

FOLK TALES
of
TIBET

NORBU CHOPHEL

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King patted the two puppies and they instantly turned into two royal children. He seated them on the silver throne and offered Dolma the turquoise throne. All the ministers received them with honour and respect. When Dolma's two sisters, Dekyi and Dolkar heard her story, that she now lived in peace and prosperity, they were envious of her and regretted their own lost chances.



The Meditator and the Thief



Once a simple, pious man lived in a cave at the far end of a village. His only notable possession was a set of seven silver bowls for offering water to the gods on his altar. These bowls were very dear to him, not because they were made of silver, but because seven bowls of clean water was the only thing he could offer to the gods.

A thief living in the same village saw the meditator's treasure and was tempted to steal it. He thought the meditator would be easy prey like other meditators who easily fell victim to numerous thieves because of their extreme devotion to religious duties and carelessness over their material belongings. Even if they caught a thief, they did not punish him severely because of the compassion within their hearts.

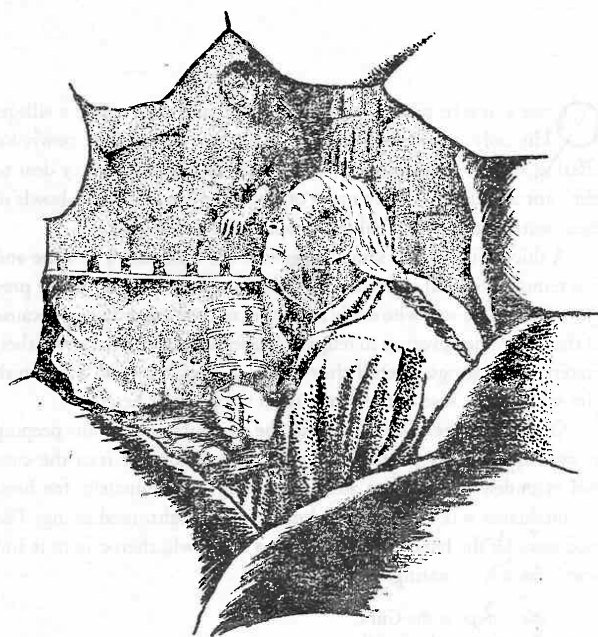
One night, the thief set out for the meditator's cave and peeping in saw that he was asleep. Slowly, he shoved himself into the cave and extended his hand to steal the bowls. Unfortunately, for him, the meditator was not sleeping, but sitting upright, meditating. The meditator let the hand come right up to the bowls, then caught it and beat it harshly, chanting:

"I take refuge in the Guru,
I take refuge in the Buddha,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
I take refuge in the Sangha." Then he set the thief free.

The beating hurt so much that the thief was almost in tears, but, somehow, he was able to memorise the meditator's words. He recited them to himself as he went home, nursing his bruised hand.

On the way he saw a couple of huge figures like horsemen coming in his direction from the other side of the bridge. They were ghosts, but when they heard his prayers, they disappeared. Though he had been unable to steal anything, he was saved from the terrifying ghosts.

So the saying goes, that merely uttering a prayer can save you from the evils and dangers that lie in your path.



The Scheming Sparrow



A pigeon and a sparrow lived quite close to each other. They were very friendly and lived in the most neighbourly manner. However, that was a very long time ago.

One day the pigeon felt like playing a joke on the sparrow. She went to the sparrow's nest and playfully threw out all the soft lining, piled it in front of the nest, and went in search of the sparrow. On meeting the sparrow, she said, "Friend, a wool merchant has stationed himself in front of your nest." The sparrow returned to her nest and saw the damage that had been done to it, but neither said nor did anything, deciding instead to wait to get her revenge on the pigeon.

A few days later, the sparrow went to the pigeon's nest in her absence, killed all the young birds and went in search of her neighbour.

"Friend, last time there was a wool merchant in front of my nest," said the sparrow. "Now there is a butcher right on your doorstep and he has all the meat you could want in the world."

Immediately, the pigeon suspected something and flew back to her nest. She was very upset to find her young ones dead and went in search of the sparrow.

As soon as they met, they quarrelled and fought fiercely. The pigeon threw thorns at the sparrow's breast and wounded her seriously (the black mark of which can be seen on a sparrow's breast even today.) When the other birds heard about the fight, they could not believe that two usually friendly birds should engage in such a useless squabble. They stopped the fight and took them to court to try them.

The court tried them both and sentenced the sparrow to receive the death penalty, having found her guilty of committing murder,

The Frog and the Princess



Once upon a time, a King had three beautiful daughters, whom he loved as much as if he had three precious jewels. He wanted to find a suitable husband for each of them. Though many princes from various neighbouring kingdoms came to ask for their hands, the King did not find anyone suitable for his three lovely daughters. He was always afraid that he would die without having them married off. He feared that he would die an improper death without having fulfilled his duty as a father. Proud as he was, he was constantly worried about the future of his daughters.

An elderly childless couple, both well over sixty, worked as servants in the palace. Their lives were lonely and miserable.

One year, one of the old woman's knees became swollen. As she couldn't afford to see a doctor, the swelling grew so serious that she was hardly able to move an inch. When it burst, a big golden frog jumped out. Seeing this, the old man declared vehemently, "This frog must be an evil spirit. Throw that inauspicious thing away quickly!" The old woman didn't have the heart to get rid of it, so with tears in her eyes she persuaded him, saying, "Who knows whether he's an evil spirit or a monster, a god or a dragon? We have suffered bitterly for so long. Now we are old, yet we have no child to help us. Maybe God has shown us mercy and bestowed on us a frog instead of a son."

Fearing that his wife would grow more unhappy, the old man did not insist and let her have her way. Even so the old man felt disgusted whenever he caught sight of the ugly creature with its flat head, big mouth and a pair of protruding eyes. He left home in anger and disgust. From then on the frog became the old woman's only companion and

even ate the same food she did. Every day the old woman would carry him in and out, treating him as if he were a baby. The little frog, though unable to speak, always opened his eyes wide as if he understood her kindness perfectly.

One day the old woman held the frog in her arms, teasing him, "Little frog, how nice it would be if you could talk!" The little frog's eyes bulged and he cried, "Mummy, Mummy, don't be sad. When I grow up I'll get married, and my wife will help you with everything and you won't have to work for the King any more." The old woman was so startled at hearing this that she almost dropped the little creature on the ground. She had never dreamed he could speak, let alone so thoughtfully. From then on, she cherished her little frog even more.

After a period of time, the little frog said to the old woman, "Mummy, it's high time you had a daughter-in-law to help you! Will you go and arrange the match?" The old woman asked, "But where can I go? Who would like to be the wife of a little frog like you! What's more, we are so poor." The little frog replied, "Don't worry! Go and ask to see the King and tell him, 'Your Majesty, haven't you got three princesses? Please can I have one for my daughter-in-law?' He will certainly agree. Then she can help you with your housework, can't she?"

The old woman laughed, "Little frog, what a sense of humour you have! How can a princess marry into a poor family like ours and what's more with a frog?" The little frog went on pleading, "Mummy! Mummy! Go and try, just once!" Seeing that he was in earnest, the old woman found it difficult to refuse him and so decided to try her luck.

When she came before the King, the old woman fell to her knees, saying, "Your Majesty, I have a request." The King asked, "What's the matter? No food, no clothes?" The old woman replied, "Thanks to your generosity, we have both. I've come to ask for a wife for my son. You have three daughters, please may one of them marry my son?"

No sooner had the old woman finished her explanation, than the King burst out laughing. "This old woman must be crazy or delirious. How can she talk such nonsense? Let my daughter become her son's wife? Impossible!" He gestured to his bodyguard and ordered, "Throw this mad old woman out!"

Driven out of the palace, she staggered homeward, complaining about the little frog all the way. As soon as she saw him, she cursed, "You little idiot! You don't know what's good and what's bad. You made me go and ask for trouble. There's an old saying: The peacock and the crow never fly together; the elephant and the ox can't get along with each other. Later you'll understand more and not have such fancy ideas."

Without waiting for her to finish grumbling, the little frog sprang up high in the air and shouted, "How can that be! I must go there by myself. Whether they agree or not, I'll marry one of the princesses. Just get your home ready to receive your daughter-in-law!" The little frog hopped to the gate of the palace and yelled, "Hey! King, ministers, officials, listen! I'm the son of the old woman who carries water for the palace. I've come here to make an offer of marriage. Open the gate quickly, I want to see the King." Even behind the walls of the palace his shouting sounded as loud as thunder and echoed in the ears of those inside for a long time. Shocked by the sound, the King and his ministers looked through the windows and saw it was a little frog making all the noise at the gate.

"Who are you?" the King asked. "Why are you shouting?"

"I'm the son of the old woman who carries water for the palace," the little frog said. "When she came to seek a match, you not only refused her, but were also very harsh with her. That was unfair! Yet I still respect you, and now I've come to see you myself. Will you agree to give me one of your daughters for my wife?"

The King roared with laughter and turned to the ministers at his side, "Did you hear what he said? The little frog dared to speak like that. How can such things happen?" Then he turned back to the frog, "How can my daughters, as lovely as flowers, be married to you, a dirty little thing like a cow pat? Scram! If you don't, I will set my dogs on you and they can eat you alive."

The little frog replied, "Don't try to frighten me. If you really won't grant my request, I'll start to laugh. Don't blame me for what happens then."

The King retorted, "Do as you like but don't complain of a belly ache if you laugh too hard!"

The little frog opened his mouth wide and laughed, letting out an enormous laugh. The sound was so loud that even the mountains and the earth shook, the wind blew, the sun and moon became dim, and the palace trembled as if about to collapse.

The King, scared out of his wits, popped his head out of the window and cried out, "Stop laughing! I'll go and find out which of my daughters would like to become your wife." The frog was silent and everything returned to normal. The King went inside and asked his eldest daughter first.

She replied, "Father, don't you love me any more? How could you propose marrying me to the son of that old woman? What's more, he's a small, dirty, ugly frog. I'd rather die than marry him!"

The King went back to the little frog and said, "My eldest daughter doesn't agree to marry such a small, dirty, ugly frog as you and your laughter was most unpleasant."

Before he could finish, the frog blew up his belly like a balloon and interrupted him with a loud cry, "What! If you won't let me marry one of your daughters, I'll weep!"

The King said, "Do as you like! Tears won't help you. My eldest daughter refused you, and I can do nothing about it. When a cow doesn't want to drink, you can't force it by pushing its head down."

Upon hearing this the little frog opened his mouth wide and cried. His tears poured down in torrents. Before long, the palace was flooded with water that continued to rise. Waves dashed turbulently against the walls and the palace seemed about to collapse.

The King, terror-stricken, begged at the top of his voice, "Do stop weeping! I'll go and ask again." This time the King went to his second daughter.

She replied with tears in her eyes, "Father, are you trying to get rid of me? If not, why ask me to marry the son of a servant?"

The King helplessly went back to the little frog and said, "Little frog, I was really unable to persuade my second daughter. She says you're the son of a servant, not a man but a frog, so she refuses to marry you."

The frog said, "You still don't want to give one of your daughters to me, so I'll jump up and down!"

"You have laughed and cried. You can do whatever you like!" the King retorted.

Then the little frog started jumping up and down more and more violently. With each jump a house collapsed under his feet and nearly all the houses around the palace caved in. Even the palace itself was rocking.

The King looked terrified and stammered, "Stop jumping and I'll give you my youngest daughter."

Young as she was, the third daughter was very clever. She said to her father, "He knows such powerful magic, I don't mind that he is the son of a servant. I'll marry this little frog, so long as you and mother and all the people in the palace can be saved."

Relieved, the King hurried outside, "This time your wish is granted," he announced to the little frog. "I'll let you marry my dearest daughter, the youngest princess."

The little frog was pleased and expressed his gratitude to the King. The young Princess was immediately dressed in her finery by her ladies-in-waiting, and the palace was gaily decorated. To the deafening sound of gongs and drums, the youngest Princess and the little frog were escorted home. Seeing that their sister had married the frog, the two elder sisters pouted and went back to the palace annoyed.

The old woman opened the door and found that the frog had really brought the Princess to be his wife. When the old woman asked him how he had managed to persuade the King and the Queen to give him the Princess, he told her how many times he had begged them and how many times he had been cheated. The old woman was overjoyed when she saw that the little frog had brought back the gentlest, most beautiful and virtuous daughter of the King. But then she began to worry when she thought about how poor her family was, with nowhere for the King's son-in-law and his bride to live. Without showing any signs of discomfort, the little Princess began right away to help the old woman: cleaning the house, carrying water, collecting cow pats for fuel and cooking. At night, the whole family slept together in one room.

The following morning, when the old woman woke up, she found that the poky, dark room they had been lying in had been transformed

into a high, spacious building, bright and clean as if made of crystal. There was enough food, clothing and provisions for their daily needs, and their home was more comfortable even than the King's palace. Only then did the little frog tell the old woman and the young Princess his story.

He was the son of the old Dragon King of Dragon Kingdom and had come to the mortal world wearing a frog's skin. Then he removed the frog's skin and changed into a handsome prince. The old woman and the young Princess were so happy that they burst out laughing. Now the whole family could live comfortably, and there was no need for the old woman to work as a servant any more. Before long, the old man returned home and they were all very happy.

One day, the young Princess suggested, "Why don't we invite my two sisters here? We don't need their favours, but we are related and we ought to show each other some affection?"

The Dragon Prince replied, "Your two sisters were cruel. We'd better not invite them."

But the young Princess insisted, so the Dragon Prince gave in on the condition that he should disguise himself as a frog in order that his secret should not be revealed to the two princesses.

The two sisters arrived. When they saw the big building and the many fine furnishings, which were better even than those of the palace, they were suspicious of the old woman's good fortune. At night when they drank barley wine, they made one toast after another to their youngest sister. As expected, the young Princess became intoxicated and talked so much that she disclosed the secret of the little frog.

Being jealous of her, the two sisters thought up a scheme. Unnoticed by the others, they threw her into a pool while she was drunk. Who would have thought that they would murder their own sister? Then the eldest Princess put on the fur gown of the youngest Princess and lay on the bed.

As the little frog went upstairs, the second Princess hurried towards him and said, "My elder sister has had to go back to the palace on some urgent business." The little frog did not bother to check this, though he wondered why she had left in such a hurry without saying goodbye

to him. As the three sisters strongly resembled one another, it was hard for him to distinguish one from the other.

Time passed. A walnut tree grew out of the pool and bore many nuts. The little frog brought them back home and they tasted delicious to him and the old couple, but to the two sisters they were like a bitter poison. In anger, the two sisters chopped down the tree and burnt it to ashes, which were spread over the fields.

Later a lot of tender green barley sprouted up. When it was ripe, the little frog made it into *tsampa*. The old couple and the frog thought the *tsampa* tasted as sweet as honey, yet to the two sisters it was as bitter as medicinal herbs. Angrily, they threw all the barley into the pool, but it turned into larks, one of which flew towards the little frog and stood on his shoulder.

The little frog brought the lark into the house, and tearfully the bird told him how she had been killed. Only then did the little frog understand that the soul of his wife had been reincarnated as a bird. He drove the two evil sisters away, took off his frog skin and changed into young prince again. Then he and his family lived happily ever after.