A LION, a wolf and a fox went out hunting together. They killed an ass, a gazelle and a hare.

Seeing this catch, the lion said to the wolf:

“Kindly tell me, friend wolf, how we should divide this game.”

“There is no need,” replied the wolf, “to cut up the three animals. You take the ass, let the fox take the hare, and for my part I shall be content with the gazelle.”

The lion’s only answer was a roar of fury, and with a single blow, as reward for his advice, he crushed the wolf’s head with his claw. Then the lion turned to the fox and said:

“And, my dear friend, what do you suggest?”

“Oh, Sire,” the fox replied with a deep bow, “it is a very simple matter. You should have the ass for your breakfast, the gazelle for your evening meal, and eat the hare as a light snack in between.”

“Very well,” said the lion, pleased to have all the game for himself. “And who taught you to speak with such wisdom and justice?”

“The wolf,” the fox replied slyly.

Why did the fox speak in this way? Was it to say what he really thought? Oh, certainly not! Was it then a sincere wish to please the lion? Certainly not that either. He spoke like that because he was afraid, and we can surely make allowances for him. But nevertheless we must admit that his words were not truthful — merely artful. And if the lion approved of them, it was because he loved meat, not truth.
A Muslim writer, Abu Abbas, tells us of the glory of King Solomon, who reigned in Jerusalem, the holy city of the Hebrews.

In his throne room there were six hundred seats, half of which were occupied by sages, the other half by Jinns or genies who assisted Solomon by their magic power.

Throughout the sittings of the Council, a multitude of great birds would appear at a word from the king and spread their wings to shade the people in the six hundred seats. And at his command, each morning and evening, a powerful wind would arise, lifting up the whole palace and instantaneously transporting it a month’s journey away. In this way, the king was at hand to govern the distant lands that belonged to him.

Besides, Solomon made the most marvellous throne one could ever dream of. And this throne was designed in such a way that no one would dare to utter an untruth in the presence of the king.

It was made of ivory, inlaid with pearls, emeralds and rubies, and around it stood four golden date-palms on which the dates were also emeralds and rubies. At the top of two of these palms were golden peacocks, and on the two others were golden vultures. On each side of the throne there were also two golden lions between two pillars of emerald. And golden vines bearing ruby grapes twined around the trunks of the trees.

The elders of Israel were seated at Solomon’s right hand and their seats were of gold, the genies sat at his left hand and their seats were of silver.

When the king held his court of justice the people were allowed into his presence. And each time that a man bore witness on another, if he deviated ever so little from the truth, an amazing thing would happen. At the sight of him, the throne bearing the king, the lions, the palm-trees, the peacocks and the vultures, would instantly turn round on itself. Then the lions would thrust forward their claws, lashing the ground with their tails; the vultures and the peacocks would flap their wings.
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And so the witnesses would tremble with terror and would not dare to tell a single lie.

And this was no doubt very convenient, and must have considerably lightened the king’s task. But fear is always a wretched thing, which consorts ill with truth.

Even when by chance, as in the story of Abu Abbas, it forces a man to speak the truth, that does not make him truthful; for, at the very next moment, fear may drive him to speak without frankness, as did the fox in our previous tale. And that is what most often happens.

An honest man does not need the marvels of Solomon’s throne to learn to speak the truth. The throne of truth dwells within his own heart; the rectitude of his soul cannot but inspire him with words of rectitude. He speaks the truth not because he is afraid of a teacher, a master or a judge, but because truth is the characteristic of an upright man, the stamp of his nature.

Love of truth makes him face all fears. He speaks as he should, no matter what happens to him.

* * *

A rich and mighty king named Vishwamitra, who longed for greater esteem, resolved to practise Tapasya (austerities) in order to rise from his own caste of Kshatriya to the highest of all, that of a Brahmin.

He did all that he thought was needed and led a life of apparent austerity which made everyone say, “The king deserves to be a Brahmin.”

But the Brahmin Vasishtha did not think so, for he knew that Vishwamitra had acted out of vanity; his renunciation was not sincere. And so he refused to address him as a Brahmin.

In his fury the king had a hundred children of Vasishtha’s family put to death. But in spite of all his grief, Vasishtha persisted in his refusal to say what he did not think was true.

So the king resolved to kill this truthful man as well. One
night he went to Vasishtha’s hut to carry out the evil deed.

When he came near to the door, he heard the Brahmin talking with his wife, and as his own name was mentioned, he stopped to listen. Saintly and pure, full of forgiveness for him were the words he heard. This touched the king’s heart. Full of repentance he threw away his weapon, then went in and bowed at the hermit’s feet.

“Brahmarshi,” Vasishtha welcomed him affectionately, when seeing the king’s present state of mind.

“How did you not acknowledge my Tapasya before?” Vishwamitra asked humbly.

“Because,” replied Vasishtha, “you claimed the title of Brahmin in the name of an arrogant power, but now that you are repentant, you come in the true spirit of a Brahmin.”

Vasishtha knew how to speak the truth without fear. And he also spoke it without rancour.

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Is it not noble to speak the truth in this way, even when there is some danger in doing it?

Besides, very often, things turn out better for those who brave this danger than it might have seemed at first. The success of falsehood is only short-lived, whereas in most cases, to be sincere is the cleverest thing to do.

One morning, the Emperor of Delhi sat on his throne to confer honours on those he considered worthy. As the ceremony was drawing to a close, he noticed that one of the people he had summoned, a young man named Syed Ahmed, had not yet made his appearance.

The Emperor stepped down from his throne and got into a sedan chair which was used to carry him through his vast palace.

Just at that moment the young man hurried in.

“Your son is late,” said the Emperor to Syed’s father, who was his friend.
“Why?” asked the Emperor, looking sternly at the young man.
“Sire,” Syed replied frankly, “it is because I overslept.”
The courtiers looked at the young man in amazement. How dare he admit so shamelessly to the Emperor that he had no better excuse? How tactless of him to speak like that!
But the Emperor, after pondering a moment, felt respect for the young man because of his sincerity; and he gave him the necklace of pearls and the jewel of honour to place on his brow.
Such was the reward of Syed Ahmed, who loved the truth and spoke it to all, prince or peasant.

* * *

It is quite certain that to be able to tell the truth without difficulty, it is best always to act in such a way that we have no need to conceal anything we do. And for that, in our actions of every moment, we should remember that we are in the presence of the Divine.

For straightforwardness of speech also demands straightforwardness of actions; and a sincere man is one who shuns all falsehood in what he says and all hypocrisy in what he does.

At Amroha a special kind of pottery is made, known as Kagazi pottery, decorated with silver designs. These pots are very pretty, but they are so light and fragile that they break with the slightest use. Although they look just as serviceable as any other earthenware, they are only good to look at.

Many people are like Kagazi pottery. They have a beautiful appearance; but if you try to put them to any kind of test, you will see that everything about them is ornament. Do not put the slightest trust in them, for this would be too heavy a weight for their fragile nature to bear.

A Brahmin sent his son to Benares to study under the guidance of a Pundit.

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Twelve years later the young man returned to his home town, and many people hurried to see him, thinking that he had become a very profound scholar. They placed before him a book written in Sanskrit and said:

“Explain the doctrine to us, honourable Pundit.”

The young man stared at the book. In truth, he did not understand a single word of it. In Benares he had learnt nothing but the alphabet. And even then the letters had been written very large on the blackboard, so that by seeing them every day he might get them little by little into his head.

So he remained silent in front of the book, his eyes brimming with tears.

“O Pundit,” said the visitors, “something has touched your heart. Tell us what you have found in the book.”

“The letters,” he said at last, “were big in Benares, but here they are small!”

Was not this Pundit like the Kagazi pots?

* * *

A wolf had his den in the rocks on the bank of the river Ganges. When the snows melted, the water began to rise. It rose so high that it surrounded the wolf’s rock on every side. So one day he was unable to go out in search of food.

“Oh well!” he said when he saw that he had nothing left to eat, “today shall be a holy day, in honour of which I proclaim a fast.”

He sat on the edge of the rock and put on a very solemn air to celebrate the holy day and the fast.

But no sooner had he done this than a wild goat came bounding across the water, from rock to rock, and reached the place where the wolf was sitting full of devotion.

“Ohoh!” he exclaimed when he saw it. “Here is something to eat.”

He pounced on the goat and missed it, he pounced once
more and missed it again. Finally the goat escaped by leaping across the stream.

“Oh well!” said the wolf, resuming his saintly pose, “I shall not be so impious as to eat goat’s flesh on a holy day. No, no — no meat for me on a fast day!”

What do you think of the wolf, his devotion and his respect for the holy day? You laugh at his roguery. But how many people there are whose sincerity is like this, who adorn themselves with fine sentiments because it suits their interests, and pose as little saints because they are unable to give free rein to their vices. But in spite of all their cunning, do you think that these tricksters can prevail for very long against one who is right and just?

The monkeys and bears of Hanuman’s army fought for Lord Rama and his brother Lakshman against Ravana the ten-headed demon.

Weakening under the blows of the warriors who were attacking him from every side, Ravana made use of his magic power.

Suddenly, at his side, among the demons, many Ramas and many Lakshmans magically appeared. They were in truth nothing but false and deceptive appearances, but the monkeys and the bears, taking them for real people, halted in confusion: how could they continue the fight and go on throwing trees and rocks against Rama and Lakshman, their beloved leaders? Seeing their dismay, the demon Ravana gave a smile of cruel delight. Rama smiled too: what pleasure he would take in destroying such a falsehood, in exposing the trickery, in gaining victory for the truth! He fitted an arrow to his mighty bow and shot. The arrow whizzed through the misleading shadows, which immediately dissolved. At last Hanuman’s army could see clearly and their courage revived.

Similarly, every straight word from a sincere man is like an
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arrow that can destroy much falsehood and hypocrisy.

* * *

There is a legend in South India which tells of a prince, the Jasmine King, whose laugh alone would fill the land for leagues around with the sweet fragrance of jasmine. But for that his laugh must come from the joyful and spontaneous gaiety of his heart. It would have been no use if he had tried to laugh without true merriment. When his spirit was full of joy, his laughter would bubble up like a fragrant spring.

The quality of this laughter came wholly from its sincerity.

The tables in Duryodhana’s palace were laid with an extremely rich display of vessels of gold and silver, ornamented with rubies and emeralds and diamonds sparkling with many colours. Lord Krishna was invited to the feast but did not go. Instead he went that night to the house of a poor Sudra, who had also invited him. The meal was simple, the dishes were plain. And yet Krishna chose this one in preference to the other, for the feast which the Sudra offered him was full of sincere love, whereas the sumptuous banquet of King Duryodhana had been given only for show.

It is also said that the glorious Rama once sat at the table of a very humble woman, whose husband was a fowler. All she could put before the famous hero was a few fruits, for she had nothing else. But she gave the best she had with such a good heart that Rama was touched and wished that the memory of this gift from a sincere soul should not be forgotten, and that is why it is still spoken of after so many centuries.

Jalal was a wise and famous teacher. One day two Turks who wished to hear his teachings came to see him with an offering. As they were very poor, their gift was small — only a handful of lentils. Some of the sage’s disciples looked at this present with scorn. But Jalal told them:
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“Once the Prophet Mohammed needed riches to carry out one of his undertakings. So he asked his followers to give him what they could spare. Some brought half of their possessions, others a third. Abu Bakar gave all his wealth. In this way Mohammed got a large quantity of animals and weapons. Then came a poor woman who in her turn offered the Prophet three dates and a wheat-cake; and that was all she had. Many smiled at this sight, but the Prophet told them that he had had a dream in which he had seen the angels take a pair of scales and put the gifts of all the people in one of the pans and into the other only the dates and the bread of the poor woman. And the scale stood balanced, for this pan was as heavy as the other.” And Jalal added:

“A small gift offered with a sincere heart has as much value as costly presents.”

On hearing this the two Turks were full of joy and no one dared laugh any more about the handful of lentils.

* *

A poor man of low caste hunted for a whole day to feed his family, but could not catch anything. At nightfall he was still in the forest, alone, hungry and worn out by his vain attempts. In the hope of finding a nest he climbed up a Bel tree, whose three-lobed leaves are offered to the great Shiva by his devotees. But he found no nest. He thought of his wife and his little children waiting at home for their father and their food, and wept for them.

Tears of pity, the legend says, are very heavy. They are far more precious than the tears shed by those who are sorry for their own pain.

The hunter’s tears fell upon the leaves of the Bel tree and bore them down towards the stone of offering standing at the foot of the tree in honour of Shiva. At that moment the man was bitten by a snake and died. The spirits immediately carried
his soul to the house of the gods and brought it before the great Shiva.

“There is no place here for this man’s soul,” the dwellers in heaven cried out together. “For he was of low caste, he did not know the holy laws, he ate impure food and did not offer the customary gifts to the gods.”

But Shiva said to them:

“He gave me Bel leaves, and above all, he offered me sincere tears. There is no low caste for hearts that are true.” And he received him into his heaven.

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All these stories show us that in every age and in every land, both men and gods have given honour to sincerity; they love honesty and truth in all things.

One who lives in falsehood is an enemy of mankind.

All human sciences — philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, physics — are seekings for truth. But in the smallest things as in the greatest, truth is necessary.

Little children, do not wait to be grown up before you learn to be truthful: that cannot be done too early; and to remain truthful, it is never too soon to acquire the habit.

Sometimes it is so difficult for men to speak the truth even if they want to, for to do so, it must first of all be known and sought out, and that is not always so easy.

There were four young princes of Benares who were brothers. Each one of them said to their father’s charioteer:

“I want to see a Kimsuka tree.”

“I will show you,” said the charioteer, and he invited the eldest to go for a ride.

In the jungle he showed the prince a Kimsuka. It was the time of year when there are neither buds, nor leaves, nor flowers. So the prince saw only a trunk of dark wood.

A few weeks later, the second prince was taken for a drive
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in the chariot and he also saw the Kimsuka tree. He found it covered with leaves.

A little later in the season, the third brother saw it in his turn; it was all pink with flowers.

At last the fourth saw it; its fruits were ripe.

One day when the four brothers were together, someone asked:

“What does the Kimsuka tree look like?”
The eldest said: “Like a bare trunk.”
The second: “Like a flourishing banana-tree.”
The third: “Like a pink and red bouquet.”
And the fourth: “Like an acacia laden with fruit.”

Being unable to agree, they went together to their father the king for him to decide between them. When he heard how one after the other the young princes had seen the Kimsuka tree, the king smiled and said:

“All four of you are right, but all four of you forget that the tree is not the same in all seasons.”

Each one was describing what he had seen and each one was ignorant of what the others knew.

In this way, most often, men know only a fraction of the truth, and their error comes precisely from the fact that they think they know it all.

How much less this error would be if they had learnt at an early age to love truth so much that they would always seek it more and more.

* * *

The King of Kumaon, in the region of the Himalaya mountains, was hunting one day on the hill of Almora, which at that time was covered by thick forest.

A hare ran out of the thickets and the king began to chase it. But this hare suddenly changed into a tiger and soon disappeared from his sight.
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Struck by this strange occurrence, the king assembled the wise men in his palace and asked them what such a thing might mean.

“It means,” they replied, “that on the spot where you lost sight of the tiger, you should build a new city. For tigers only flee from places where men come to live in great numbers.”

So workmen were engaged to build the new town. A thick iron rod was driven into the earth to test the firmness of the ground. By chance, at that very moment a slight earth-tremor occurred.

“Stop!” cried the wise men. “The point has pierced the body of Seshanaga, the world-serpent. The town must not be built here.”

And, indeed, the legend tells that when the iron rod was drawn out of the ground, it was found to be all red with the blood of Seshanaga.

“This is most unfortunate,” said the king, “but since we have decided to build the city there, we shall build it all the same.”

The wise men were furious and they predicted dire misfortunes for the city, and the early end of the king’s race.

The soil was fertile and the water abundant. For six hundred years, the town of Almora has stood on its rock, and the surrounding fields produce rich harvests.

Thus, in spite of their wisdom, the wise men were mistaken in their predictions. Doubtless they were sincere and thought they were speaking the truth, but men are very often mistaken in this way and take for realities what is nothing but superstition.

Little children, the world is full of superstitions, and the best means given to man to discover more of the truth is to remain always sincere and to become always more so in thought, deed and word; for it is when we avoid deceiving others in all things that we also learn to deceive ourselves less and less.