

## The Magical Stone

*An adaptation of a folk tale from India*

Many years ago, it is said, a man worked as a common laborer. His job was to cut stones from the mountain and then carry them down to the village, where they were used for building. It was honest work--but it was also backbreaking. Each night the man went home to his humble dwelling and to his meager portion of food. Each night when he went to sleep, he would do so with a heavy heart. He longed for a life free from burden and hard labor.

One morning, just after sunrise, as he was ascending the mountain, the man noticed something glinting in the early morning sun. On closer inspection, he discovered it to be a wondrous stone. It gleamed like a jewel, but something inside him told him it was not one. Resolving to show this rare stone to the elders of the village later, he placed it in his satchel and went to work.

Toward noon, the man broke for lunch. The sun was beating down with a vengeance. The man sought and found a shady spot. He reached into his satchel for the dried cooked lentils he had brought when his hand happened upon something sharp. Producing the object, he found it was the shiny stone. Ah, yes--the stone! He had forgotten about it. Its brilliance was especially blinding in the afternoon sun.

The man was about to return the stone to his satchel when a commotion in the village below drew his attention. It was a caravan of camels. A rich merchant was passing through the town on his way to the spice market in the big city. The laborer caught a glimpse of the rich man under his shaded canopy. He was dressed in the finest silks. He shouted orders to his drivers.

"How I wish I were a merchant," the poor man said to himself, still clutching the stone. "Then I would want for nothing ever again."

Suddenly, there was a flash of light, more dazzling than a thousand suns. Temporarily blinded, the man shielded his eyes with his shirtsleeve.

When he opened them again, he was sitting atop a camel under a shaded canopy. The finest silks had replaced his sackcloth robe.

"Oh, good master," the driver of a camel riding alongside called out to the man. "Do you wish to stop in this crude village? It is lunchtime."

The laborer could not believe his eyes or ears. The sun must be playing tricks on his mind. He pinched himself--but it was real. He had become a rich merchant. "B-but how--?" he muttered to himself. A faint glow within his closed hand (now adorned with rings of silver and gold!) drew his eyes downward. *The stone!* Was it possible? Dare he believe it?

"Master?" The voice of the driver roused him from his thoughts. "Shall we partake of some refreshment here before resuming our journey?"

"Ah--yes," said the merchant. He pointed toward a grove of palms. "Let us dismount over there." A wondrous lunch of fine meats and dates and olives and cakes was set out before the man. Never had he feasted on such food. "Life is now wonderful," he said to himself, filled with contentment.

As the hour drew ever closer toward noon, however, the day grew ever hotter. The man could feel beads of perspiration forming under his fine silks. His eye was drawn

to the sun, which burned with a fury. “Hmmp!” the man grumbled to himself. “Not even a wealthy merchant can find relief from the sun.”

Scarcely had the words formed in his brain when another, even more outrageous, thought took seed. *If the sun is greater than even a rich merchant, how marvelous it must be to be the sun!* Again, reaching for the stone, the man clutched and whispered, “Make me the sun. Then I will want for nothing ever again.”

Another intense flash of light occurred--but this time it did not cease. The light was coming from the man. He was the sun. He glimpsed down at the scorched landscape below. “Not even kings,” he chuckled to himself, “can escape my power.”

Just then, a cloud passed in front of the sun. It looked downward in dismay. The cloud’s cooling shadow gave relief to the villagers below. “What is this?!” the sun asked. “Does this cloud mock me?”

Within the sun’s fiery core, an even brighter glow erupted. It was the stone. “Stone,” the sun commanded, “make me a cloud! Then I will want for nothing ever again.”

With the same dispatch, the stone carried out the sun’s order. The stone was now part of a billowy white cloud. The cloud’s joy was complete--but it was also short-lived. A strong wind suddenly rose up and scattered the cloud into wispy fragments. The fragment that included the stone shrieked out angrily. “I command you to make me the wind at once! Do so, and I will want for nothing ever again.”

The now-familiar flash was followed by a power unimaginable to mere mortals. The newly transformed wind whistled through valleys. Trees were forced to bow in its presence. The wind headed out over the sea, where it parted the waves. “I am the most powerful force on earth!” the wind said with a haughty laugh.

Upon returning to shore, however, the wind met its match. A vast mountain rose before it up into the clouds. Neither sun nor cloud was able to budge the massive mountain. Nor could the wind. The wind knew what it must do. “Stone,” it bellowed, “make me a mountain. Then I will want for nothing ever again.”

No sooner had the wind been transformed into a mountain than a new disturbance arose. It was a faint metallic noise. “What is that noise?” the mountain demanded to know. “What force on earth dare challenge my all-encompassing power?” The mountain looked down on its brow. There chipping away was a common laborer. He cut stones from the mountain. He would later carry these down to the village, where they were used for building.

“Oh great stone,” the humbled mountain said. “I beg of you--make me a laborer. Do so, and I give my solemn oath that I will want for nothing ever again.” Instantly, the man was back at his familiar perch on the mountainside. The bright stone had vanished--but he no longer needed it. The man had found true contentment. Never again would he curse his lot in life.