

Chapter 5 of 'The Monkey King'

Adopted from the classic Chinese tale



Monkey meets a Sage

STORY SO FAR:

The Monkey King, in pursuit of a sage who can teach him the secrets of life, wanders into a dark forest, where he comes upon the cave of Master Subhodi.

A Breakfast Serials story

The enormous cave doors groaned open. A tiny child dressed in filmy white silk emerged from inside. Peering about, she called, "Where is the one for Master Subhodi?"

Monkey King, looking down from the tree, was too frightened to answer.

The child looked around again and shouted, "Is there anybody here who was born from a stone?"

Monkey was so startled, he tumbled out of the tree and fell at the child's feet. He peeked up at her. "Little one, I was born from a stone."

The tiny child looked down. "You naughty monkey! Hiding in a tree. Hurry. Master is waiting for you."

"Are you sure he's waiting for me?" Monkey asked, truly astonished.

"Did you come from a far-away mountain?" the child asked. "Are you here to study how to live forever?"

"That's me," Monkey said with delight. "Truly, your master must be wise if he already knows who I am."

"Master Subhodi knows everything. Now come along," the child replied.

Monkey followed the child into the cave, which was filled with a soft blue light. Where the light came from he could not tell.

After walking along for about a hundred paces, the tiny child suddenly vanished. "Child!" Monkey called. "Where did you go?"

No answer. She was gone. Monkey never saw her again.

"Silly trick! Nothing s-scaries me," Monkey told himself, and walked on.

Momentarily he came to a room that held a large platform made of rare woods, woods which gave off a delicate perfume. Around the platform, on mats, sat thirty students. On the platform, sitting still as a statue, with his legs crossed, was Master Subhodi.

Master Subhodi's long beard and eyebrows were snowy white. His round face was kind; his eyes gleamed with knowledge and wisdom. Everything about him was solemn and dignified.

"Master!" shouted Monkey, shattering the silence of the cave and startling several students as he made a clumsy bow before the sage. "I offer you my most humble respects!"

"Where are you from?" the master asked, unruffled. His voice was soft and deep.

"I am from the great Mountain of Flowers and Fruits in the glorious province of Ao-lai," Monkey said.

"I was born from a huge stone atop that mountain. I am also the Magnificent King of the Monkey Clan."

The trace of a smile appeared on Master Subhodi's face. A great sage, he already knew about Monkey. In fact, Master Subhodi had been waiting for him. But all he said now was, "Tell me what you wish to learn."

"To live forever!" Monkey wanted to say, but he decided it was better to sound modest. Instead, he said, "I wish to learn any kind of wisdom you can teach me."

Master Subhodi laughed gently. Here is a naughty one, he thought. I shall test him first. So he said, "Monkey, there are three hundred and sixty schools of wisdom. We start with 'Quietism.' It teaches you how to be thoughtful, and restrained in word and deed."

Monkey frowned. "Will . . . will it teach me how to live forever?"

"Certainly not."

"I don't think I desire that kind of wisdom."

"Very well," said Master Subhodi. "What about natural philosophy? You'll learn to read a lot of sacred texts."

"Will that teach me how to live forever?"

"I'm afraid reading would be too boring for me. I'm a monkey, after all. I can't sit still."

"I see," said Master Subhodi. "Then what about the wisdom of exercises? You will learn to balance your Yin and Yang and develop your breathing powers."

"Will that teach me how to live forever?" asked Monkey.

"Not at all."

"Master," said Monkey, "I'm not good at things which are difficult. Teach me something quick and easy."

Master Subhodi seemed to lose his patience. "You won't learn this!" he cried. "You won't learn that! How dare you call yourself a student!" He stood up and strode over to Monkey.

The students gasped. Master Subhodi stared hard into Monkey's eyes. Suddenly he lifted his right hand and struck Monkey on the head! Slap! Slap! Slap! Three times. Then he folded his hands behind his back and walked away.

The students were stupefied. Never before had they seen the master lose his temper.

"Master!" Monkey cried out. Master Subhodi turned, gave Monkey a very strange look, and walked off into an inner room.

The students glared at Monkey.

"Go back to your mountain, Monkey!" one of them shouted. "I don't think Master wants to teach you anything."

Monkey, ignoring the taunts, was truly puzzled. He felt that the master had been trying to tell him something. A secret, perhaps? But what? Monkey touched his head where Master had struck him.

Suddenly a broad grin appeared on Monkey's face.

He was quite certain he knew the answer.

(To be continued next week...)

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CHAPTER 5

Activity Guide



Just the Facts

1. Who came out of the cave to greet Monkey?
2. According to Master Subhodi, how many schools of wisdom were there?
3. How many students were studying with Master Subhodi?

Between the Lines

4. What did the tiny child do that frightened Monkey?
5. What about Master Subhodi's appearance suggested that he was the spiritual leader?
6. According to Master Subhodi, what school of wisdom taught you to be thoughtful and restrained?
7. Why did Monkey say he didn't want to study natural philosophy?
8. How did the other students react to the meeting between Monkey and Master Subhodi?

Let's Discuss

9. What did Monkey really want to learn from Master Subhodi?
10. What do you think about the way Monkey talked to Master Subhodi?
11. Make a prediction: What message was Master Subhodi giving Monkey?

VOCABULARY

- delicate perfume, (adjective)** pleasing to the sense of smell
- natural philosophy, (adj, noun)** study of the natural world, like physical science
- hundred paces, (n)** about 100 human steps
- province, (n)** a division of a country, like a state
- sacred texts, (adj)** related to religion
- stupefied, (adj)** extremely surprised, astonished
- Yin and Yang, (n)** two opposing principles in the Chinese study of the universe; yin is female and passive and is represented by darkness, cold, and wetness; yang is masculine and is represented by light, heat, and dryness

In the Real World

Find news stories about three different subjects you would like to learn about. How would learning about each of these topics make you a better person?

Competition

Hey kids!!! Send in your answers to the Activity Guide for each chapter and win great prizes, with the compliments of Vijitha Yapa Bookshops. The best entry each week will be awarded a book voucher for Rs. 1,000. These weekly entries will also be eligible for lots of exciting prizes at 'The Monkey King' Grand Competition at the end of the serial story. (See page 9 for details)

