

The Farmer and the Money- Lender

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Indian

Intermediate
5 min read

There was once a farmer who suffered much at the hands of a money-lender. Good harvests, or bad, the farmer was always poor, the moneylender rich. At last, when he hadn't a farthing left, the farmer went to the moneylender's house, and said, 'You can't squeeze water from a stone, and as you have nothing to get by me now, you might tell me the secret of becoming rich.'

'My friend,' returned the money-lender piously, 'riches come from Ram—ask him.'

'Thank you, I will!' replied the simple farmer; so he prepared three girdle-cakes to last him on the journey, and set out to find Ram.

First he met a Brâhman, and to him he gave a cake, asking him to point out the road to Ram; but the Brâhman only took the cake and went on his way without a word. Next the farmer met a Jôgi or devotee, and to him he gave a cake, without receiving any help in return. At last, he came upon a poor man sitting under a tree, and finding out he was hungry, the kindly farmer gave him his last cake, and sitting down to rest beside him, entered into conversation.

‘And where are you going?’ asked the poor man at length.

‘Oh, I have a long journey before me, for I am going to find Ram!’ replied the farmer. ‘I don’t suppose you could tell me which way to go?’

‘Perhaps I can,’ said the poor man, smiling, ‘for I am Ram! What do you want of me?’

Then the farmer told the whole story, and Ram, taking pity on him, gave him a conch shell, and showed him how to blow it in a particular way, saying, ‘Remember! whatever you wish for, you have only to blow the conch that way, and your wish will be fulfilled. Only have a care of that money-lender, for even magic is not proof against their wiles!’

The farmer went back to his village rejoicing. In fact the money-lender noticed his high spirits at once, and said to himself, ‘Some good fortune must have befallen the stupid fellow, to make him hold his head so jauntily.’ Therefore he went over to the simple farmer’s house, and congratulated him on his good fortune, in such cunning words, pretending to have heard all about it, that before long the farmer found himself telling the whole story—all except the secret of blowing the conch, for, with all his simplicity, the farmer was not quite such a fool as to tell that.

Nevertheless, the money-lender determined to have the conch by hook or by crook, and as he was villain enough not to stick at trifles, he waited for a favourable opportunity and stole it.

But, after nearly bursting himself with blowing the thing in every conceivable way, he was obliged to give up the secret as a bad job. However, being determined to succeed, he went back to the farmer, and said, ‘Now, my friend! I’ve got your conch, but I can’t use it; you haven’t got it, so it’s clear you can’t use it either. The matter is at a standstill unless we make a bargain. Now, I promise to give you back your conch, and never to interfere

with your using it, on one condition, which is this,—whatever you get from it, I am to get double.’

‘Never!’ cried the farmer; ‘that would be the old business all over again!’

‘Not at all!’ replied the wily money-lender; ‘you will have your share! Now, don’t be a dog in the manger, for if you get all you want, what can it matter to you if I am rich or poor?’

At last, though it went sorely against the grain to be of any benefit to a money-lender, the farmer was forced to yield, and from that time, no matter what he gained by the power of the conch, the money-lender gained double. And the knowledge that this was so preyed upon the farmer’s mind day and night, until he had no satisfaction out of anything he did get.

At last there came a very dry season,—so dry that the farmer’s crops withered for want of rain. Then he blew his conch, and wished for a well to water them, and, lo! there was the well. But the money-lender had two!—two beautiful new wells! This was too much for any farmer to stand; and our friend brooded over it, and brooded over it, till at last a bright idea came into his head. He seized the conch, blew it loudly, and cried out, ‘O Ram, I wish to be blind of one eye!’ And so he was, in a twinkling, but the money-lender, of course, was blind of both eyes, and in trying to steer his way between the two new wells, he fell into one and was drowned.

Now this true story shows that a farmer once got the better of a money-lender; but only by losing one of his eyes!

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