



The Weaver, Destiny, and Human Effort

Tales From the Panchatantra

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ONCE UPON A TIME A WEAVER and his wife lived in a small town. Even though he worked hard, weaving fine clothes all day and selling them in the market every week, the weaver hardly made enough money to purchase the bare necessities.

Yet, other weavers became rich, even though their work was crude and the clothes they made were plain and rough. One day, the weaver said to his wife, "Look at these other weavers. They are so unskilled, yet they have plenty of money and live a comfortable life. I make fine clothes, clothes of the best quality, and still we suffer in poverty. This town is unlucky for me. Lets move to the city and seek our fortune there." "No," his wife answered. "Thats just wishful thinking. If we are supposed to be rich, it will happen right here in our own town. If not, no matter what we do or where we do it, nothing will work out. Lets stay here. Well try our best and if Providence favors us, money will shower on us from all directions." "Only cowards and fatalists speak that way," the weaver replied. "Even lions work hard to capture their prey. Prosperity comes to those who work as hard as they can. I believe that by making steady efforts I can create my own destiny."

Theres a better market in the city than in this little village." Saying this, the weaver left for the city. The weaver worked hard and saved 300 gold coins in three years. Then he decided it was time to go back home. He set out with a high heart, but night caught him when he was halfway there. There was neither village nor cottage in sight, so he stretched out under a tree near the road. Falling into a deep sleep, he began to dream. In his dream, he saw two gigantic and fierce figures talking to each other. One said, "Human Effort, didnt you know that in this lifetime the weaver can only earn enough money to meet his daily needs? He can earn only enough to put a roof over his head, clothes on his back, and food on his table. You knew this, so why did you grant this man 300 coins of gold?" The other responded, "Destiny, I must reward a man who is committed to making steady efforts. Whether he can hold on to the fruits of his labor or not is in your hands, not mine." The weaver, startled out of sleep by this dream, opened his eyes and found his bag of coins empty. Not even one coin remained. You cannot imagine his grief at losing the money he had earned and saved with such diligence. "How can I show myself empty-handed to my wife?" he thought. "What will my friends say about me? There is no point in going home." With this thought, the weaver turned back to the city. This time, by working night and day, almost without rest, he saved 500 gold coins in a year. Again, he decided to return home with his riches. This time, too, darkness caught him halfway. He was worn out and needed to stop and rest. But remembering what had happened the year before, he was afraid to fall asleep, so he kept on walking. But though he stayed wide awake, he still heard the same two voices, and again they were talking about him. He heard Destiny say, "Didn you remember that this weaver can only earn enough money to meet his daily needs? Why did you give him 500 coins?" Effort replied, "Destiny, I must let him reap the fruits of his labors at least once. The rest is in your hands." The voices faded away, and the weaver stopped and looked into his bag. Once again it was completely empty. His despair was complete. "Even death is better than a life tortured by poverty," he told himself. Rather than live another second in poverty, 111 hang myself from this tree and die right here." Without wasting a moment, he tied a noose around his throat, scrambled up the nearest tree and fastened the other end of the rope to a high branch. Just as he was about to jump, he heard a voice. "Weaver, do not kill yourself." "Who speaks?" cried the weaver. "It is I, Destiny, who took all your money. It is your fate to have only enough money for food and clothes. Don waste your time worrying about acquiring money. Your wife is beautiful and has a loving heart. Go home and live happily. Be content with what you have." The weaver unwound the noose from his neck and dropped the rope to the ground. Destiny spoke again. "I am pleased with your courage and determination. You may ask for one boon and it will be given to you." Instantly the weaver cried, "Give me unlimited wealth!" "What is the point of having wealth you cannot use?" Destiny asked. "You will only suffer from it." The weaver argued, "Just grant me wealth. I want it whether I can use it or not. I want it whether I can enjoy it or not. The only thing in the world that I want is money. Even stockpiled money is greater than all else." The rich are respected. Everyone looks up to them. Even if a rich person doesn share his wealth with others, the world still follows and attends him. Haven you heard how the jackal shadowed the bull for weeks and months on the slim hope that one day the bull might die and the jackal would then enjoy a feast?" "No," Destiny said, "I don know this story. Tell it to me." So, still sitting in the tree, the weaver told the story of the bull and the jackal. "Once upon a time, a farmer had a powerful bull. He was beautiful, but his nature was so wild that the farmer let him loose. The bull happily took off for the forest. In that same forest, by the bank of a

river, there lived a jackal and his wife. "One day, while the pair was sunning themselves by their den, the bull came to the river for a drink. Seeing his massive shoulders and the ample flesh covering the rest of his body, the female jackal turned to her mate. Look at that bull. What a fine meal he would make! Just looking at him makes my mouth water. He has reached his prime and will die soon. Go and follow him. When he falls to the ground, bring me the tender flesh from his shoulders." Her husband stared at her in amazement. That's crazy! Who knows if this bull will ever die? How long can I chase him? What's the point? Don't give me such a useless task. Why can we stay here as always, feeding on the rats who pass through our den, and loving one another?" His wife shook her head. I'm tired of eating the flesh of rats." Her husband replied, And what if some other jackal takes my place while I'm following the bull? Why should I abandon a familiar prey for an unknown one?" But his determined wife scorched him with her scolding, saying I never thought you were such a coward! Have you no courage? One who is satisfied with the little he has usually loses even that. Even if this bull doesn't die soon, a chunk of flesh from his shoulder will certainly fall off. You must follow him!" Flinging this last remark over her shoulder, the female jackal took off after the bull herself, and her mate soon followed. And so, hoping that the bull would fall dead at any moment, they passed their days, weeks, and months trailing after it. No one knows whether they ever got the flesh of that bull, but their children carry on the pursuit to this day. Thus, the bull, with his wealth of flesh, is constantly attended."

When the weaver had finished his story. Human Effort (who had been listening too) said, "If your desire for wealth is so strong, come down from that tree and go back to the city where you earned your gold coins. Two merchants live there. One is a miser who hoards his gold, while the other is generous and shares his wealth. Visit both of them, study their lives, and then choose the type of wealth you desire. I will grant you either the wealth of the miser, or bless you with wealth to generously share with others." Destiny and Human Effort vanished, and the weaver turned back to the city once again. Arriving at sunset, he spotted the house of the merchant. The merchant was so infamously stingy that everyone had forgotten his real name and called him only "Miser." Instead of greeting the weaver as a guest, Miser tried to get rid of him. Oblivious to insults and mistreatment, the determined weaver stayed. Miser begrudgingly gave him some bread and water and let him sleep on the bare ground outside the door. As the weaver slept, Destiny and Human Effort visited his dreams. "Effort, why did you allot that extra bread to Miser to give to the weaver?" Effort replied, "My job is only to make humans perform their actions. The fruits of their actions are entirely in your hands." The next day, Miser had an attack of dysentery and was forced to fast—so he unwittingly compensated for the bread he had given to the weaver. That evening the weaver visited the house of the merchant who had earned the name "Generous." Here he was greeted with love and respect, and was provided with good food and a comfortable bed. As he slept, he again heard Destiny and Human Effort talking: "Effort, you made Generous spend so much money on this weaver. Now how will this expenditure be made up?" Effort replied, "It was my duty to make Generous spend money on his guest. Rewarding Generous for his act is your job, Destiny, not mine." The next morning, as the weaver was having breakfast at the table of Generous, a messenger came from the King bringing rich gifts to his generous host. Once more, the voice of Human Effort spoke to the weaver. "Now that you have seen both the wealth of the generous man and the wealth of the miser, which do you choose?" The weaver, who was beginning to understand, said, "I choose neither. Instead, let the will of the Lord be done." The voice spoke for the last time, "Let Human Effort triumph over Destiny in your life." "May it be so only if my chosen course is wise, and if wisdom continues to guide my efforts in the right direction," replied the weaver. The weaver returned to his home in the village without the gold coins, but with the wealth of wisdom. He had come to understand that choosing the right course is its own kind of wealth. The ups and downs of fortune no longer had any power to affect him. He set about practicing his craft of weaving, working to his fullest capacity, and renouncing the fruits of his labors. The weaver was wealthy, but his wealth was of a different kind than the material riches he had originally sought. For the rest of his days he lived with a steadfast faith and a deep, abiding contentment. And so ends the tale of the weaver. Destiny, and Human Effort.



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