

## THE KING AND THE DRUM

Once upon a time there lived a king in central India. He was handsome but very vain. He looked at himself constantly, in mirrors, in pools of water, even in other people's eyes when they spoke to him. "I am the handsomest King on Earth." he said to his courtiers.

He paid less attention to ruling his kingdom than he did to having his hair styled and his body massaged. As a result, his people grew poorer and unhappier. But the king did not care. "Why!" he boasted one day in court, "I am probably more handsome than all the gods."

Unfortunately for the king, a particularly bad-tempered god happened to be flying by and was incensed at what he heard.

"Something will have to be done about this king."

He searched in his mind for an appropriate punishment. Then his eyes fell upon a bull. "Horns!" The god clapped his hand with malicious glee. "I'll see how his handsomeness likes himself with horns."

When the king awoke the next morning, he followed his normal routine. First, he drew his mirror out from under his pillow and gazed into it.

Suddenly the guards outside the king's chamber heard a loud shriek. They came rushing in to find the king sitting upright in bed with a large pillow on his head.

"Out... out..." he waved a trembling finger at them. As they backed away, he shouted after them, "Send for the royal barber immediately."

The royal barber was cheeky talkative little man. He came in briskly.

"You're up early today, Your Majesty, but why the pi...."

The king broke in, "Stop your patter and come close to my body."

As the surprised barber drew close, the king said in his most commanding voice, "Barber, I'm about to show you something. But if you talk about it to a single living soul, I will have you flogged and hanged." The king slowly removed the pillow from his head.

"Oh!" The barber clapped his hands to his mouth in horror.

"Well, don't just stand there", said the king impatiently. "Do something to cover them up."

The barber tugged the king's hair this way and that and managed to cover the horns partially. The king put his nightcap on to hide the rest. "Now go and tell the court I am unwell. I will not see anyone."

He sat up and glared at the barber, "And remember my warning."

The barber fled. As soon as the door of the bedchamber closed behind him, he started laughing. The people of the palace stopped and asked him the reason for his mirth. But the barber just shook his head helplessly and ran laughing through the halls.

"I will die if I don't tell someone," he groaned. "My stomach is swelling with the secret."

He saw a tamarind tree standing in the middle of the royal courtyard. He went up to it and whispered the secret to its trunk.

That night there was a fierce storm and the Tamarind tree was blown down. The king was informed through the door, for he would not see anyone, and he commanded the tree to be given to the royal musician. "Let him make a drum from the trunk of the tamarind and play it outside my door."

Soon the drum made of tamarind wood was ready. The courtiers assembled outside the king's door and the musician began to play. But instead of the thum-thum-thum that everyone expected, the Tamarind drum intoned, "The Raja has horns on his head. The Raja has horns on his head."

The court burst out laughing and the king cried with rage. "I won't stay in the palace a moment longer", he shouted, "I'll go to the forest and live by myself."

He tore the nightcap off his head and ran out of the palace, seizing the Tamarind drum on his way out. The king lived for several years in the forest. He learnt to care for creatures smaller than himself. He grew strong and wise and selfless. His only companion was the Tamarind drum and the drum, when he beat it, gave him all the advice and experience of the old tree. The king learnt to play the drum so beautifully that even the spirits of the trees were charmed and they went to meet the god who had given him the horns.

"Forgive him", they pleaded. "He has changed. Remove his horns and give him back his kingdom."

The god waved his hand and the horns disappeared.

During the day, the king went down to forest pool to drink water. While cupping his hands he saw his reflection, and his lean, sun-tanned face looked back at him, without any horns! And, as he sat up in surprise, several horse-riders burst into the clearing and he saw his courtiers. They knelt before him. "Your Majesty, forgive us and come back. The kingdom needs you."

The king went back to his kingdom. He kept his Tamarind drum beside him always and he ruled wisely. And, yes, the barber kept his head, but lost his job!

- **Maneka Gandhi**

### About the Story

The story describes how a Tamarind tree helps a proud king overcome his vanity and become a wise ruler. The underlying message of the story is that some miracle happens on the earth in some or the other form to control the vanity or pride of a person when the people on the earth find themselves helpless in controlling the same.

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### Glossary

vain: conceited, having too high an opinion of one's looks, abilities, etc.

clapped: here it means 'brought the hands together'

malicious: feeling/showing malice or ill will

glee: feeling of joy caused by success or triumph

shriek: scream shrilly

cheeky: saucy, impudent

briskly: quickly

patter: a kind of talk used by a particular class of people

tugged: pulled hard

glared: stared angrily or fiercely

intoned: spoke with a particular tone

rage: anger, violence

cupping: putting into the shape of a cup

sun-tanned: make or become brown with sunburn.

### COMPREHENSION

#### A. Tick the correct alternative:

1. The king becomes -  
a) more vain at the end of the story.  
b) more wise at the end of the story.  
c) more aggressive at the end of the story.  
d) more commanding at the end of the story. [ ]
2. The king was proud of his.....  
a) wealth                                      b) beautiful appearance  
c) ruling etiquette                      d) subjects [ ]
3. Who taught a lesson to the king?  
a) a bad tempered god      b) the people of the kingdom  
c) the barber                      d) the invaders [ ]
4. There is an implied message in the story  
a) that miracle happens on the earth in some form or the other when there is nobody to control the vanity or pride of a person.

- b) that kings are always cruel and are punished by gods.
- c) that kings always pay attention to their subjects.
- d) there is no message in the story.

[ ]

**B. Answer the following questions in 10-15 words each:**

1. What did the king say to his courtiers?
2. How did the king learn a lesson?
3. 'Suddenly the guards outside the king's chamber heard a loud shriek' who gave this loud shriek and why?
4. Who called the barber and why?
5. What was the warning given by the king to the barber?
6. Why did the barber tell the story to a Tamarind tree?
7. Who was given the Tamarind tree after it had blown out? How did he utilise the trunk of the Tamarind tree?
8. Why did the barber lose his job?
9. Who decided to punish the king? and why?

**C. Answer the following questions in 20-30 words each:**

1. What miracle did the malicious god perform?
2. What did the king do to remove the horns from his head?
3. What did the Tamarind drum say? How did the courtiers react to the saying of the Tamarind drum?
4. How was the king freed from the curse?
5. How was the Tamarind drum used by the king?

**D. Answer the following questions in about 60-80 words each:**

1. What happened to the king and how did he become a wise king?
2. Summarise the main idea of the story. Also state the underlying message of the story.

**E. Say whether the following sentences are True or False:**

1. The barber whispered the secret to the trunk of a Tamarind tree. [ ]
2. The Tamarind drum intoned thum-thum-thum [ ]
3. The people went to the God and prayed to forgive the king. [ ]
4. The barber lost his job. [ ]
5. The king also learnt to care for creatures smaller than himself. [ ]