

A Tale: The Four Harmonious Brothers



Long ago in the dense jungle near Kashi (Varanasi) lived a grouse, a hare, a monkey and an elephant. They dwelt together in peace and harmony. Wishing to know which among them was the eldest so that they might accord each other appropriate respect, the grouse asked each of them to tell how they first remembered seeing a particular tree.

The elephant and the monkey recalled seeing it when it was the same size as themselves. The rabbit had drunk dew drops off it when it had but two leaves, while the bird said that he had eaten some seeds and that the tree had sprouted from his droppings. Discovering their proper order of seniority in this way they went about with the monkey riding on the elephant's back, the hare on its shoulders and the grouse perched on top of the hare.

They decided to enter the path of virtue by observing the five basic moral deeds, avoiding: killing, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants. Having made these the basis of their own conduct, they set out to teach them to the other animals in the forest. The resulting harmony brought great peace and prosperity to the kingdom.

One day, the king and queen and their ministers asked a clairvoyant hermit to tell them the cause of their good fortune. He explained that it was because of the animals' good conduct. When they expressed a wish to see the animals, the hermit told them it was unnecessary for they could achieve the same by following the same precepts. This they did and the kingdom enjoyed great wealth and prosperity