

# THE SADHU AND THE TORTOISE

## Intent of the Story

- ✓ *Our society's expectations ruin our personal happiness.*
- ✓ *It's not possible to live in a sophisticated society and be ourselves*
- ✓ *Life in "high" society deprives us of true friendships, spontaneity and intimacy.*
- ✓ *Wealth, power and luxury deaden us.*
- ✓ *Be true to yourself.*

## The Story.

"What kind of King; am I? I have all the wealth and power any king can crave for. Every pleasure and comfort is mine, yet I feel alone and lonely. Friends, I have none! I cannot trust my ministers and courtiers. All are crooked and double-faced. I need a friend close to me."

The King summoned his advisors. He sounded desperate. "I want to have a friend, one who will be neither a minister nor a courtier, someone in whom I can trust, and confide."

One of the King's; advisors remarked: "Your majesty, long ago I came to know a very good and honest man who could be the person you need now. Many years ago, he left the palace, and settled at Rishikesh. Up there, in the Himalayas he spends his time in prayer and meditation. His name is Sadhu Shubhananda."

The King replied: "At any cost, I want him to come and stay with me in the palace. Go there and bring him to me. Tell him that the King needs him. I'll give him whatever he wishes, even half of my kingdom."

Early next morning, the ministers left the palace in search of the man who fulfilled their King's desires. After a long and tedious journey the searching party reached the ever green and cooling countryside of the Himalayan Mountains.

There, at a distance they saw a Sadhu sitting alone on the bank of a rivulet, absorbed in prayerful silence.

The leader of the party said: "Look at that Sadhu. Could he be Sadhu Shubhananda? I wonder. Look at his poor appearance. Never mind, let us meet him and ask him:"

"Most revered sage, are you Sadhu Shubhananda?" By way of an answer the Sadhu slightly nodded his head. The ministers told him: "Kindly, know that the king has sent us to call you to his palace. He wants you to be his friend and trustworthy companion.. The King; offers you all his possessions, his wealth, his comforts, his pleasures"

There wasn't any visible response from the Sadhu. Instead, there was a long silence. "Pray," the envoys insisted, "What is the meaning of your silence/? Please, give us an

answer! Will you come to the palace?"

There was a long pause. At the end, very gently, the Sadhu moved his right hand as if pointing at something. Then, he showed them a tortoise basking in the sun on a nearby rock. Then very softly he spoke to them: "Do you see that tortoise over there, so still, so quiet? This tortoise, though so quiet, and so still is fully alive, and enjoying the sun, the water, the nights and days. It's free. Has the King any such tortoise in his palace?"

"Oh, yes!" The envoys replied, "The King has a big tortoise like this in his room. It's a jewel of a tortoise. It is studded with gold, diamonds, pearls and precious gems. It's worth a fortune."

"Hmmm! Now, tell me," asked the Sadhu: "Do you think that this tortoise over here, would like to exchange places with that tortoise in the King's palace?"

There was a long silence. Then the Sadhu added: "Well, then, go and tell the King that Sadhu Shubhananda would not like to exchange places either! I am in love with life and freedom. **Can anyone living in the King's palace be free and stay alive?"**

*(An Indian Story)*

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. Why the King, although he had all the things, he could crave for, was feeling sad and lonely in the palace?
2. Why did the King find it so difficult to find a true and honest friend in the Royal Palace?
3. What sort of human relationships obtain in our affluent society? True, false, sincere, insincere, lasting, fragile, etc...? Why?
4. Is it now-a-days easy to experience genuine friendship and intimacy? Why?
5. Can a life steeped in pretence and superficiality satisfies the human heart? Why?
6. In today's world is it easy to find honest, loving and trustworthy friends? Why?
7. How many true friends have you ever had in your life? Can you share your experiences of true friendship?
8. Were you the tortoise of the Hymalayan stream, would you exchange places with the tortoise of the King's palace? Why?
9. Why the Holy Sadhu was not enticed by the King's offer of wealth, pleasures and power?
10. Are we not, little by little, becoming like the tortoise in the palace of the King? How? Would you mind to share?

### **Thoughts for a Talk or Mini Input**

- By living in our sophisticated society, we are forced to play roles, to put on masks, to conform to silly conventions and arbitrary rules of etiquette.
- Society robs us of our freedom, spontaneity, and genuineness.
- Social conventions put us in a "straight jacket", they make us play roles.
- Like the tortoise in the King's palace with wealth and riches, we become artificial, stifled, half-dead.

- The "higher" and the more “progressive” the society we live in is, the more we are affected and imprisoned by fads, fashions, rules, rituals and "phoniness".
- If we dare not to toe the line, society ostracizes us and leaves us out in the cold, cut off from the mainstream of life.
- There is a lot of pretence and hypocrisy in the “the advanced and educated” world we are imprisoned in.
- People today, care more for appearances than for truth. They rather want to look good, honorable and happy than really being that.
- We are forced lie to one another. We cannot say what we feel but only what others want to hear.
- Friendship, transparency and intimacy are nearly impossible.
- Human relationships are not real, honest and satisfying.
- It is more enjoyable and rewarding being alive and leading an unconstrained life like the tortoise of the Himalayan stream, than being dead and studded with gold and jewels in the world.
- The greatest satisfaction and joy in life is being oneself.

### **Self Examination**

#### **Honestly and fearlessly answer to yourself the questions below**

- What are your goals and aims in life? What do you want most from life?
- In your daily life, are you enticed by wealth, popularity, pleasures and power? How?
- What are you most striving for in life? What are your dreams for your future?
- What are things on which you spend most of your time and money?
- Are you able to live up to your principles and values and your conscience regardless of what others may say of you, or do to you? Why?
- What do the answers you gave to those questions above tell you about yourself?