

The Winning of Friends

Panchatantra is a collection of Indian moral fables in Sanskrit. It was originally intended as a guide for kings and policy makers. Vidyapati or Vishnu Sharma, the Sanskrit sage, is considered the author of Panchatantra fables. The text is a set of prose and poetry originally written around 100 BC to AD 500. The earliest translation was done by Burzoe, a Persian physician in 550 AD. It was translated into Arabic, Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Latin. Europeans were introduced to Panchatantra through the translation of Rabbi Joel.

The Prelude introduces the origin of Panchatantra. Long ago, King Immortal Power was the ruler of a kingdom called Maidens' Delight (Amarasakti). He was so talented and wise that many kings sought his wisdom. He had three sons named Rich Power, Fierce Power and Endless Power. But the three sons were foolish and refused to learn anything. One day, King Immortal Power summoned his counsellors and asked for their suggestions. One of them asked him to teach them grammar for twelve years to awaken their senses. Another counsellor named Keen advised the King to send for the old sage Vishnu Sharma and send the young princes with him. He was sure to inspire them and make them wise. The King accepted and Vishnu Sharma appeared before him. He bluntly refused the King's gifts. He promised to make the princes wise within six months. Vishnu Sharma took the boys to his home and taught them five books that he had written:

1. The Loss of Friends
2. The Winning of Friends
3. Crows and Owls
4. Loss of Gains
5. Ill-Considered Action

The boys read and memorized the books in six months. They became wise and the five books became Panchatantra. They travelled the world and awakened the intelligence of young people everywhere.

Book II: 1. The Winning of Friends

A crow named Swift lived in a banyan tree. One day, he saw a hunter spread a snare and scatter grain to trap birds. A flock of birds flew down to eat the grain but Swift warned them. They flew away in safety. Next the dove king named Gay-Neck was flying with his followers in search of food. In spite of Swift's warning, Gay-Neck urged his followers to eat the grain. All of them were trapped. But Gay-Neck asked his followers to fly in unison so they could lift the snare with them. To emphasize that unity is strength, he told them the story of the Bharunda birds.

2. The Bharunda Birds

The Bharunda birds were magical because they had one body and two necks. When they were searching for food, the first neck found nectar. The second asked for half. But the first neck refused. In anger, the second neck picked up some poison and swallowed it. The bird forgot that they had only one stomach and died. When the doves heard this, they were motivated and started flying in unison. The hunter saw them and came running down from his hiding spot. But the birds had flown away. Gay-Neck had another plan. He went straight to his friend Gold. This Gold was a mouse and he lived in a hole that he had converted into a fortress. Gay-Neck requested Gold to bite through the snare and set them free. When Gold started biting near Gay-Neck's wing, he asked the mouse to release his followers first. It was done and Gay-Neck went home with his friends.

Swift heard of Gay-Neck and his friendship with Gold the mouse. Believing Gold to be a creature of extraordinary talent and a means of release from traps, Swift went to befriend him. When he called out the mouse, Gold refused to come out. Mice were food for crows and Gold knew better. After much cajoling, Gold came out and they became friends. Swift went away and brought a huge piece of meat for Gold. The mouse offered the crow corn and rice. They ate their fill and soon became very good friends that the mouse sat between the crow's wings. One day, Swift told Gold that he was dissatisfied with the country and wanted to go away. He planned on going to a lake in the south and living with his bosom friend Slow. Gold requested Swift to take him also. Swift placed Gold on his back and they both flew to the lake.

Slow was a tortoise. He saw a mouse riding Swift and was soon introduced to Gold. Slow asked why Gold looked so sad and the mouse began his tale.

3. Gold's Gloom

There was a shrine to Lord Shiva in the city of Maiden's Delight. In a cell nearby lived a monk named Crop-Ear. He often went to the city and got plenty of food and money as charity. He returned back to his cell, ate to his heart's content, gave some to his servants and hid the rest. Gold and his companions found this hoard and lived on it. The monk realised the presence of mice and moved his hoard from place to place. But Gold found it no matter where. Crop-Ear was dejected and told the matter to Wide-Bottom, his friend who happened to be another holy man. Crop-Ear struck his alms bowl with a bamboo stick to keep off the mice. This irritated Wide-Bottom who searched hard and found the hoard.

Disappointed and hungry, Gold sniffed out another path for his companions. But half-way through, a hungry cat pounced on them and slaughtered many mice. The poor

mice complained that their leader is incapable of finding them food and shelter. Out of anger, Gold tried to jump into the alms bowl and steal whatever food remained there. But he had lost his vigour and his energy. He could not jump anymore. As Wide-Bottom said, he who has no money has no strength. Gold cursed his poverty and came back to his fortress. That was why he had accompanied Swift to search for a new hoard. Slow advised him that a healthy body and good friends were always better than a hoard of money.

4. Mother Shandilee

This tale was narrated by Wide-Bottom to Crop-Ear when he searched for Gold's hoard. Once Wide-Bottom had stayed with a man. His wife, Mother Shandilee was well known for her cunning. When her husband asked her to feed some people on the occasion of the Winter Solstice, Shandilee declined. She got some sesame seeds and hulled them to prepare cakes. She had placed the hulled seeds in a bowl under the sun. Unfortunately, a dog urinated over them. Shandilee was disappointed but she had an idea. She washed them and took them to the city in a basket. She asked if anyone would exchange her hulled seeds for unhulled seeds. A woman exchanged her unhulled seeds as hulling was a tough task. When the woman's husband came home and heard of the exchange, he advised her to be careful as Mother Shandilee was not to be trusted. He had smelled the seeds. That was how Wide-Bottom was able to identify Gold's hoard.