Twelve

The Giver

RANTIDEVA who was a king, became a hermit in the forest. He had given his wealth to the poor and lived a simple life in the solitude of the jungle. He and his family had only the bare necessities of life.

One day, after a fast of forty-eight hours, a light meal of rice with milk and sugar was prepared for him.

A poor Brahmin came up to the door of the hut and asked for food. Rantideva gave him half of his rice. Then came a Sudra begging for help and Rantideva gave him half of what remained.

Then he heard a dog barking; the poor beast seemed to be starving. Rantideva gave him what was left. Last of all came a Pariah who stopped at the hermit’s door and asked for help. Rantideva gave him the milk and the sugar, and continued to fast.

Then came four gods who said to him:

“It was to us, Rantideva, that you gave food, for we assumed the forms of a Brahmin, a Sudra, a dog and a poor outcaste. You were good to us all and we praise you for your loving thoughts.”

A kind heart treats all men and even animals as members of one family, one humanity.

Do we not meet people every day who know less than we do? It is in our power to tell them things which may be useful on matters such as food, clothing, exercise, work and recreation.

It is our duty to give them knowledge as it is our duty to give bread to the hungry.

An ignorant man does harm to himself and he does harm to
those around him, just as the bad flute-player made the Brahmin suffer. Did you ever hear how that happened?

One day a Brahmin was walking through the countryside when he was surprised to hear a voice coming from a pipal-tree. The voice spoke to him several times bidding him not to bathe in a tank, not to perform his evening worship, not to eat and not to go away.

So he cried out:

“Who are you to forbid me to do things which have no harm in them?”

The voice from the pipal-tree replied:

“I am a Brahma-Rakshasa. In my last life I was a Brahmin and very learned in the art of music, but I was unwilling to impart my learning to others. I kept my knowledge to myself. And now I am doomed to be a Brahma-Rakshasa and every day I have to listen to a piper, and I cannot tell you how badly he plays. It is terrible. How often I have wished I could come out of the tree, snatch away his instrument and show him how to use it, where to place his fingers, how to use his breath. But it is not possible and I am forced to hear his awful tunes.... ”

I cannot tell you the rest of the story here, except to add that fortunately a way was found to rescue him from his torment. But you see how miserable we can be as a result of the bad work, the bad art, the bad music of people around us.

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If a man is hungry, what is the only thing that will relieve him? Food. If a man is thirsty, what will relieve him? Water. If a man is ignorant, what is the only thing that will help him? Knowledge.

It is good to give bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, knowledge to the ignorant.

The five sons of Pandu, the five noble Pandavas, were staying in a palace which at first sight seemed beautiful and comfortable. But it had been built by an enemy, Purochana, and he had made
The Giver

the floors and the walls and the roofs of very inflammable material; he intended to set fire to it one night while the Pandavas were asleep, so as to be rid of the five princes whom he hated.

Such was his villainy. For this wicked purpose, he made use of his skill in building and his cleverness in plotting.

One day a very skilful miner came to the palace. He said secretly to the princes:

“One of your friends sends me here to serve you. I am a miner. Tell me how I can help you. I know for sure that your enemy, Purochana himself, will try to burn you all alive in this house.”

Then the eldest of the Pandavas said to the miner:

“Use your skill in mining, good sir, to make us an underground passage so that even if the gates are guarded we may escape, for we shall get away through the secret passage dug by your spade and made passable by your art.”

In the floor at the very centre of the palace the miner began to dig. The Pandavas kept planks ready to place over the hole and covered the planks with carpets whenever Purochana came near. So the deceiver was deceived.

At last the five princes were informed that the passage was ready. It led from the house to a lovely spot in the forest.

One night the princes set fire to the palace and then with their mother Kunti, they made their escape through the underground passage. It was dark but safe. When strong Bhima noticed that his companions were not fleeing fast enough, he put his mother on his shoulders, took two of his brothers on his hips and the other two under his arms, and with this burden ran like a wind that cannot be stopped, away from the deadly fire.

Purochana’s trick had been foiled by the good miner’s skill. The miner was not content merely to dig the ground to discover treasures for himself alone; he dug for others. He helped others with his knowledge; he shared his science.

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Words of Long Ago

Even the greatest people on earth does not know everything. We should learn from one another, man from man, nation from nation, one part of the world from another; each nation, each man should be glad to teach what he knows.

The peoples of the West bring to the East their knowledge of science, technology, economics, etc.

From all time the peoples of the East have given to the West their philosophical and ethical knowledge. Thus India has given to other countries the knowledge contained in the Vedas and the teachings of the Buddha on the Noble Path as well as in all her sacred books.

Even a child can give knowledge. One child can teach the alphabet to another. One child can teach another how to do simple arithmetic, or to tell the North from the South, the East from the West, or to tie a knot, to play a game, to sow a seed, etc.

We can all be givers. A holy book says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”