

The Old Man

Once upon a time, a long time ago there happened to be an old man. He was a very wise man. He also was very hospitable. All the people respected him. Even the king of the land would not organise a party without (inviting) him. One day towards the evening the old man sat in the shade of a giant mulberry tree growing near the gate, drinking tea. At that moment a young man walked towards him and greeted him. He returned greetings and after they had inquired about each other's well-being, he offered him to take place on a mattress. After the young man had taken place on the mattress, they talked with each other about all kinds of things. Just at that time one of the king's servants arrived and said: "Elder, the king invites you". The wise man replied: "I would have come, but I have a guest!". The servant returned and reported: "My king, (unfortunately) he happens to have a guest. He says, that unless he throws out the guest, he seemingly cannot come" "Oh, how stupid you are. Couldn't he come and take his guest with him? If he does like that, who will call him a wise old man?! Go, tell him to come and take his guest with him. Go immediately and return quickly. Without him I will not start the party, said the king, and apparently sent the servant over to the old man once again. When the servant arrived he said: "Elder, the king told that you should bring your guest too and come quickly. If you don't come, he said he wouldn't start his party." "If that is the case, then we will go now. You can go too!" the old man said, and as he sent the servant away, he said facing his young guest: "Good young man, it seems the king is inviting us to his party. You know yourself it's the king's party. The preparation was enormous. If you go and won't behave yourself, then you will most probably regret that. Let me therefore give you three bits of advice however, you should hold on to them and behave accordingly." As he prepared himself to leave, the old man continued: "Firstly, when you enter the party hall and sit down, choose yourself a place fitting your position, so that you won't need to move later on. Secondly, however much the conversation gets heated up, if you yourself are not asked for advice, then don't speak before your turn. Thirdly, if you are not being asked straight, in company of others you should not take out any weapon, not even your personal knife." -- The young man replied: "Don't worry, elder". -- So, they went off to the king's party. And as the old man and his guest arrived, they were received with respect and quickly taken to the feast hall. The two of them were guided towards the place of honor (=furthest away from the entrance). The young man was hesitating a little and then walked straight to the place of honor. The old man however, decided to go to the place he considered proper for himself. When the young man saw this, he immediately understood that he should sit somewhere else and moved restlessly. But it was already too late. The king's officials, treasurers and secretaries starting coming in, one after the other. So, sitting in the place of honor was out of the question! To make place the young man moved bit by bit until he finally happened to find himself reaching the cloak-room (i.e. where people leave their shoes). Then he realised how mistaken he had been, but the old man only seemed to be shaking his head. Well, everybody had come to the party. And imagine how much there was on the table (cloth) at the king's party: kebabs, pilau, apples, pomegranates, dates, you name it, in enormous quantities (lit.: if you can count them, you did a good job). There was also plenty of wine, in various qualities. The guests having eaten and drunk the conversation became more and more excited. Then the old man carefully looked around towards the place where his guest was seated. When he saw him, he noticed that he was already getting drunk (lit.: his head had moved). The one that shouldn't have spoken before his turn, now didn't give his table mates (lit.: people eating from the same pot) a turn to speak. He himself spoke very fast, chit-chatting about all kinds of things. The old man didn't know what to do and sat with his head bowed down. At that moment the king's head official wanted to cut an apple or pomegranate and was looking for a knife. When he didn't find one, he said to the servants: "What, isn't there any knife?" -- These

words reached the ears of the young guest, who immediately said: "Don't keep waiting, you may take this one for cutting", and let his own knife with the precious stone sail through the air towards the head official. The old man tried to keep an eye on him, but saw that it was already too late. That official took the knife and looked for a while closely at him. I'd say, this seems to be a very good knife. So, then the greedy official saw to take advantage of the young man's stupidity and said: "Oh, my 'king of the world', please, take a good look at this knife! That must indeed be the precious stone that was stolen from the kingdom's treasury! The thief happened to come to me himself. He needs to be punished right now", he said. When the king also heard that, he fully believed the head official. "Hangman", he called, apparently really furious. The old man understood that if he wouldn't do something the situation would worsen and could become a disaster, so he said: "Oh my king, I don't doubt your official". Maybe he is right in that it is the knife with the precious stone that was stolen. But don't forget that there are many such things (knives) in the world. That in the first place. Secondly, this young man is my guest at the moment. Taking that into account and since I accompany him, you must not bother him. But if tomorrow by the time I leave, it has been proven that it is the stolen knife, you may sentence the young man for his offence and punish him the way you seem fit. The king and the head official didn't know how to go against the old man. They looked each other in the eye for some time. Then the king said: "Okay, let it be as you said." Let us respect each other and also render the guest honor. Only on one condition, that you won't help the guest to escape the situation. Therefore I will have my messengers guard your house tonight. But don't say: "I didn't know", if you dare to instruct your guest only a thing, both your heads will roll tomorrow and your property will be confiscated.", the king said. The scholar agreed. After the party he returned home with his guest. The king ordered two messengers to escort them. ? All of them seems to have become silent during the walk. But the young man happened to feel very scared (lit.: as if he was on water). He thought by himself: "Oh, what on earth have I done?" If I had indeed listened to the scholar, nothing would have happened. But now I am going to die innocent. Our ancestors used to say: "Wherever misfortune will come, it will come from a two finger sized tongue (=all trouble is caused by careless talk) That moment they got to the scholar's house. The old man watched the messengers and said: "Well young men, if you find ourselves a suitable watch post, do take that place. I have really nothing to instruct my guest. I won't sleep with him in one place at all. I will sleep inside myself, but I will give him a mattress to sleep on the platform that is outside in the yard. It is indeed like it is said: "Done with his hand, carried on his shoulder" (=You will reap what you sow) Tomorrow he can do whatever he thinks necessary, he can sleep inside if he like, but now the young guest will be given a mattress to sleep on outside. The messengers were walking to and fro near the old man's entrance door until after midnight. But nobody said a word. Then they also found themselves a quiet spot and peacefully laid down for a nap. When the old man and young guy went to lie down, they couldn't get to sleep. The old man was trying to think of a way to help the young man. The young man was condemned to die the next day - in that situation can anyone sleep? At night, he was tossing and turning. He heard the watchman, who had come in, snoring, and went out. Having heard this, the wise old man, seeing that the best moment had come, decided to give the guest some wise advice. But because the young man hadn't taken care, the old man didn't turn straight to the young man. When the watchman suddenly awoke, the old man started talking slowly/quietly so that they wouldn't suspect him in anything. "Hey my kitten, you've met a terrible day!" You couldn't stick to my advice! But now do not miss the opportunity again. Tomorrow, don't let go of what I say, do it!" said the old man, coughing as he advised the young man. The young man also, in order to show that he was listening, cleared his throat slightly. Knowing that the guest was listening to his words the old man continued: "Hey my kitten, as soon as they take you into custody, look at the king and say this:" "My father was an important trader. One day he put together a big convoy, and went off to trade. He put all kinds of expensive things in his baggage - silk dresses, gold, silver, gem stones... But my father has

disappeared since then. We asked everywhere, but no one has seen him. After that I got my weapons and horses ready and went out to find him. I went from village to village, but didn't find any news. In the end I reached a desert. While I was still settling into the desert, I came across the scattered remains of my father. When I saw him I realised that robbers had fallen on him, and demanded and taken his animals and goods. As for him, they had obviously killed him. The knife with the precious stone that your chief official says I stole was sitting on top of my father's corpse. Of course the murderers had panicked and left!" he said, and continued what he had decided to say: "Hey my kitten, after you have said this, take a deep breath and look as if you are a very unsatisfied man, then say, "Oh my king, finding no other way out, I buried my father there. Coming home, I recounted what had happened. My mother's eyes flooded with tears. Because of this, I went out and patiently searched for the murderer. I also wiped the knife with the precious stone and stuck it in my waist-band. Whenever two get together and if I find any reason to throw the knife, I throw it on the table. It doesn't make any difference if s/he is the owner or not, if I can find the owner who would recognize the precious stone, I would do so. So, he must be the murderer I'm looking for! In so doing constantly, I was luckily able to attend your party, and deliberately got out my knife. Your chief official recognised it, and said that this was a precious stone stolen from the treasury. If that happens, my king, that official, it turns out that I am a criminal and that I am the thief of the treasure. Now, you can conjecture and think who might need to be punished. If the old man had not taken time up to today, I would have explained the situation in the evening. Because of the fact that you didn't reject the old man's words, I also thought, I could wait another day, and so I'm telling you this now," and having said that went to sleep peacefully. Having listened to the wise old man's advice the young man's spirit widened [i.e. he relaxed]. He also went to sleep for a while. The next day, as soon as music was played, messengers got up from their places. Again, having had breakfast, whether they talked about it or not, went in the direction of the old man and the youth. When they saw them, they were all asleep in their sleeping places. At that time the sun rose and lit up the world. It also wisely wakened his guest. The old man sent him on his way. During that time, the messengers, following him, and tying his hands, took him back to the palace, as the king had decreed. They brought out the king's precious stone. The king asked what kind of conversation had gone on between the guest and the host. The messengers said, "There was no conversation, your grace!" The king commanded that the young man be taken to a narrow field. They started to push him out/force him out In the narrow field the whole assembly gathered, the king and his officials and representatives came on behind. They say that the chief official had the pearly knife in his hand. Then the king decreed that the young man should be hanged, for taking that knife. At that moment they took the young man to a narrow tree. The young man said at the top of his voice, "Oh king, are you being just?" The king said, "Stop!" to those dragging the youth, and then looked at the boy and said, "Now what is it that you wanted to say?" The young man and guest said, "If you are just, don't hurry now, listen to me a while" saying the words that the wise old man had taught him one-by-one. He was so believable, and he talked so confidently, that the whole gathering said, "How can this be?" and the wise among them standing there also heard. A hubbub started up. The whole crowd shouted out, "Oh king, it seems that your thief is among your own people, and the chief official hasn't sinned once, but twice! He is both the murderer and the thief of the treasure!" He should be hung at dawn!" they all cried out. The king, having heard the boy's persuasive words, and the crowd's just demand, also came to see the point of view himself. He waved his seal in the direction of the assembly, signalled, "Be quiet" and then cried out "Hangman!" in a piercing voice. "Well, your grace!" he said and having pointed out the chief official to the hangman, decreed "Hang him tomorrow!" They hanged the official who had stolen and cheated right then at dawn. To the young man they said, "Go, may you have a safe journey!" and sent him politely on his way. The assembly rejoiced that they had shaken off the awful official and that the old man had stopped another injustice from getting started. The young man took

the events that had happened as a lesson never to be forgotten and being very thankful of the wise old man's advice, went and lived elsewhere. As for the king, he announced to all and sundry that the wise old man was to become the chief official.