

BUDDHIST LITERATURE

HOÀNG HOA

FABLES

(Excerpts from the Sutra of 100 Examples)



WISDOM TORCH PUBLISHER

HOANG – HOA

Fables

(Excerpts from the Sutra of 100 Examples)

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PREFACE

In life, no one escapes moments of success and glory. But how many men throughout the ages, intoxicated by their triumph, have let themselves be carried away by pride and folly?

In the same way, no one can boast of being forever free from ignorance. For a single moment of blindness is sometimes enough to fall and shatter an entire life. This is why this collection of poetic fables, aims to be a source of strength : it helps each one journey through life without letting success become a source of ridicule, or failure a cause for devastation..

We are in the height of summer, in the oppressive heat of June. This book hence comes as a gentle and refreshing night breeze, restoring a little clarity and flavor to life.

It also possesses the power to dispel sorrow and calm the bitterness of those weighed down by fate. It guides humanity toward emotional mastery and wisdom, enabling each person to become a fully realized being.

Our friend Hoàng-Hoa undoubtedly faced the walls of humanity's "blind absurdity" amidst the trials of the world before turning to wisdom. It was by turning to "the forest of Dharma" and drawing upon the subtle essence of rare flowers such as the elusive Udumbara blossom, that he forged a pure and limpid mind and offered this precious work to those seeking the light of Buddhist wisdom.

Written at Quán Sứ, October 2, 1950.

TỔ-LIÊN

THE THREE-STORY HOUSE

*A wealthy upstart, strolling through the city,
Came upon a splendid house, dazzling with beauty.
Three ravishing, majestic, gilded stories,
He suddenly thought: "I too want to shine!"*

*"Money is piling up in my hands,
Am I less than he with garden and pond?
I too shall raise a splendid dwelling,
Vast and imposing, to display my grandeur."*

*He summoned some masons, showed them the house:
"Like this, see, build it this way!
In the village, there is still a spacious plot of land,
Erect a palace just as vast and precious."*

*The mason laid the foundations and set the stones,
But the fool asked, with a naïve yet sincere tone:
“Why dig like this, wasting so much time?
Build the upper floor right away!”*

*The mason replied, laughing at his foolishness:
“Without a base or foundation, everything collapses, my friend.
First you build the base, then you rise to the top —
Without that, nothing can ever stand.”*

Moral

*Thus in life, many impatient fools
Want to skip steps, rise too quickly.
But he who runs too fast is bound to fail,
The ancients said it, and this truth still holds.
Many, weary of the world and its sorrows,
Seek deliverance, peace, happiness.
They aspire to reach the heights in an instant,
But their wings are too weak to sustain their ardor.
He who skips steps is sooner or later defated,
Patience builds, impatience leads astray.
Step by step, one rises, and ultimately reaches the heavens;
But “He who climbs too high will find his fall all the more painful.”*

EATING SALT

*A fool visits his friend,
The host welcomes him and prepares an exquisite meal.
But the grumpy guest finds it too bland,
He throws down his chopsticks and rises in displeasure.*

*The host adds a little salt to the dish,
The fool tastes it and exclaims: "How good this is!
If a little makes so good, much will do better,
Let's add more to make it delicious!"*

*He hastily pours in a whole handful,
But the taste becomes unbearable, bitter beyond relief.
He spits, grimaces, and complains loudly,
The host laughs softly and says :
"How many people, in this vast world,
Are mistaken, their folly abounds!"
For too much or too little leads to error,
Without proper measure, everything dies.*

Moral

*Thus, the Dharma, a priceless treasure,
When poorly conveyed, loses its infinite power.
Unless adapted to each individual mind,
It remains barren and brings no benefit.*

THE SOOTHSAYER WHO KILLED HIS SON

*Once upon a time, there lived a vain man,
Who believed himself the wisest and most fortunate.
Carrying his son, he traveled far from home,
To display worldwide, his grand art of prophecy.*

*He sat down, weeping bitterly in feigned sorrow,
And passersby questioned him about his distress.
His eyes filled with grief he replied :
“My son, alas, has but a thread of life left in his heart.
In just three days his hour will come,
And my pain, my sorrow, no one will soothe them.”*

*They told him: “Destiny is not so certain,
Divination may deceive, or prove vain.
Go home, wait these three days,*

Perhaps your son will live, by heaven and by love."

*But the soothsayer answered, his brow darkened:
"My words are true, none can overturn them."
Even the sun has its hours of shadow,
But its fate, alas, is to perish.*

*Three days passed... the child kept smiling,
Still alive, dishonor now loomed.
To avoid being seen as an imposter in the village,
The seer killed his son, to save his reputation.*

*The village quickly gathered, praising his prophecy,
Offering money, gifts, and empty flattery.
But the seer, realizing the loss of his child,
Cursed his folly and remained in torment.*

Moral

*Ah! human folly, blind hunger for fame,
Killing one's child to satisfy ambition!
In the world, for honor or power,
How many shatter lives and stain their history with blood.*

*In the Dharma too, some betray the path,
Breaking the precepts, sowing pain and sorrow.
Apparent wisdom, but a grasping heart,
That is how they stray down the path of suffering.*

GOOD ADVICE

*A group of merchants, poor yet valiant,
Set out to seek gold across distant seas.
But without a wise guide, they wondered in fear :
How could they travel without misfortune?*

*Fortunately, a master showed them the way,
They hoisted their sails and left the old harbor.
The ship crossed gently the bay,
Until a sign compelled them to stop:*

*"For those who wish to travel safely,
a human life must be sacrificed."*

*They all began to think: "Who must die?"
One said: "We must act to avoid perishing:*

*We are related, losing one of us would be devastating,
Let us sacrifice the captain, this insignificant old stranger."
"Yes, that's right!" they cried in unison,
Let the ritual be completed and let us depart."*

*So they killed the ship's master,
Then set sail again, eager to leave.
But soon lost, without star or path,
They all died, wandering in their fate.*

Moral

*Such is the fate of those who seek salvation,
Seeing the world filled with absolute pain and injustice.
They know the Dharma is the true guide,
To escape illusion and the dreaded torrent.*

*Yet through greed, pride, or anger,
They abandon the precepts, that could enlighten them.
Blind and foolish, they despise the wise,
And are left to wander, lost along their way.*

*O reader, remember this ancient proverb:
"Without a teacher, all effort is in vain."*

PRAISING ONE'S FATHER

*A man said: "My father is virtuous,
Always charitable, just, and courageous.
He never kills, never offends,
Is ever ready to help, radiating compassion.
His face is joyful, serene, at peace,
Never angry, nor uttering a foolish word."*

*A fool, jealous, wanted to boast even louder:
"Your father is great, but mine is even greater!"
The people replied: "Greater? What nonsense !
Explain then, let us hear your genius."*

*The fool declared, proud of his words :
"My father is pure, chaste throughout his life.
From childhood, he has known no carnal desire,
Even in his sixties, he remains beyond reproach."*

*He has never failed, never transgressed,
Far surpassing your father; it must be admitted!" "*

*At these words, they all burst into laughter,
And denounced his lies in a mocking tone :
"If your father abstained from all desire,
How then were you conceived?"*

Moral

*There are those who, proud of their knowledge,
Despise others, neglecting their own conduct.
Clinging to their prejudices, their beliefs,
their pride becomes their penance.*

*But all this is but a vain spectacle,
Vanity becomes a laughable obstacle.
For praising too much amounts to blaming oneself,
And boasting ultimately leads to discredit*

*O readers, do not hasten to boast,
It is better to speak truthfully, sincerely, and with moderation."*

REFUSING TO RECOGNIZE ONE'S OWN CHILD

*There was once a man who had a son,
Whom he loved and cherished more than precious jewels.
One morning, he left home early.
While he was away, a thief slipped in
And carried the child off without a trace.
When the man returned and did not see his son,
He cried out in anguish and despair:
Overwhelmed with grief, he fell to the ground,
Calling to Heaven and praying to the Buddha without cease.*

*Villagers then pointed to a corpse and said,
“Here he is — your child lies dead here.”
Hearing this, he immediately believed it to be true.
He embraced the lifeless body and wept bitterly, crying:
“My heart is torn apart —
Why must such tragedy befall me?”*

*After mourning, he gathered wood and lit a fire,
Cremated the body, and carefully collected the ashes and bones.
He placed them into a small cloth bag
And kept it with him at all times.
Firmly convinced that these remains
Were truly his beloved child,
He carried them everywhere,
Unwilling to ever let go.*

*One morning, by chance,
The real child — having escaped — returned home
And knocked on the door, calling for his father.
But the foolish man scolded and drove him away:
“My son has been dead for thirty days!
Who are you to falsely claim to be him?
Liar ! Be gone!”*

*The child pleaded outside the door,
But the deluded father remained inside, unmoved,
Refusing to accept him and driving him away again and again.
At last, the child, heartbroken, left.*

*Alas! How deeply foolish —
Rejecting one's own child,
While clinging to a bag of dry bones!*

Moral

Life is often the same:

We cling tightly to our prejudices,

Wrapping them in a bag of ignorance and delusion.

Over time, we accumulate errors

And take them to be truth,

Even believing ourselves wiser than others.

Then, when we hear the true Dharma,

We dismiss it as false and refuse to listen.

How, then, can we ever escape delusion

And return to the path of truth?

SAVING UP THE COW'S MILK

*That foolish man once wished to host a feast,
Serving only fresh cow's milk to his friends.
He pondered it over and over:
"If I milk the cow every day, the milk may spoil.
It's inconvenient, difficult to store,
And takes effort day after day.
Ah, I have it! I'll tie up the cow
And leave it for a whole month—
Then the milk will be full, and I can collect it all at once!"
So he tethered the cow far from the calf,
Thinking to himself, "This is a fine idea!"
In his naïve imagination,
He only wished for the milk to accumulate quickly.*

*After a month, he invited his friends
And welcomed them to his home for the feast.
When everyone had gathered,*

*He brought the cow in to milk it.
But to his shock — after a whole month,
The cow's milk had completely dried up!
Stamping his feet, the fool cried out:
“How could this happen? What a disaster!”
Seeing this, his friends grew disappointed,
Got up, and left them, laughing among themselves:
“What a fool — ignorant as a beast,
And yet he invited us all this time!”*

*The man stood there, stunned and ashamed,
Mouth agape, eyes wide in disbelief,
Lamenting his fate again and again:
“How can I ever face my neighbors now?”*

Moral

*In life, there are many like this:
They wish to practice generosity and cultivate blessings,
But think, “I will wait until I succeed,
Then I will give, all at once.”
Yet impermanence arrives without warning:
A fire, a theft, misfortune, or hardship —
When suffering strikes,
How can one still hope to give at that moment ?*

*For this reason, do not delay or hesitate.
Practice generosity from this very moment.
Let life be bright today,
So there will be no regret for days wasted in the past.*

WATERING THE SUGARCANE

*Two men each planted a field of sugarcane.
They made a wager:
“Whose cane is sweeter this year will win;
Whoever’s is bland must pay ten coins.”*

*One of them thought,
“If I want to win,
Why not press the sugarcane into juice
And use that to water the field?
Surely the cane will grow lush and sweet!”
So he crushed the cane and poured its juice
All over his field,
Confident it would thrive.*

*But to his surprise,
The cane withered away—*

*Watered like that, it all shriveled
And came to nothing.*

Moral

*So it is with those who practice generosity:
They accumulate good intentions for a future life,
Yet go about taking from others —
Only to give in charity and seek merit.
Because of this, no true merit is gained,
While the burden of wrongdoing only grows heavier.
For compassion begins in the heart —*

*If you take from others to give,
Where can true merit be found?*

STEALING THE KING'S ROBE

*A man once slipped into the royal palace
And stole the king's garments, then fled far away.
At dawn, when the king awoke
And found his royal robe missing, he was astonished.
He ordered his soldiers to search everywhere
And capture the thief.*

*Soon, they seized the man
And brought him bound before the throne.
Seeing him, the king burned with anger and demanded :
"Why did you steal my robe?"
The man bowed and pleaded:
"Your Majesty, please reconsider — do not wrong me!
How could I dare commit such a crime?
This robe belongs to my ancestors.
It has been passed down for three generations —*

I am the fourth to inherit it."

*The king replied,
"You still dare to lie?
If this truly were your ancestral robe,
Then put it on and let us see!"
The man, flustered and pale,
Reluctantly tried it on.
He put it on from bottom to top,
Mistaking the sleeves for pant legs.
He struggled awkwardly,
Tying it about himself like trousers,
Wrapping the flaps around his waist —
A foolish and absurd sight.*

*The king, seeing this, turned to his court and declared:
"Is it not clear?
This is the royal attire of a king —
And in his ignorance, he wears it blindly!"*

Moral

*In life, there are many like this:
Lacking true understanding or wisdom,
Yet eager to display profound philosophy.
They pick up fragments of others' words,
Borrowing ideas here and there to appear impressive.
In the end, they reveal their emptiness —*

*Speaking in confusion, mixing things up,
Turning deep truths into nonsense,
And becoming objects of ridicule.*

*So too are those who, in this world,
Encounter the profound teachings of the Buddha —
A treasury of deep and subtle wisdom —
Yet attempt to appropriate and claim them as their own.
With arrogance, they declare:
“These teachings are my own invention,
My philosophy, my path!”*

*But without true understanding,
How can they grasp such profound meaning?
They distort and misrepresent everything,
Turning it upside down in confusion.
Those with genuine insight, upon hearing this,
Can only shake their heads and say:
“How absurd!
Just like that foolish man —
Wearing the king’s robe backward,
Yet boldly claiming it as his own.”*

“TOO MUCH—I DARE NOT!”

*Long ago, there was a foolish man —
Not deaf, not blind, not lame —
Yet lacking sense and understanding.
On a blazing summer day,
Under a scorching sun,
He grew unbearably thirsty.
He ran wildly through the village,
Crying out in desperation,
His throat completely dry.*

*At last, he reached a great river,
Then stopped and stood there, staring.
A passerby, surprised, asked:
“You fool — are you mad?
There is the river — why don’t you drink,*

Instead of crying out in thirst?"

The man groaned and replied:

"Sir, I am not mad.

But the river holds too much water,

While my stomach is so small —

How could I possibly drink it all?

So I can only stand here, frustrated!"

Hearing this, the man could not help but laugh,

And said:

"How foolish and deluded you are!

When you are thirsty, you drink a few cups —

No one asks you to drink the whole river!"

Moral

Vast as the ocean, yet the boat has its limits.

In all things, one must know one's capacity.

Do not be overwhelmed by immensity,

Only to lose heart and accomplish nothing.

So it is for those who study the Way:

The Dharma is deep and boundless,

Like a vast forest of profound teachings.

Only with patience and a steady heart

Can one hope to enter the realm of truth.

*Yet many wish to practice and uphold precepts,
But seeing their vastness,
They feel small and incapable,
And fear they cannot sustain them.
Out of fear, they hesitate, then give up —
And in the end, gain nothing at all.*

*Though the precepts are many,
One may begin with just a few —
Two or three, according to one's strength.
The Buddha does not bind or force us,
Nor demand we become like Him at once.*

MASSAGING THE TEACHER'S LEGS

*Long ago, there was a village teacher
Who, feeling aches and pains as the weather changed,
Was visited by his students.
He asked two of them to massage his legs,
To rub oil and knead away his soreness.*

*Each student took one leg.
As the teacher lay there comfortably,
His pain gradually eased.
Pleased, he said:
“You two have studied long and shown devotion —
After this, I’ll reward you with sugarcane to eat.”*

*But the teacher did not know
That earlier that morning,
The two boys had quarreled bitterly*

*And still held anger toward each other.
As they massaged his legs,
Their faces remained tense and hostile.*

*After a while, one grew tired
And stepped outside for a moment.
No sooner had he left
Than the one inside seized the chance —
Taking the teacher's leg,
Which the other had been massaging,
He struck it hard
To vent his lingering anger.*

*When the other boy returned and saw this,
He became furious:
“Why did you hit my leg?
Do you think I'm afraid of you?”
He rushed forward in rage
And struck the other leg —
The teacher's leg — just as hard.*

*Startled and in pain, the teacher leapt up
And struck each of them with a stick, shouting:
“You ungrateful students!
You dare to fight
By beating my legs in your anger ?!”*

Moral

So it is in life:

*Those of the same household turn against one another;
Smearing each other's faces,
Driven by selfish motives and hidden schemes,
Hurting one another in pursuit of gain and status.*

*People of one nation contend for power;
Harboring resentment and hatred,
Only to harm each other in the end—
Bringing sorrow upon their own land,
Blind to the suffering they create.*

*So it is in the Way as well:
Lesser paths criticize the greater;
The greater distort the lesser—
Attacking one another;
Bringing harm only to themselves,
And wounding the profound and noble Dharma.*

MAKING ROCK SUGAR

*A foolish man was cooking rock sugar
When a neighbor came to visit.
He poured some water for his guest and said:
“Please sit and wait a moment.
When the sugar in the pan cools down,
I’ll serve you some to enjoy.
Tomorrow, I’ll even wrap up a kilo
For you to take home to your wife.”*

*The guest sat down, waiting patiently,
While the foolish man went looking around
For a fan.
Finding one, he began to fan vigorously,
Hoping to cool the pan more quickly.
Seeing his guest still waiting,
He grew anxious and fanned even harder;*

*Thinking: "If I keep fanning,
The sugar will cool in no time!"*

*But soon his arm grew tired.
He stopped—and strangely,
The sugar began boiling even more !
Angry, he resumed fanning,
But the wind only made the fire blaze stronger.
The sugar bubbled and splattered,
Even hitting his face.*

*Frustrated, he threw down the fan,
Eyes wide in shock.
The guest, unable to hold back laughter, said:
"How foolish!
Instead of putting out the fire,
You keep fanning—of course the flames grow stronger!
How can the sugar ever cool like that?
Put out the fire in the stove first!"*

*Hearing this, the man realized his mistake:
"Ah, that's right—it's my fault.
I kept thinking that fanning would cool it—
How truly foolish I've been!"*

Moral

There are many like this in life:

*Not blind, not deaf —
Yet chasing after the wrong things.
Lacking patience,
They seek quick results.
They neglect what truly matters,
And chase after empty efforts.
Thus, they never succeed,
And when things fall apart,
They blame fate.*

*So too are those who do not reflect deeply,
But force themselves into harsh ascetic practices,
Enduring pain and hardship,
Believing it to be virtuous.
They imagine that when this life ends,
They will rise to heavenly realms —
Yet instead, their bodies are exhausted,
And nothing of true benefit is gained.
All the while, the fires of greed and delusion
Continue to burn within,
Agitating body and mind.
Instead of extinguishing these inner flames,
They pursue suffering in hopes of reward.
How can that lead anywhere ?*

*Thus, the Buddha teaches:
Only by extinguishing greed, anger, and delusion
Can one be freed from suffering
And cleanse away the dust of the world.*

THE TWO SWALLOW BIRDS

*Atop an ancient tree,
A pair of swallows built their nest.
The weather was still warm,
And the husband and wife rejoiced in their good fortune.
Day after day, they flew through the western forest,
Gathering chestnuts to fill their beloved nest.*

*Summer came, hot and blazing.
The male swallow set off on a journey,
Saying, "Look after our nest, my dear.
I must travel deep into the distant forest.
In a few days, I will return
To reunite with you."
Having spoken, he flapped his wings
And flew away toward the green hills.*

*She remained behind, heart aching,
Thinking of him day and night, restless through the long hours.
As the sun blazed, the chestnuts dried;
No news came from her husband.*

*On the fourth day, he returned to the nest.
Reunion brought joy beyond measure,
Yet he was startled and asked,
“What has happened to the chestnuts?”
She whispered:
“Since you left, I have waited for you,
Seeing no sign of your return.
The chestnuts remained untouched,
For my heart was too heavy to eat, day and night.”*

*The male swallow did not believe her:
“You lie! Who would wait while I am away?
I was gone but a short time —
How could the chestnuts remain?”
In anger, he struck her, piercing her heart —
She fell dead instantly.*

*Then the sky shivered, the wind howled,
And rain poured, filling rivers and lakes.
The chestnuts, soaked in the cool water,
Became plump once more, just as before.*

*The male swallow stood in shock,
Seeing the injustice done to his wife.
He cried in grief, dumbfounded:
“My dear! Where have you gone?
Come back, and we shall share our happiness as before!”*

*But the wind and rain roared in reply.
Through the storm, he could see nothing —
His sorrow, a debt that even the birds
Of a thousand generations could not repay.*

Moral

*Consider this story of the swallows:
How often are we like them?
Acting hastily, without reflection,
Rushing to judgment before understanding.
And when disaster comes,
Regret arrives too late.*

*O friends, think first, act later —
Life is impermanent,
And time waits for no one.*

SELLING AQUILEGIA RESIN

*A young man set out to buy aquilegial resin,
Seeing its high value and lofty price,
He thought: "If I secure this resin,
I shall become wealthy beyond measure."
So he toiled and dived in the seas,
Year after year, enduring hardship and danger.*

*At last, he obtained two carts full of precious resin,
And carried them home, his heart brimming with joy.
Back in his village, he displayed the resin for sale.
A whole week passed without a single buyer —
For the price was higher than before,
And such a rare treasure sold slowly.*

Yet soon he saw others' stalls:

*Goods sold quickly!
Before the market ended,
Two carts emptied in an instant.
Impatient, he thought:
“If others sell fast, so can I!
I’ll burn the resin into charcoal,
And sell it quickly, sparing all complaint
After so much labor to transport it here.”*

*He burned the two carts of resin —
Only half remained as charcoal.
The next morning at market,
He sold it and earned only a single coin!*

*Neighbors and friends exclaimed,
“Fool! You’ve destroyed your wealth!
Two carts worth thousands
Reduced to one coin through your folly!”*

Moral

*Many are like this in life:
They labor tirelessly toward a goal,
Almost reaching success,
But then abandon it,
Or ruin what they’ve already built.
Having nearly achieved what they desire,
They turn back at the last step,*

Lacking patience to see it to completion.

The Way is the same:

*One must pursue the precious Dharma wholeheartedly,
With diligent practice over long years.*

Yet some seek only immediate results —

Hoping for small gains without perseverance.

This will not suffice. Courageous effort is required.

Be steadfast, for sentient beings dwell in the sea of suffering,

Seeking the supreme Dharma-wheel

To bring all to liberation.

EATING THE PHEASANT

*Long ago, there was a foolish man,
Sickly and weak, whose ailments would not heal.
Medicines cost him dearly,
Yet brought no relief, and his suffering grew.
He endured life's pain, teeth clenched in anguish,
When one afternoon, weighed down with despair,
He thought, "Better I die than continue in this torment."*

*At that moment, a neighbor visited,
And said, "Early this morning,
A H'mong healer came by.
They say he is miraculous, curing all illnesses.
You should invite him quickly
To prepare medicine, so your sickness may abate."*

Overjoyed at this rare chance, the foolish man agreed:

*"Please ask him to come; I am too weak to summon him myself."
The neighbor went and invited the healer.
The healer examined him and said,
"You are gravely ill, but there is hope.
You must eat pheasant for one week —
Then your illness will vanish.
I am leaving for a few months
To help many poor villagers,
So you must follow this advice carefully."*

*The healer departed, and the man returned, puzzled:
"Eat pheasant? I have never seen such a thing."
For days, he repeated the word "pheasant,"
Believing that merely calling it aloud
Would fulfill the healer's instructions.
His throat grew hoarse, but the sickness remained,
And his frustration turned to fury:
"Have the spirits deceived me?
Why do I suffer so?"*

*A friend, seeing his plight, entered and asked,
"Why do you shout so violently?"
The foolish man explained everything.
The friend, feeling compassion, said:
"This is a misunderstanding.
The healer is indeed skilled.
You have confused the symbol with the substance;*

*Calling out does not heal.
You must actually eat the pheasant."*

*The man asked, "How then should I proceed?"
The friend drew a clear picture of a pheasant,
Saying, "Here — buy one like this, eat it, and you will heal.
No need to shout or fret."
Overjoyed, the foolish man cut out the picture, gnawed on it,
Sure that his illness would vanish.
He painted more pheasants, cut them, and ate them,
Yet his condition worsened.*

*Finally, a friend bought him a real pheasant.
He cooked and ate it, and gradually his sickness lessened.
But he remained foolish, thinking, "A few days and I will be fully
healed."
Because he refused to eat enough, the illness lingered.
Eventually, the man suffered greatly, wandering weak and exhausted,
Until one morning he met the healer.
He told the whole story.*

*The healer, moved by compassion, instructed him:
"Do not rely on symbols or forms.
It is the real, tangible medicine that heals.
A picture of a pheasant is useless;
Even a thousand such images cannot cure you.
Your illness is severe; you must take enough of the real medicine
To restore your health."*

Moral

*So it is in life: people chase illusions,
Confused by appearances, sounds, and shapes,
Ignoring the true remedy,
And suffering in vain.
Many profess devotion and chant,
Yet inside remain bound by greed and anger.
They watch days and months pass,
Hoping for transcendence, yet cling to worldly illusions.
Even when they hear the true teaching,
And make some effort in virtuous deeds,
They often mistake partial practice for full attainment,
And their results are limited.*

*O friends, reflect on this:
Do not be distracted by illusions.
Endlessly strive to remove the delusions of the mind,
And engage in practice with clarity and sincerity.
Only then can one hope to progress on the path of awakening.*

WHO IS STUPID?

*Long ago, there was a foolish man,
Bald and bare-headed, walking about without care.
A passerby, seeing him again and again,
And having long underestimated him,
Took a stick and struck his head hard.*

*The fool let it happen,
Neither shouting nor moving away,
Standing stiff as wood,
His head swollen, blood trickling.*

*Someone curious asked,
“Why does he strike you?
If it hurts, why don’t you avoid it,*

Why stand there so stubbornly?"
The fool replied,
"That man is truly foolish!
Seeing my bald head, he thought it was stone.
No wonder he struck so hard—it hurts so much!"
The listener could not help but laugh:
"Indeed, a real fool!
If you were wise, wouldn't you move?
Yet you stand there, unyielding, like this!"

Moral

So it is in life: many are blind and foolish,
Criticizing the world as cruel or chaotic,
Or blaming fate for their misfortune.
The truth is: the fault lies within ourselves!
Without effort to cultivate wisdom and skill,
We wander lost in the deep abyss.

"Having borne karma in the body,
Don't blame the heavens near or far."
If one must fault, begin with oneself.
Even when life seems unjust,
It is the mind that shapes the experience.

FIGHTING TO SCRAPE THE SPIT

*Long ago, a wealthy man had two servants,
One standing on each side.
One servant was quick and clever,
Praised by the master and loved as if a son;
The other, slower in nature,
Was scolded almost every day.*

*He thought to himself:
“I am foolish indeed!
Whenever the master gives a task, I delay,
And so I am always rebuked.
Better I act quickly at once.”*

*From then on, he waited eagerly
For the master’s slightest command,
Ready to obey immediately.*

But... the master gave no orders for the whole morning!

*Apparently, he had a throat ailment,
Sitting quietly, spitting repeatedly.
The eager servant stood ready
To scrape up whatever the master spat.
Whenever the master spat, he tried to be faster;
But the other servant blocked his way.*

*Frustrated, he turned quickly,
And saw the master's mouth dripping with spit.
"Surely he wants to spit now!" he thought,
And pressed his heel hard against the master's mouth.
The ground and the master's mouth were smeared;*

*The wealthy man was furious,
Slapping and kicking him in anger.
Alas, the poor fool!*

Moral

*— This story teaches: no matter the task, big or small,
One must consider timing and opportunity.
Act at the right moment,
But don't rush blindly or act without sense.*

THE DEMON

*Long ago, a traveling troupe of actors
Went from place to place, performing for a living.
They specialized in only one play:
“Demon” a show many loved to watch.*

*One afternoon, after performing brilliantly,
They packed up and prepared to leave
For the next day’s performance through the forest.
Some locals, trying to persuade them to stay,
Warned: “The Ngai forest is haunted!
Those who sleep there at night
Will meet terrible demon spirits.
Better stay until morning than go now —
The forest is truly frightening!”*

The actors laughed:

"We perform Demon, what is there to fear?"

So they set off, confident, to cross the forest.

But soon, night fell, shadows stretching long,

And the forest grew cold and eerie.

They decided to stop for the night,

Gathered leaves to lie on (no mats in the wild!),

Collected firewood to keep mosquitoes away,

And finally fell into a deep sleep, taking turns guarding the fire.

At midnight, during the first watch,

The air was icy, cutting to the bone.

To keep warm, the watchman took a demon costume from the chest,

Draped it over himself, and dozed by the fire.

Suddenly, someone awoke, and seeing the costume:

"Demon in the forest!" he shouted, hair standing on end.

He leapt up and ran, screaming.

The others, still half asleep, saw him and panicked,

Thinking danger was near:

They all bolted blindly, convinced a demon was pursuing them.

The watchman, half-awake, saw everyone fleeing

And thought, "Surely the demon is real!"

He joined the mad chase, trying to keep up.

The group ran in terror, tripping over trees and stones,

Skin scraped, chests burning, blood trickling;

They ran all night without stopping,

Collapsing from exhaustion.

*At dawn, sunlight revealed the truth —
There was no demon. Just fear, confusion, and sleep-deprived minds.*

Moral

*— Many of us, like the troupe, chase illusions,
Bound by desire and confusion.
We pursue fleeting forms,
Entranced by fame, wealth, or fleeting pleasure,
Only to exhaust ourselves and suffer.*

*Look closely, see clearly:
Do not let the mind chase shadows;
Observe life directly with insight.*

FABLES

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