



The Four Friends

Traditional story told by Ringu Tuku Rinpoche

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a very beautiful and prosperous country where everything was going well. Everyone there was very happy. Then one day they held a meeting. The king spoke first and said, "If everything in our country is going well, it is thanks to me. I rule the country wisely and fairly, and this is why everyone is happy."

Next the ministers spoke. "Oh no," they replied, "if everything is going well in our country it is thanks to us. We know what people need, and we make sure that we give them what they need, and this is why everyone is happy."

Finally, the people of the country spoke. "No, no," they said, "if everything in our country is going well it is thanks to us. We are always law-abiding, kind and goodhearted, and this is why everyone in this country is happy."

As they continued to disagree, an old man entered the room. He was a hermit who lived alone in the forest. "Actually", said the hermit, "the reason why everything is going well in our country is not thanks to any of you. It is because there are four animals in the forest who love and respect each other so much, and who are such good friends, that they have brought peace and prosperity to the whole country."

Everyone was amazed by what the hermit said and asked him to take them to the forest to see these animals. So, the old man led the way to the forest, and they soon found the four animals. There was a big elephant, and on the top of the elephant rode a monkey, and on the top of the monkey sat a rabbit, and on the rabbit's head there perched a bird.

Everyone watched, as the elephant picked a fruit and, instead of eating it himself, passed it to the monkey. The monkey passed the fruit to the rabbit, and the rabbit gave it to the bird. They asked the hermit to tell them the story of these animals.

The hermit explained that these four animals were best friends, but so they could respect and care for each other properly, they had decided that there should be an order of rank. To establish this, they needed to know their ages, so that the younger ones could respect the older ones and the older ones could care for the younger ones. However, they found it very hard to work out who was the eldest and who was the youngest, so they went to a big tree.

The elephant said, "When I was very small, this tree was the same size as me." Then the monkey said, "When I was very small, the tree was the same size as me." Next the rabbit said, "When I was very small, this tree only had two leaves on it, and I used to lick dewdrops from them." Finally, the bird said, "Well, I took a seed from another part of the forest and dropped it here, and it is from that seed that the tree grew."





So, who was the eldest? The bird, of course; and then came the rabbit, then the monkey and lastly the elephant. So, on that basis, the youngest respected the eldest and the eldest cared for the youngest, and the harmony between these animals was so great that it spread beyond the forest to bring peace and prosperity to the whole country. This is why even these days Tibetans have pictures of the four friends on the walls of their homes, so that their family will be as harmonious as that country was.

And what does this story teach us? It shows that the essence of Dharma is to do to others what you would wish them to do to you. If you say hello to somebody, they will smile back. In general, if you want others to be good to you, then you have to be good to them first.

Teacher's Notes



Questions for Reflection, Age Group 5 – 11 (Whole group)

- What is a good friend for you? Can you give examples?
- What did the four friends in the story find out about respecting and caring for each other?
- Do you think that age is important in a friendship?
- Do you think that harmony between school friends spreads a good atmosphere in a whole school? If yes, why?

Exercise in small groups, Age Group 8 – 11 (groups of 3- 4 students)



Preparation:

A5 or A4 sheets of paper, with one of the following words written on each:

Fun, Respect, Toys, Games, Neighbourhood, Care, Helping, Age, School, Listening

Activity:

Discuss the meaning of each word, give examples, and add each word under the following headings:

1 What is crucial for a friendship?

2 What is convenient for a friendship?

Speak about the results and explain your choice (**whole group**)



Optional: add symbols or drawings to each of the words.