

The Tiger and the Brahmin

There was once a tiger that crept into a village, and you can imagine what he planned to do there. The terrified villagers managed to catch him and had imprisoned him in a pit so that he couldn't eat them. As the tiger prowled and snarled and growled and spat at the bottom of the pit, a good hearted Brahmin came past and stopped to see what the matter was. The tiger pleaded with him to get him out of the pit and promised faithfully not to eat him if he did help him to escape. Convinced by the tiger's promises, the kind but foolish Brahmin found a long, sturdy branch and lowered it into the pit to help the tiger climb out.

Delighted to be free, the tiger sprang from the branch and pinned the Brahmin to the ground, ready to eat him. The Brahmin protested that it wasn't fair, the tiger had promised not to eat him! The tiger shrugged. The Brahmin should have known better than to trust him. However, having tricked his way out of the pit the tiger was in a good mood. He agreed to give the Brahmin a little time to ask around, to see if anyone could think of a good reason why the tiger should not eat him.

The Brahmin turned to a tree by the side of the road. What did the tree think? Was it fair that the tiger should eat him, when he had helped the tiger out of the pit?

'Fair! Life isn't fair,' said the tree. 'I give people my shade to give them shelter from the sun, but still they will chop me down when winter comes and they need fuel.' The tiger smiled and licked his lips.

Disappointed by the tree's response, the Brahmin stopped a passing donkey. Surely he didn't think it was fair that the tiger should eat him when the tiger had promised faithfully not to.

'Fair! Life isn't fair,' said the donkey. 'I work hard for my master. I carry heavy loads without complaining, day in and day out, but still he will get rid of me when I am too old to work.' The tiger smiled broadly and licked his lips.

The Brahmin was discouraged but he hadn't given up. He knelt down on the road they stood on. What would the road say? Was it fair that the tiger should eat him when without him the tiger would still be in the pit?

'Fair! Life isn't fair,' said the road. 'I take people wherever they want to go, but still they walk on me with their dusty shoes.' The tiger's smile was wider than ever as he licked his lips.

The Brahmin was beginning to lose hope when a jackal walked past and stopped to find out what was going on. The Brahmin explained and asked the jackal what he thought, but the jackal looked puzzled and shook his head. The Brahmin explained again while the tiger growled impatiently, eager to get on with his lunch. Still the jackal shook his head.

'I don't understand you,' he said. 'You will have to show me what happened.' The Brahmin led him to the empty pit and showed him the branch, but again he shook his head. 'You'll have to start again from the beginning,' he said. The tiger snarled with frustration.

The jackal turned to the tiger, 'Are you telling me you were in that pit?'

'Yes!' roared the tiger, who really had had enough of this. Once more, the jackal shook his head.

'I'll show you!' yelled the frustrated tiger and he threw himself back into the pit. 'Like this,' he growled.

'Ah!' said the jackal. 'I'm beginning to see. But was the branch there when you were first put in?'

'Of course not!' snarled the tiger.

'Then I'll just take it away,' said the jackal, removing the branch and leaving the tiger once more stuck at the bottom of the pit. 'Now I understand,' he smiled, and he strolled on his way.

As for the Brahmin, he hurried on, relieved to be alive and not quite as foolish as he had been.