



A collection of some traditional tales selected from the wide plethora of Indian folklore.

Tales for the Young

Retold by:
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1. The Jackal and the Rats

One day a jackal saw some rats going inside a hole. He stood by the hole on one leg. After some time the rats came out. The leader of the rats said to the jackal, "Why are you standing here on one leg?"

The jackal said, "I am standing on one leg because I am praying to God. I always do so."

The rats thought that he was a saint. Everyday they would visit him, pay their respects and then go away. The jackal would watch all the rats go away. Then he would suddenly catch the last one and eat it.

After several days, the rat-leader found that many rats were missing. He decided to find out what was happening. So one day he told his friends, "Today all of you go first. I will come last."

When the jackal saw the rat-leader leaving last, he sprang at him, but missed and fell on the rock. The rat-leader attacked him, dug his teeth into his throat and killed him.

All the other rats came back and had a feast.

A person of evil nature like the jackal in this story cannot be anybody's friend, and should not be trusted.

2. The Monkeys and the Bird

One day it was raining in the forest. Some monkeys were running around. They were feeling cold. They saw some fireflies. From the distance the fireflies looked like fire.

One monkey said, "Friends, let us go near that fire. If we sit there, we will be warm."

All the other monkeys agreed. A bird was sitting on a tree. It heard the monkeys, and said, "Friends, it is not fire. It is the light coming from the fireflies. You will not be warm if you go there." One monkey said, "You are telling a lie. I will teach you a lesson."

So saying he caught the bird and killed it. Then all the monkeys went near the fireflies but they did not find any fire there. Now they realized their mistake but it was too late. They had already killed the bird that had given them good advice.

One should listen to the advice given, and not act in haste.

3. The Tortoise and the Swans

Two swans and a tortoise lived on a lake. They were good friends. Once there was no rain, and so the lake was dry.

The swans said, "Let us go to another lake."

The tortoise said, "You can easily fly away. How will I go?"

The swans thought about it. They brought a stick and said, "Hold the stick in your mouth. We'll hold the ends from each side. But you must promise not to open your mouth."

The tortoise said, "I promise."

Thus the swans held the stick from each side. The tortoise held it in his mouth in the middle. The swans flew away.

On the way the tortoise saw some children playing on the ground. He said, "Ah! The children are looking so small from here."

When he opened his mouth, he could not hold the stick. He fell down and died. He had not only forgotten his promise but had also acted foolishly.

We must think before doing something that may be harmful to us.

4. The Snakes and the Crows

Two crows lived in a tree. The mother crow laid some eggs. One day when the crows went in search of food, a snake climbed up the tree. It ate a few eggs. Everyday the snake would eat some eggs. The crows did not know what to do. They went to their friend, the jackal. They said, "The snake eats our eggs. What should we do?"

The jackal said, "I have an idea. Go to the King's palace. Bring a necklace of the princess and drop it into the snake's hole."

The crows did so. When the servants of the princess saw the crows drop the necklace into the snake's hole they dug up the hole. When the snake came out, they killed it and took away the necklace. The crows were now happy.

Their eggs were safe because their friend had given them a very wise advice and they had listened to him.

5. The Jackal and the Drum

One day a jackal was very hungry. He went into the forest in search of food. There he heard a noise. He got afraid and said, "Who is there?"

There was no reply. He stood there silently. He heard the noise again. Now he was really very afraid. But he thought, "Why should I be afraid? I will go and see."

So saying he slowly walked towards the noise. He saw a drum lying under a tree. The branch of the tree was moving with the wind. It was striking against the drum and making noise. It was this noise that he had heard. He started laughing. He was not afraid any more.

If we think clearly and not act in haste we have no need to be afraid of anything.

6. The Tiger and the Brahmin

A tiger lived in a forest. He was very old and could not catch any animal. So he was hungry.

He had a gold bracelet. He sat down near the pool. He saw a Brahmin on the other side. He said, "O Brahmin! Come and take this gold bracelet."

The Brahmin said, "If I come there, you will kill me."

The tiger said, "No, no! I am very old. I have no teeth. I cannot kill you. Don't be afraid. Please come here." The Brahmin walked into the pool. His feet were caught in the mud.

The tiger said, "Wait there. I will help you."

The tiger jumped into the pool and caught the man. He killed him and ate him.

The Brahmin lost his life because he got greedy.

7. The Jackal and the Otters

A jackal lived in a forest. One day his wife said to him, "I want to eat 'Rohita' fish today. Can you bring some?"

"Yes, I can," said the jackal, and went to the river.

When he reached the river, he saw two otters bringing out a big 'Rohita' fish. He hid himself behind a tree. The otters sat down under a tree with their fish.

One otter said, "This is a big fish. We can feed on it for many days."

The second otter said, "You are right. But how shall we divide it into two parts?"

The first otter thought that if he divided the fish, he would have to give the bigger piece to his friend. So he said, "You divide it."

The second otter thought, "If I divide the fish, I will be bound to give him the best piece." So he said, "You divide it." They kept talking and arguing like this for quite some time. None of them was willing to leave the bigger share for the other.

Now the jackal saw his chance. He came from behind the tree and said, "What's the matter? May I help you?"

One otter said, "We caught this fish but we cannot decide how to divide it and share with each other. Will you help us in dividing it equally?" The jackal said, "Yes, I will." Then he cut off the head and tail of the fish. He gave the head to one otter and tail to the other. Then he took the middle piece and said, "This I will take as my fee."

Now the otters realized that the jackal had cheated them. If the two animals had trusted each other, the jackal could not have done so.

Friends should always trust each other and not allow a stranger to cheat them and spoil their friendship.

8. The Crow, the Deer and the Jackal

Long ago a deer and a crow lived in a forest. They were good friends.

One day a jackal saw the deer. He wanted to eat him. He said to the deer, "I have no friends. Will you be my friend?"

"Yes, I will be your friend," said the deer.

But when the crow heard of the meeting, he was not happy. He said to the deer, "You should not make a stranger your friend."

The jackal was very clever. He tried to make friends with the crow also. "The deer is my friend. Why don't you also be my friend?" the jackal said.

The deer also said, "Friend crow, let us all be friends and live together happily." The crow agreed.

One day the jackal said to the deer, "On the other side of the forest there is a field full of sweet grass. Come, I will show it to you."

The deer immediately went with him. He was very happy to see the sweet corn. He started eating. A farmer saw him and set a net to catch him. The deer was caught in the net.

He said to the jackal, "Dear friend, cut the net and set me free." But the clever jackal refused, saying, "I am fasting today. So I cannot cut the net. I will come tomorrow morning and set you free." And he went away.

The crow came searching for the deer. He felt very sad on seeing him caught in the net. He asked, "My friend, how did this happen?" The deer replied, "The jackal led me to this trap." The crow said, "I have an idea. Lie on your back and don't move. I will peck at your eyes. When I croak, run very fast."

The deer did so. When the farmer came, he thought, "Aha! The deer has died. I will remove the net and take him away." When he removed the net, the crow said, "Croak, croak!" The deer sprang up and ran away.

The farmer was angry and threw his club. It hit the jackal sitting under the tree. The jackal was killed.

One should be careful in selecting friends.

9. The Clever Jackal

Once five friends were having a party in a village. They were thieves. They had stolen food from many houses and were now enjoying it.

They decided, "One who kills a jackal and brings it will be considered the bravest of all."

One of the thieves said, "I will go and kill a jackal."

He picked up his club and went to the forest. He thought, "I will lie down here and pretend I am dead. When the jackal comes, I will kill it with my club."

He lay down under a tree. After some time two jackals came there. One of them said, "Look, there is a dead man. Come on!"

But the other jackal was clever. He said, "Wait! Let us make sure he is dead."

The jackals went behind a tree near the man. The clever jackal said, "Just as I said! He is alive. He is just pretending he is dead. He is waiting to kill one of us. I will teach him a lesson."

So saying the clever jackal went very slowly towards the man. He caught the club with his teeth and slowly pulled it. The thief held on to the club more tightly. The jackal now suddenly let go the club. The man jumped to his feet and threw his club at the jackal but the jackal had already run away behind the tree. The club missed the jackal.

Now the thief did not know what to do. He could not go back to his friends and tell them that he had failed to kill a jackal. So he went home and slept.

One should not boast of doing something difficult if he cannot do it.

10. The Vulture, the Cat and the Bird

Some birds used to live in a tree. One day a vulture came to live there. The birds got worried. But they felt pity on the vulture.

They said to him, "You are very old and blind. Don't worry. We will share our food with you."

The vulture was happy. He said, "Thank you very much. When you go to gather food, I will look after your young ones."

One day when the birds had gone away, a cat came there. The little birds made a big noise. The vulture came down and asked, "Who is there?"

The cat was frightened but he saw that the vulture was blind. So the clever cat said, "I have heard that you are very wise. I have come to learn from you."

The vulture said, "But you are a cat. You might kill these young birds and eat them. I will have to kill you."

The cat said, "No, wise bird. I have come as a pupil to you. I have read religious books. I don't kill young birds. Have faith in me and let me stay with you."

The vulture agreed and said, "All right, you may live with me here."

Everyday the cat would catch a young bird and eat it. Finding the number of young ones gradually getting reduced the birds were now very worried. One bird said to the others, "We must find out what is happening to our young ones."

The cat heard the bird. Next day when the birds had flown away in search of food, he ate the young ones and ran away from there. When the birds came back, they saw some bones lying under the tree. The vulture was sleeping there. They thought, "The vulture has eaten our young ones. We will teach him a lesson."

So saying they attacked the vulture and killed him. He lost his life because he had made the mistake of having an evil animal as his friend.

11. The Greedy Forester

Long ago some elephants lived in a forest. One of them was white. He was very kind. He did not like some of his friends because they were cruel. He used to feel bad when his friends teased the monkeys, squirrels and other small animals.

One day a man lost his way in the forest. He saw the white elephant and got frightened. He thought that the elephant would kill him. So he started running. The elephant followed him. Now the man got more frightened.

But he was surprised when the elephant spoke to him, "You were screaming. Can I do anything for you? I will take you to the city. Come, sit on me."

The man sat on the back of the elephant who started walking towards the city. When they reached the city, the elephant stopped. The man got down and bid the elephant goodbye.

One day the forester saw a craftsman making an elephant toy of ivory. He asked him, "Is this ivory very costly?"

The craftsman replied, "Yes, it is costly. You are a forester. If you bring ivory of an elephant from the forest, you will become rich."

The forester saw a good opportunity to make money. He went to the forest. There he met the white elephant. The elephant asked him, "Why are you so sad, friend? May I help you?"

The forester replied, "I have to pay money to somebody. You can help me by giving me a piece of your tusk."

The elephant was generous. He said, "I will be happy to give you both my tusks. Please cut them off and take them."

The forester took out the saw, cut off the tusks and went away.

After some time he came back again. He said to the elephant, "Your tusks helped me. I need some more now."

The elephant was really very kind. He said, "Take the rest of my tusks."

The forester pulled hard and took the rest of the tusks. The elephant was now in great pain.

The forester started walking towards the city. On the way the earth opened and fire came up. The forester was being burnt alive. He cried for help. He heard the voice of God, "You are very greedy. The elephant was kind but you gave him much pain because of your greed. Now you must suffer."

The forester realized his mistake but it was too late.

If we take undue advantage of someone's generosity for our selfish motives, we will ultimately suffer.

12. The Foolish Birds

Once two birds lived in a tree. The mother bird laid some eggs in the nest. Just then a snake came there and ate the eggs. The birds were very sad.

They started looking for another tree so that they could make a new nest there. A crab saw them and asked, "O birds! Why are you looking so sad? Please tell me."

The birds told him about the cruel snake. The crab thought for some time. Then he told them, "I will tell you how to kill that snake."

The birds felt very happy and said, "Please tell us the way immediately."

The crab said, "Get some fish and put them in a line between the holes of the mongoose and the snake. The mongoose likes fish. When he comes out and sees fish, he will reach the snake's hole. When he sees the snake, he will kill it."

The birds put a long line of fish between the holes of the mongoose and that of the snake. The mongoose came out and ate all the fish. Then he went down the snake's hole and killed it.

The birds were very happy. But the next moment the mongoose saw the eggs of the birds. He too ate all the eggs.

The birds were sad again. They had behaved foolishly and so lost all their eggs because they trusted one enemy to kill another enemy.

13. The Traveler and the Wish Tree

On a hot day a traveler stopped under a shady tree. He lay down there and wished, "It would have been very nice if there was a soft bed here."

Immediately a bed appeared there. The traveler was surprised. He did not know that he was sitting under a wish tree. Since he had wished for a bed it had appeared there.

After lying on the bed he thought, "This is perfect. It would be lovely if a beautiful maiden were here to give me company!"

As soon as he thought about it, a beautiful girl appeared before him. He thought, "It is really my lucky day. Whatever I wish comes true. I have a soft bed and a beautiful maiden. But what should I eat? I wish I had some good food."

Immediately many varieties of food appeared before him. The traveler was very happy! He ate heartily and lay down in bed. The maiden started singing to him.

He said to himself, "This is happiness. But what will happen if all this disappears and a tiger attacks me?"

The moment he said so, the bed and the maiden disappeared and a tiger came charging at him.

The traveler was frightened. He climbed up the tree and thought, "I should have remained satisfied with what I had. The shade of the tree should have been sufficient, but I got greedy and lost it too. Now it is time to do something to save my life."

14. Choice of Friends

One day a fowler came to the forest. He set up his net under a tree and scattered some grains. He hid himself in the hollow of the tree.

After some time a fleet of pigeons came there. They saw the grains and wanted to eat. But their leader said, "My friends, let us not be greedy. It may be a trap."

The pigeons did not want to leave such a feast even though the pigeon leader feared that it was a trap. Suddenly a net fell upon them and they were all trapped under it.

The pigeons started blaming each other, but the leader said, "Don't waste time arguing. Let us find a way to free ourselves."

The pigeons asked, "How can we do that?"

The leader replied, "Let us all fly together with the net."

At a given signal all the pigeons flew away with the net. The fowler came running but he could not do anything.

A crow had watched everything. Impressed with the pigeon leader's wisdom and concern for his flock he started following the pigeons.

After flying for a long time the leader asked his friends to get down near the house of his friend, the Mouse.

Seeing his friends the Mouse came rushing out. When he saw his friend, the pigeon leader, trapped under a net, he started to cut the strings. But the pigeon leader said, "No, my friend. First free my friends."

The Mouse said, "My teeth are small. After cutting so many strings and freeing your friends, I may not be able to cut more strings to free you."

The pigeon leader said, "It does not matter if I am not freed. My first duty is to see that my followers are freed first."

The Mouse cut all the strings and freed the pigeons. They thanked the Mouse and flew away.

The crow, who was watching, was greatly moved. He said to the Mouse, "O good friend, I also want to be your friend."

The Mouse got afraid and said, "How is it possible? You will eat me."

The crow said, "Don't be afraid. Your friendship will be very valuable to me. If you don't make me your friend, I will die at your door."

The Mouse liked the crow's determination. He agreed to be his friend.

Then they went to live in another forest where the crow's friend, the Tortoise lived. The three friends now started living happily together.

One day a deer came running to them. A hunter was after them. The Tortoise could not move fast, so the hunter immediately caught him and tied him on to his bow.

Now the Crow, the Deer and the Mouse made a plan to free their friend. The Deer went and lay down, as if dead, in the path of the hunter and the Crow sat on him. When the hunter saw the Deer, he thought the Deer was dead. So he kept the Tortoise and his bow on the ground and started walking towards the Deer.

In the meantime the Mouse cut the strings. The Tortoise slipped into the water and was now safe. The Deer suddenly got up and ran away. The hunter could not catch him. When he turned back, he found that the Tortoise had also escaped. He could do nothing.

At a distant place the four friends met each other.

The Tortoise said, "I must thank you for saving my life."

The Mouse replied, "There is no need to thank anybody. It is everybody's duty to help a friend in need."

The four friends lived happily in the forest.

15. The Wise Old Bird

Some wild geese lived in a tree in the forest. They were very happy.

One day an old bird saw a small creeper growing at the foot of the tree. He told the other birds, "Let us pull it out. If it grows big, it will come up to our nest."

The other birds did not agree. They said, "It is a very small plant. What harm will it do to our nest?"

The old bird said, "When it grows big, it will become very dangerous. So finish it now itself."

The younger birds laughed and said to each other, "This old bird is mad. Let us not listen to him."

When the old bird heard this, he became very sad.

As the days passed, the creeper grew. It became big and strong. One day when the geese had gone far away, a hunter came there. He thought, "The geese live here. I will catch all of them."

He climbed up the creeper and spread out his net. In the evening when the geese went up to their nest, they were all caught in the hunter's net.

The geese realized their mistake. They said to the old bird, "Please forgive us. If we had listened to your advice, we would not have been caught in this trap. Please tell us what we should do now."

The old bird told them how to free themselves.

Next day when the hunter came back, he saw the geese lying still on all sides of the net. He thought that they were dead. He got angry and threw all the geese out. The geese suddenly got up and flew away.

One must listen to the advice of the wise.

16. The Kind King and Foolish Monkey

Long ago a kind and benevolent king ruled over a state. He could not tolerate anybody being unhappy – even birds and animals. Whosoever came to his court would get what he wanted. Nobody in his kingdom went hungry. All the people in his kingdom loved and respected him.

The king was fond of animals and birds. He also kept a pet monkey who was very dear to him. The monkey was free to wander anywhere inside the palace. He was always ready to serve the king. He would bring cold water for the king and also fan him so that the king could sleep peacefully.

Both the king and the queen were happy with the monkey as he used to make them laugh. But the courtiers did not like the king giving so much importance to that monkey. They would say to the king, “O King! This monkey is an animal. It is not right for him to roam freely throughout the palace and be always near you. He is not wise and may do something so foolish that we may regret.”

But the king did not listen to them and said, “This monkey is not only a servant but has also become my friend. He will never do anything to harm me.”

After several days the courtiers’ fears came true. One day the king was taking rest after lunch. The monkey reached there and started fanning him. After some time the king slept. In the meantime a fly came and sat on the king’s nose. The monkey used the fan to remove

it. The fly came again and sat on the king's nose. The monkey removed it again. Many times this happened. At this the monkey grew angry and picking up the king's sword hit the fly sitting on the king's neck. The fly flew away but the king's neck was severed.

Thus the kind king lost his life at the hands of the foolish monkey.

It is truly said: "A wise enemy is better than a foolish friend!"

17. The Naughty Monkey

A naughty monkey lived in a garden. He used to jump from one branch of the tree to another. Sometimes he would pick unripe fruit, eat some and throw away the others. Whenever a traveler was sleeping under the tree, he would quietly pick up his things and take them high up in the tree.

People living near the garden were fed up with the monkey. They tried very hard to catch him but the monkey was too clever for them and could not be caught.

After a few days a kind man started building a temple near the garden. When the naughty monkey saw the carpenters sawing wood, he also wanted to do so. He waited for a suitable opportunity. One day the carpenters went away a little distance to eat food. Before going they had fixed a small piece of wood in between the two sides of the log so that they could restart their work immediately after returning.

The monkey saw his opportunity. He came down the tree and started picking up various tools and throwing them around. Finally he climbed up the log of wood and tried to pull out the piece of wood. After trying many times he succeeded in pulling it out but his tail got caught in between the two sides of the log.

The monkey tried very hard but could not free his tail. He was now afraid that when the carpenters came back they would beat him. He made one final attempt and was able to pull out his tail but it was cut

in the middle. He was now in pain. All the birds and animals who were watching started laughing and making fun of him. The monkey felt ashamed and quietly went away.

It is bad to imitate others and try to do somebody else's work without knowing anything about it.