

THE TALE OF THE GURU

Narrator's (Flat) Voice: O worldly-wise One, Once upon a time in a little village in India, there was a GURU. And this Guru met with a class of children under the shade of the spreading Bo Tree . One day he told them this story :

Guru's (Earthy) Voice: Once! O young innocents! O Children of the Gods! Once so very long ago! Once upon a time, there was: a JUNGLE! And in this Jungle there lived : an ELEPHANT! And while he was walking about one day , (in the Jungle , mind you !), he met : a MONKEY!

NOW : What do you think of that? And this... Monkey ... well; he wanted to speak to this Elephant. Indeed, he actually stepped in the Elephant's path and stopped him ! And he said:

Monkey's (Squeaky) Voice: Memsahib Elephant! Do not continue to go the way you are going! Do not go that way! No! No! No! By all means, do not go that way! No! No! No! Never go that way!

Guru: Well , my Children: imagine the reaction of that old Elephant. Put yourselves in his boots! The Elephant looked at the Monkey in utter amazement, and said:

Elephant's(Slow Rumbling) Voice: Oh Monkey: what is the matter ? Why can' t I go this way? I ALWAYS go this way!

Guru: But the Monkey had a ready answer for that one:

Monkey: O venerable long-nosed one! Do not continue to go on that way you were going! Even if you were going that way , even if you ALWAYS go that way , do not, do not, do not, do not go that way! Let me tell you the story of 'THE LION AND THE JACKAL'! :

Once upon a time, O Elephant, a LION was bouncing around in the jungle, this very same jungle, this one here ...when, lo and behold , he met: A JACKAL! Oh Memsahib Elephant: believe me when I tell you that this Lion was very hungry, hungrier than the famished gazelles at the time of the monsoon floods ; and he would fain have eaten this Jackal! And so, he grabbed the Jackal in its paws and pinned it to the ground ! But the Jackal said :

Jackal's (Rasping) Voice: O Lion! Spare my life! Hear my story!

Monkey: To which replied the Lion :

Lion's (Roaring) Voice: Huhhhn! Jackal?!! Make it snappy! I'm hungry!

Guru : But the Lion was fond of a good story and he released him. Then the Monkey said:

Monkey: The Jackal said:

Jackal: Once, O LION! Once upon a time in a distant kingdom, there lived ... a KING!

Lion: What wuz duh king's name? Huhhh? Jackal!

Jackal: The king's name...was ...RAJA! Raja ruled over vast dominions , filled with many happy subjects ! At the court of this Raja, mind you, were many retainers, menservants and maidservants, couriers and courtiers, knights and princes, knaves and fools, and a beautiful wife as well, and many Concubines, including one favorite Concubine, whose name was...

Narrator: But then, O Worldly-Wise One, the Children cried all together at once:

Children (Childish high-pitched voice): What's a Concubine?

Guru: A Concubine , is the second, or third, or fourth wife, and so on and so forth, of a king. They are not for the likes of you or me, which is as it should be. It is best that the subject be avoided altogether. So, my very young ones, let me go onwhere was I?...

Children :(All shouting) The Jackal said!

Guru : Yes. Thank you. Well, the Jackal said:

Jackal: Therefore towards his wife and all his Concubines , did this king, RAJA, manifest much connubial bliss; and they, also, manifested much connubial bliss towards him! Yet, alas: for one day his favorite Concubine did something that very much offended him, and he waxed sore wroth:

Elephant: Oh, Monkey!

Guru: said the Elephant,

Elephant: Do not make this tale too long sad, or too sad, for I must soon be going!

Monkey: It's a sad tale for sure. It really is! Boy, is it sad ! I'll grant you that much! It's very, very sad! But its also very good , very good! It's a very, very good tale! Even that Lion himself thought it was a good story when the Jackal told it to him, and I'm sure you'll agree with me that it's a very good story when I tell you what the Jackal told the Lion. Have no doubt about it, I can assure you...!

Elephant: Enough, Monkey! All right! Proceed if you must.

Guru: sighed the Elephant. But, my Children, is it possible that this story may well be too long and too sad for you at your tender age?

Narrator: said the Guru, stopping his recitation, O worldly-wise one. But they cried out as with a single voice:

Children : No ! No ! No No No !
 No No ! No No !
 No ! More story! More! More! More!

Guru : Very well then: The Monkey said to the Elephant,

Monkey: The Jackal said to the Lion,

Jackal: The King said to his Concubine most favored in the land:

Raja(Booming accusing voice): O My Concubine! You have much offended me ! For, as it is written in some book of wisdom : "A naughty Concubine is worse than a bed of straw and the taste of stale chapattis "

Jackal: To which the Concubine replied:

Monkey: but just then, I hate to say it, I really do, but just then the Lion interrupted the Jackal and frightened him half to death, by asking :

Lion: Dis CON'-CU-BINE , wuz she pretty, Huhhhn?
JACKAL !!

Monkey: The Jackal was really annoyed, I don't think you need to be told that. But, Elephant you know as well as I do, you know how it goes, if the Jackal didn't keep the Lion amused all the time, he became dinner! In less time than it takes to say "Mahabalipuram"!. So he said:

Jackal: O, Lion! She was like unto the moon at midnight! Her eyes sparkled like the stars in the eastern sky, not any eastern sky either, but that sky which one may see in winter through the dews-swept dawn over Uttar Pradesh! Her teeth were whiter than the Elephant tusks of Bengal.....

Elephant: I would be very careful, Monkey, in what you say.

Monkey: Begging your pardon, Elephant; you know how vulgar those low-class Jackals are. He went on:

Jackal: Her cheeks, O Lion, lit up the heavens like torches blazing in the courtyards of Madras at the festival of Dipavali! And, Lion, if you will allow me to continue with my story, the Concubine asked the king, Raja :

Guru : But just then the Elephant himself interrupted the Monkey to ask:

Elephant: My memory is very good, Monkey, and I am certain that you never told me the name of this Concubine.

Monkey: Right you are, Elephant! Let me think. The Concubine's name was - Lakshmi. That was her name all right! Lakshmi!

Children : Lakshmi! Lakshmi!

Narrator: cried the Children. And they would have continued to cry out her name, perhaps forever, had not the Guru silenced them by many stern admonitions gleaned

from the Vedas on the obligations of students in the company of a teacher. Then the Guru said:

Guru: The Monkey said:

Monkey: The Jackal said:

Jackal: The Concubine said:

Monkey: But once again, begging your pardon, Elephant, the Lion stopped the Jackal, and asked:

Lion: Whut wuz her name, Huhhhn! Jackal!

Jackal: Her name, O Lion, was LAKSHMI!

Worldly-Wise One: But I already know that!

Narrator: Of course you do, Worldly-Wise One: but the Lion didn't. In fact the children themselves interrupted the Guru once again, and complained:

Children: We all know her name is Lakshmi!

Guru: Yes

Narrator: said the Guru,

Guru : but it was the Lion, not you, who did not know her name, at least not until then. Well, the Monkey said:

Monkey: The Jackal said:

Jackal: The Concubine said:

Lakshmi: (Sweet, tearful voice) : O my powerful Lord, in what fashion have I been the occasion of thy great displeasure?

Jackal: And the king replied :

Raja : Dare you deny that I saw you, just the other day, wandering about in the woods? Why were you in the palace, attending to your duties?

Concubine : O Sire! I beg you to forgive me! I was merely picking flowers for your birthday, a mere two days

hence! Do not forget, my beloved Lord, what many a wise sage of yore has said : " Those blessed beings who engage in innocent occupations will never know grief, woe, weeping, sorrow, mourning , lamentation or remorse!"

Raja: That is true, indeed,

Jackal : the king agreed ,

Raja: but the holy books also tell us that " The wise horse does not run until the master commands! " and in fact, I even recall having seen it written down somewhere that, "Even the waters of the Ganges dare not rise in flood against the word of Brahma!" You have been disobedient, my naughty Concubine, and you will be punished!"

Jackal : The king's heart was filled with vexation, and could not be appeased until this unfortunate, beautiful Concubine was driven from his court!

Elephant: That was an unjust king, so to abuse a good and innocent Concubine!

Monkey: Truly said , Elephant! and his own death was terrible and horrible! We should never forget what the ancients have written : " Virtue is its own reward" , and, "A living dog is actually much better off than a dead king !

Elephant : Forsooth, Monkey! Most wisely spoken, for it has also been said that "One cannot hope to escape the consequences of evil deeds even in the clefts of high mountains ", and, furthermore, that "The glittering chariot of this world is like unto a vain bauble, whose axles forever screech : "ME....!!ME....!! " "

Jackal: The poor rejected Concubine had nowhere to go. She wandered through the jungle picking berries, raw fruits, and wild herbs. It came about one afternoon that, sitting alone within the branches of a banyan tree, weeping and sighing for her change of state, she met a SNAKE!

Concubine : Oh, Snake!

Jackal: said the Concubine

Monkey : said the Jackal,

Guru: said the Monkey

Narrator: said the Guru, O Worldly-Wise One

Concubine : My name is....

Worldly-Wise One : I hate to interrupt, Narrator, but that's rather a scary story to tell to Children, don't you think? There are lots of different kinds of Snakes in India. I mean, it could have been anything from a harmless garter Snake to a king cobra or, for all we know, a starving boa constrictor!

Narrator: Indian tradition, O Worldly-Wise One, generally portrays snakes in benevolent rather than venomous roles. I doubt very much that the Guru had a boa constrictor in mind . It's a fair guess that we're dealing with a common variety of water Snake. These are not dangerous but have been known to grow to enormous sizes. Take it from me , those Children weren't frightened by the arrival of the Snake. Well, to get on with it, the Guru said:

Guru: The Monkey said

Monkey: The Jackal said

Jackal : Lakshmi said:

Concubine : Oh, Snake! Just a short time ago, I was among the favored of the land! But now I have been sent away and forced to live in the jungle, and I don't know what will become of me!

Snake's (Snaky) Voice: Do not grieve!

Jackal : said the Snake ,

Monkey: said the Snake

Guru : said the Snake

Narrator: said the Snake

Snake: All things come and go! It is the way of the world! Who can know what the morrow will bring? I myself have lived to see slaves exalted and kings thrown down,

the rich made beggars and beggars rich! Indeed, if I bethink me not amiss, has it not been said by some venerated sage of ancient Punjab that , " A little while and the bird is on the wing?" Do not disdain those who remind us that "The wise do not grieve!" Of all these wise old sayings, that of which I most treasure is this one : "He who never complains, will never complain, that 'others complain against me ,saying, "He complains too much!!" "'"

Guru: Take heed, little Children,

Narrator: said the Guru,

Guru: Although these words were uttered by simple jungle creatures, they are filled with ancient wisdom, and you must commit them to memory - and to your hearts! Well, as I was saying, the, er, Snake said:

Children: The Monkey! The Monkey!

Guru: I beg your pardon; right you are! So, the Monkey said to the Elephant!

Monkey: The Jackal said to the Lion!

Jackal: The Snake said to the Concubine!

Snake : Dry your tears, most estimable lady! Your eyes will once again sparkle like mist over Himalayan peaks ! Your breath shall once again be like the soothing ocean breezes guiding the dainty fishing vessels along the coast of Malabar! Your lips, once again - how shall I say it - shall twinkle like rubies in the turbans of the Nizams of Hyderabad! Be my guest!

Jackal: So the Snake took Lakshmi to his cave and gave her the remains of a boar, and afterwards she lived with him for many weeks until she found a home with her own species! Nor did he touch a single one of her bracelets and bangles, although it is well known that snakes are greedy for gold and jewels, but preserved them in a heap to serve as her dowry in a splendid marriage held the following year to a high caste prince, and attended by 3 rajas of Peshawar and the Rani of Gujarat!

Monkey: Then the Jackal shut up. The Lion stared at him a good five minutes, before he roared:

Lion : Is that all, Jackal? Why, I oughta eat you up right now!

Jackal: Oh Lion! Lion! There is a moral to this fable, which is, that all creatures may be of use to one another! Sire! Look down the road aways, and you will see an Elephant, certainly a better meal for you than my emaciated carcass. As he has just been listening to a very very long story told him by a foolish Monkey, he is completely confused and will offer you no resistance!

Monkey: And the moral, oh Elephant, of this story is,

Guru: said the Monkey:

Monkey: that if you had walked along this road you would have met , right away, and absolutely for certain, I guarantee you, an honest-too-goodness crouching Lion, who is just waiting to gobble you up, for he postponed his lunch for a long time to listen to a very, very long , boring and confusing story being told him by a stupid Jackal!

Guru: The Elephant was grateful to the Monkey for saving his life and gave him a shower from his trunk. And, my Children, the moral of this story is, that I am now a very, very old man, who is not sure of what he is saying half the time.

Narrator: And the moral of this entire convoluted, digressing and irrelevant saga, O Worldly-Wise One, is that we are all living in a fable of Monkeys and Elephants, Jackals and Lions , Snakes, Kings Concubines and Snakes , Gurus, Children, Narrators and Worldly-Wise Ones! Be steadfast in your devotion and never stray from the path of goodness.

Worldly-Wise One: Golly-gee! Thanks!
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