

BUDDHIST TALES
FOR YOUNG AND OLD

A Prince of Monkeys (Carefulness)

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Once upon a time there was a cruel monkey king who ruled in the Himalayas. All the monkeys in his band were his own wives and children. He was afraid that one of his sons might grow up and take over as king. So it was his policy to bite each son just after he was born. This altered him so he would be too weak to ever challenge his father.

A certain wife of the monkey king was pregnant. Just in case the unborn one was a son, she wanted to protect him from the cruel policy of her husband. So she ran away to a forest at the foot of a distant mountain. There she soon gave birth to a bright little baby boy monkey.

Before long this baby grew up to be big and strong. One day he asked his mother, "Where is my father?" She told him, "He is king of a band of monkeys living at the foot of a far-off mountain. That makes you a prince!"

The prince of monkeys said, "Kindly take me to my father." His mother said, "No my son, I am afraid to do so. Your father bites all his sons in order to weaken them for life. He is afraid one of his sons will replace him as king." The prince said, "Don't be afraid for me, mother. I can take care of myself." This gave her confidence, so she agreed and took him to his father.

When the cruel old king saw his strong young son, he thought. "I have no doubt that when this my son grows stronger he will steal my kingdom from me. Therefore I must kill him while I still can! I will hug him, pretending it is out of love for him. But really I will squeeze him to death!"

The king welcomed his son, saying, "Ah, my long lost son! Where have you been all this time? I have missed you dearly." Then he took him in his arms and hugged him. He kept squeezing harder and harder, trying to squeeze the life out of him! But the prince of monkeys was as strong as an elephant. He hugged his father right back. He squeezed him tighter and tighter, until he could feel the old king's rib bones starting to crack!

After this terrible greeting, the monkey king was even more terrified that one day his son would kill him. He thought, "Nearby there is a pond possessed by a water demon. It would be easy to get him to eat my son. Then my problems would be over!"

The monkey king said, "Oh my dear son, now is the perfect time for you to come home. For I am old and I would like to hand over my band of monkeys to you. But I need flowers for the coronation ceremony. Go to the nearby pond and bring back two kinds of white water lilies, three kinds of blue water lilies and five types of lotuses."

The prince of monkeys said, "Yes my father, I will go and get them."

When he arrived at the pond, he saw that there were many kinds of

water lilies and lotuses growing all over it. But instead of jumping right in and picking them, he investigated carefully. He walked slowly along the bank. He noticed there were footprints going into the pond, but none coming out! After considering, he realised this was a sure sign the pond was possessed by a water demon. He also realised his father must have sent him there to be killed.

He investigated further, until he found a narrow part of the pond. There, with great effort, he was able to jump from one side clear across to the other. In the midst of his leap he reached down and picked flowers, without actually getting into the water. Then he jumped back again, picking more flowers. He continued jumping back and forth, collecting lots of flowers.



Suddenly the water demon stuck his head up above the water. He exclaimed, "In all the time I've lived here I have never seen anyone, man or beast, as wise as this monkey! He has picked all the flowers he wanted, without ever coming within the grasp of my power, here in my kingdom of water."

Then the ferocious demon made a path for himself through the water and came up onto the bank. He said, "My lord, king of monkeys, there are three qualities that make a person unbeatable by his enemies. It appears that you have all three - skill, courage and wisdom. You must be truly invincible! Tell me, mighty one, why have you collected all those flowers?"

The prince of monkeys replied, "My father wants to make me king in his place. He sent me to gather these flowers for the coronation ceremony."

The water demon said, "You are too noble to be burdened by carrying these flowers. Let me carry them for you." He picked up all the flowers and followed him.

From a distance, the monkey king saw the water demon carrying the flowers and following the prince. He thought, "I sent him to get flowers, thinking he would be eaten by the demon. But instead he has made the water demon his servant. I am lost!"

The monkey king was afraid all his unwholesome deeds had caught up with him. He went into a sudden panic, which caused his heart to break into seven pieces. Of course this killed him on the spot!

The monkey band voted to make the strong young prince the new king.

The moral is: It pays to be careful.