



Story Guide

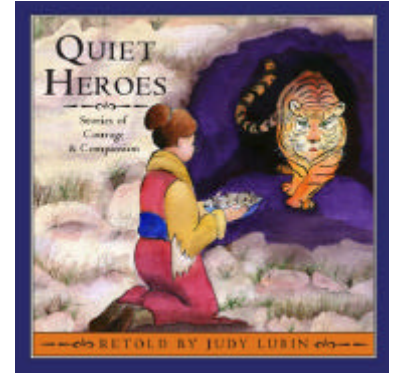
For

Quiet Heroes

Stories of Courage
and Compassion

Retold by Judy Lubin

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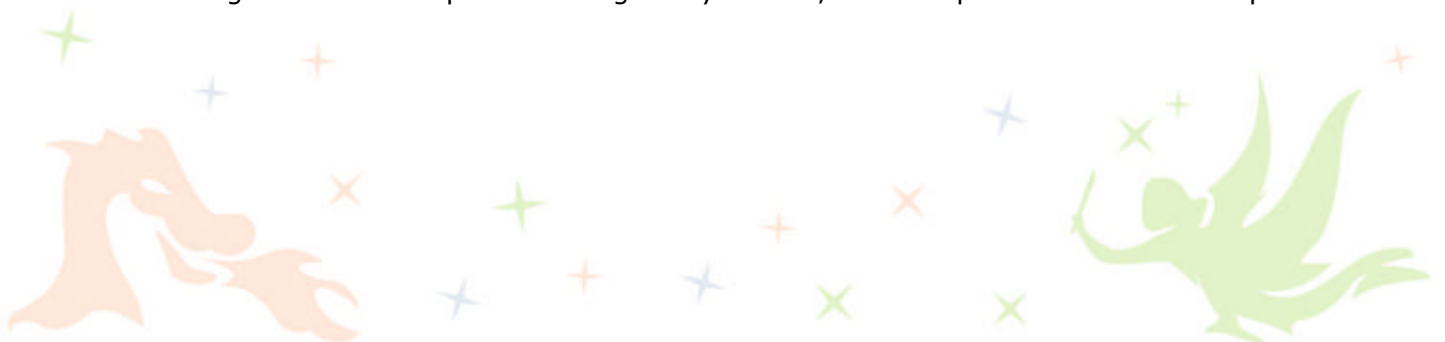
Story Guides are meant to be used by adults, and teens grades 6 and older, to help choose and use stories. They explain the hidden meaning and symbolism that I give to each of the stories when I tell them. The information in this guide is not meant to be shared with children. Children experience stories through their imaginations as a fun, engaging and concrete experience, nothing like the abstract and intellectual approach taken in the Story Guides. Telling children what we expect them to take from a story is akin to giving away the secret of a magic trick. We take away the fun and the magic! And remember, children relate best to stories when they have a chance to process them. Whenever possible, play the stories one at a time with play or quiet time in between.

Great King Goodness

Great King Goodness is a Buddhist Story that emphasizes the values of compassion and non-violence. Listeners are meant to understand that King Goodness is a quintessential role model for these values. If I were telling this to a Buddhist audience, I would include the insight from the original story that King Goodness is said to be a previous incarnation of Buddha. That is, he is a Bodhisatva – someone who has achieved enough enlightenment to end his cycle of reincarnation, but chooses to return to human life to help others. That's a complicated way of saying that he's as good as it gets!

The story directly addresses one of our most common misconceptions about compassion. King Goodness's kindness is seen as a weakness. And, indeed, kindness can appear to be the opposite of warrior-like strength. But, kindness takes courage. Sometimes kindness takes even more courage than anger or hatred, which are fairly easy to fall into. Kindness requires us to stop and think, to go against the grain, to rise above our instincts. Rather than a physical risk, kindness requires an emotional risk. When we act in kindness, we leave ourselves vulnerable, just as King Goodness is vulnerable to attack.

Indeed, we are meant to associate King Goodness with vulnerability. The antelope, which King Goodness adopts as his signatory animal, is not a predator. The antelope is a



prey animal, and thus, highly vulnerable. But the antelope is swift and not so easy to catch. In Buddhist cultures, meat-eaters – predator animals – are seen as being at a less evolved spiritual place than vegetarians. This has to do with the vulnerability of those who do not prey upon others. It takes a good measure of non-conventional strength to succeed when our main weapon – predation – is deemed unusable.

Indeed, it takes very high levels of emotional strength to stand strong in the face of that vulnerability. But, if we can find that emotional strength, as King Goodness does, the payoff is large – long term peace and safety. We often think that punishment, or vengeance, provides safety. But too often, it only provides an escalation of wrong doing and violence. King Goodness's goal is the long term maintenance of a peaceful kingdom. To achieve that goal, he must remain strong in his values. His ability to forgive his enemy at the end of the story is a crucial part of his ability to bring overall safety to his kingdom. Had he taken vengeance on the King of Kosala, he would have been stuck with the war that he had tried to avert. Instead, he found himself with a loyal protector for the rest of his days.

The symbolism of the goblins in this story also show us something of King Goodness's nature. The Goblins are a symbol of evil; they deal with death. But they do so in way that renews life. Because the goblins devour the dead bodies, they return life to the earth and continue the ecological cycle of death and rebirth. Like the stories on *When the Last Leaf Falls: Stories About Letting Go Retold by Judy Lubin*, the goblins represent the nature of change – we must detach from the old in order to make room for the new. The goblins, then, are not wholly a force of evil, but they are unpleasant and not very noble. That King Goodness befriends them and helps them is a sign of his wisdom. A similar trait is found in Jewish lore. In the Jewish tradition, the teaching of wisdom is done through the character of King Solomon, who is held to be the wisest of the wise. King Solomon is known for his relationship with Asmodeus, King of the Demons. He invites Asmodeus to his palace, travels with him, and even asks for advice from the King of the Demons. What could a demon possibly teach to a great and noble king? Plenty. Part of King Solomon's wisdom comes from his ability to understand the ways of evil without succumbing to that evil. King Goodness has the same wisdom – he knows how to put the forces of death to use in order to bring renewal. Indeed, because he remains true to his noble side when in the presence of the goblins, even the goblins recognize that he is master over them, not the other way around.

King Goodness also knows how to use the animalistic side of human nature to help free himself. He shows this when he uses the jackal's energy and struggle to loosen the dirt that buries him. Again, he knows how to use the less noble forces of life without succumbing to them. He is familiar with them, but not beholden to them. In the end, King Goodness frees himself and regains his kingdom through his compassion towards his enemies and towards those that others may consider to be more lowly than him.

The Tiger's Whisker

The Tiger's Whisker is a story from Korea, but similar stories come from all over the world. Yun Ok shows us the true meaning of heroism with her willingness to endure hardship and to put her own life in danger in order to help another. While the bulk of her work is in taming the tiger itself, her entire journey gives us a metaphor for healing.

Mountains are often thought of as holy places in Asian cultures. From the top, we can gain a bird's eye view that brings us a broader perspective. Since a bird's eye view over one's life is often associated with Spirit or the Divine, Yun Ok's climb up the mountain can be viewed as a spiritual quest. To truly heal another, we must be engage our own spirit. Of course, the path is not easy, and sometimes she slips back to the bottom and must begin again, just as we often must do when on a spiritual path.

The field of snakes that she passes through represent the danger of false wisdom. In many storytelling cultures, snakes represent wisdom because they shed their skin each year. This is a metaphor for an ability to shed one's outer identities to allow for growth and renewal. But, shedding the skin can also be representative of a surface level change, akin to putting on a costume. In this use, snakes can represent false wisdom. This sense of false wisdom often comes up in relation to arrogance. We pretend that we know the answer, because we don't want to admit that we are uncertain, or might be wrong. But this puts us on the wrong path. To get past the problem of false wisdom, Yun Ok must step carefully.

She then comes to a tangled, thorny forest that symbolizes the tangled, thorny nature of emotional problems. This part of the journey gives her cuts and scrapes, symbolic of emotional wounds.

Then she must cross a swift moving body of water. To see the symbolism of the river, take a minute to think about the properties of water. It won't move unless put in motion by another force and then won't stop moving until it is stopped by another force. Gravity will cause a portion of a mountain lake to run down the mountainside in the form of a stream, which will stay put at the bottom of the mountain unless moved again by another force. Water goes where you put it. It is passive. But, if it gathers up force, as in the case of a tsunami started by an undersea earthquake, it can be unstoppable. Yun Ok's crossing of the river symbolically tells us that she must somehow cross the remnants of former energies that are now passively in her way. For example, she might face built up anger that has hardened into a sense of immobility.

But she manages all of these challenges, night after night. Her most difficult challenge is the actual taming of the beast, which of course is a metaphor for the beast within her post-war husband, and within all victims of tragedy. When she tames this beast, we see that, as the healer says, a potion won't solve all problems, but hard work, dedication and courage will.

The Guest Chenoo

The Guest Chenoo is a tale from the Wabanki people. In this story, the heroine's compassion toward her enemy turns him from a monster into a human. The story reminds me of a true story from Native American lore. Two tribes ended generations of bloody war by pledging to always greet each other with the words (roughly translated), "I see that you are human." It took some time, but eventually all fighting stopped forever more. The message here is clear. An enemy is simply someone for whom we have no compassion. Add back that compassion, and we lose the enemy.

In this story, the Great Spirit to whom Nesoowah prays could be seen as a metaphor for the higher self or the divine within. The compassion that she must muster in order to save the raging Elaak can only come from a place of connection to some type of spirit – either within or without. Her choices were not rational, or even reasonable. They came from the wisdom of a very broad perspective on the human capacity for healing and change. She had to access this part of herself in order to bring about the change. The Native Americans who stopped their wars by greeting each other with "I see that you are human" also had to access to a higher part of themselves in order drop centuries of unthinking hatred and replace it with compassion.

The Magic Brocade

The Magic Brocade is a story from China, although it emphasizes the achievement of what we call the American Dream – a house that we can call our own and that embodies our ideal of comfortable living. The brocade represents the mother’s version of this universal dream.

In many folktales, the hero takes on many challenges in order to achieve his own dreams. In this tale, the hero takes on many challenges for the sole purpose of helping someone else achieve their dream. But, the son gains his own happiness in the course of helping another. This metaphor hides a frequent truth about life – success comes most easily when we strive for goals in which others gain. Maybe this is just because, when we are working towards goals in which others benefit, we find we always have ample help. But it could also be that selfish success is a lonely success, and may not even bring happiness at all, as evidenced by the older son. Success is happiest when shared.