

The Four Perfect Friends

A Tale from Ancient India



Once, many, many years ago, four animals – an elephant, a monkey, a rabbit, and a bird – met under a large tree and began a very heated discussion. Each insisted that he was the first animal to have discovered the tree. Each animal wanted to be recognized as being the most important.

Elephant said: “When I first saw the tree, I scratched my back on its branches – just like this.” And Elephant scrunched his great shoulders and wriggled them about. But the tree had to be a very tall tree for an elephant to use it as a scratching post.

Monkey said: “When I first saw the tree, I jumped from branch to branch and picked its fruit. It was very delicious.” Monkey jumped about and smacked his lips. But the tree had to be a full-grown tree to have branches for swinging and to bear fruit for a hungry monkey.

Rabbit said: “When I first saw the tree, I hopped right over it – just like this.” And Rabbit hopped about – showing off his agility.

Then Bird spoke: “But I was the animal who flew over the ground that was barren. I carried a seed in my mouth. I threw down the seed from which came this great tree. Surely, you must see that I was the first animal to have discovered the tree.

All of the animals had to acknowledge that Bird was the animal who was present at the very beginning of the life of the tree. Elephant – the biggest animal – was the last to have seen the tree; Monkey – the next in size – was the next in time. Rabbit came next, both in size and time; and finally, Bird – the smallest of the four animals – was the first to have discovered the tree.

So Monkey stood on Elephant’s back and Rabbit sat on the shoulders of Monkey and Bird perched on the head of Rabbit. All four animals stood happily in harmony under the tree: the biggest was “smallest”, and the smallest was “biggest”.

Moral: You cannot tell the importance of a person by his strength, his power, or his size. Instead, you must listen to each other, and allow every person to share the shade of the tree of life.