

Money and Money

- by D. Kaliraj, published in Chandamama Magazine June 1984.

Rajendra and Narain were friends in their childhood. Upon growing up, Rajendra took to trade and soon grew very rich. But he earned his money through dishonest means.

Narain was a school teacher. He was happy with his modest income.

One day, Rajendra exhorted Narain to grow rich like him. Both used to be very frank to each other.

"I'm happy with my lot. I don't want to grow rich through dishonesty," said Narain.

"What if you earn through dishonesty? If you have money, you can help others!" said Rajendra.

"Your ill-gotten money will help none. But help given with money earned honestly will go a long way in helping anybody" asserted Narain.

"Don't speak nonsense. Do you mean to say that I cannot help anybody? Let us see!"

Rajendra called a very poor man and gave him a gold ring. "Make use of this much gold to improve your condition," he told the man.

The poor man thanked him and went away happy. He put on the ring and sang to his heart's content while crossing the river by boat. He dipped his hand in the water again and again to see the ring glistening.

As his finger slightly shrank in the cold water, the ring slipped off and was lost.

The sad man reported the matter to his wife. The hopeful lady immediately went to Rajendra and narrated their misfortune to him.

"Never mind. Here is another chance for you," said Rajendra as he handed over a gold necklace to her.

The happy lady went home and hung the necklace on the wall of her hut. Suddenly, a crow which was accustomed to enter the hut flew away with it.

The lady bemoaned her lot. This time her husband went to Rajendra and reported what had happened.

"Never mind. Here is yet another chance for you – the last chance," said Rajendra and he gave him a bagful of money.

It was evening when the poor man was back in his hut. "I'll hide the money in such a way that no thief can steal it," he told his wife and buried the bag under a heap of ash.

Early in the morning, their neighbour, a poor old lady, visited their hut for a handful of ash to clean her utensils. Instead of waking up the couple, she helped herself with the ash. In the process, she found the bag and quietly removed it.

An hour later, the couple discovered their loss and shed tears. Narain, who was on his way to his school, heard their whimpering and enquired what had befallen them. They narrated everything to him.

The poor man said "I did not work yesterday. As a result, I have no money to buy any food today."

"My friend, here is a rupee for you. Have food first and then decide what you should do," said Narain.

In those days one could buy so much with a rupee! The poor man went to the bazaar and bought food items for two days including a fresh fish.

"Bring me some dry wood," his wife said, ready to cook. The man climbed an old tree in which he saw a dry branch. His eyes were diverted to an object glittering in a crow's nest. He found it to be the lost necklace.

"I've found it, I've found it!" he cried out.

"I've found it, I've found it!" cried out his wife who had just cut the fish and found the ring inside it.

The nervous old lady who had stolen the bag of money thought that she had been found out! She surrendered the bag to the couple, saying, "I found this under the ash in your kitchen. Lest it should be stolen, I kept it in my custody."

In the evening, the couple reported the events to Rajendra and Narain.

"Indeed, Narain, it is your single rupee that changed the value of my gifts. Without that, my gifts would have been lost to him." said Rajendra.