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A STRANGE HEAVEN

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Once upon a time there was a farmer who lived with his four sons. They were good for nothing but the youngest was very sensible. His name was Pankaj. The farmer loved Pankaj the most; whenever he went to the far corners of the country he would bring for Pankaj toys and new clothes. These things made Pankaj very happy. Then one day the farmer's wife died. But the farmer did not remarry for the sake of his sons. The farmer would do everything by himself. He did the household chores like washing dishes and fetching firewood himself. Sometimes Pankaj would also help. But Pankaj was very young. What could he do? Still he did whatever he was capable of. The farmer's other three sons were useless and worthless. He, therefore, remained very unhappy. Once he went to fetch some fodder for his calf. The moment he began to cut the grass he slipped from a rock and rolled down and got deeply injured. He died at the spot. When the news of his death reached his sons, Pankaj cried aloud. But what could be done now? What had happened cannot be reversed. But the unhappy times were there to stay with Pankaj. His brothers separated him from them. But Pankaj did not lose courage. The creator of the world, God, was there to help poor Pankaj face the difficulties.

Pankaj collected the toys that his father had given him. He bought some more things and with them set up a shop. Within a few days he began to earn enough money. He thought to himself that a drop at a time makes an ocean. Then in another few days he earned a lot of money. Then he set a new and a bigger shop. This shop also earned him a lot of money. His brothers became jealous of him. They schemed of killing him. They said to Pankaj that they wanted to work as his servants in his shop. Pankaj took pity on them. He hired them as his servants. But the three brothers never did any work during the day. Pankaj told them that without hard work nothing can be achieved in the world. Even animals do some work whereas they were men with hands to work. This made no impression on his brothers. Then they decided to kill him. They put him in a gunny sack and threw him in the well during the night. The well was not very deep. Pankaj survived by God's grace. When Pankaj returned home his brothers were amazed to see him alive and asked him how he was saved since they had thrown him in the well. Then Pankaj realised that base people should be treated deservedly, so he, in order to avenge himself, told them that the well in which they had thrown him actually led to heaven. He said that he even met his dead parents there. Pankaj's brothers were fools. They asked him to put them also in a bag and throw them in the well. They also wanted to meet their dead parents. Pankaj thought to himself that fools should be treated like fools. Then Pankaj put his three brothers in a bag and threw them in another deep well from which it was difficult to be saved. Pankaj had told them about a strange heaven. Then he returned home and began to live in peace. He repented the fact that he had killed his own brothers but had he been honest enough they would have killed him instead. Someone has rightly said that fools should be treated like fools.

Original Himachali Folktale: *Anokhā Swarg* by Thakur Dutta Sharma in *Kathā Sarvari*. Bhag-1. Himachal Kala, Sanskriti Bhasha Academy, Shimla. Jan. 1977. p. 48-49.

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