the East.

Generation after generation the youngsters migrated to the dragons. The parents and Grandparents knew what was going on. They have spent precious time with

the dragons and took that wisdom into their daily life. You see a spiritual path is the most practical path.

These small villages were becoming wise. One was a young boy named Confucius. He was seeing his transformation from the dragons and putting them truly into practice. He discovered a system that is still in practice in China today. All his wisdom came from spending time with the dragons. He then carried on his journey in life and we have a great tradition.

One of the earliest students was Lao Tzu. He was truly a man of nature. He spent a considerable amount of time with the dragons. Even at a young age, he was wise beyond his time. Even the dragons were amazed at his knowledge and wisdom. At times it seemed that his wisdom was beyond theirs. Mind you these dragons were thousands of years old. Lao Tzu was only around ten years old. Needless to say, there was great friendship and understanding with each other. At that time China and Tibet couldn't understand the simplicity of Lao Tzu and the dragons.

Lao Tsu didn't care about politics and worldly affairs. He hardly ever went to cities. They were a complete distraction. Man wasn't open to wisdom or knowledge at this time.

So Lao Tsu spent a lot of time with the dragons and nature. You see Lao Tzu could see the unity of all life.

There is a story that when Lao Tzu was going to leave this world a small group approached high in the mountains. They begged for some insight and wisdom.

Today we have the Tao Te chings. One of the greatest books today. Lao Tsu went with some dragons and never returned. His wisdom is still alive today.

Today dragons are revered all around the East. Wherever you go in China you will see dragons as flags or statues. Their wisdom is still alive today.

Unfortunately in the West not much has changed. Dragons are still something to be fearful of. Stories are still being told of dragons hoarding wealth. Dragonslayers were the savior of mankind.

Isn't it amazing the times haven't changed much? We still are angry. We still think that wars can solve our issues.

Maybe, just maybe we can learn from the dragons.

Our true nature is the universe. The new dawning of man is here.