

## Of Goats & Things!

Once upon a time, a goat was about to have its throat slit by a very righteous holy man when much to the man's surprise - the goat spoke.

"I shouldn't do that if I were you," it said.

The righteous holy man, somewhat taken aback replied, "ha, you can speak!"

"Indeed" replied the goat, somewhat sardonically.

"Ah, then why do you now speak to me at this most perilous time of your life?" - he asked.

"To give you some honest advice and to warn you at the same time," said the goat.

"Bah! what nonsense is this? How can you warn me when I am sitting here with my very sharp knife at your throat?" asked the righteous holy man, somewhat perplexed.

"Well, believe it or not, I am not trying to have my life spared, no, I am trying to save you from yourself," replied the goat.

"Oh really, then do, prey tell," said the righteous holy man, disdainfully.

"Well, believe it or not, not so very long ago, I too was once a very righteous holy man, and I remember one day when just such an event as this happened to me. And, like you, I disbelieved that goat who told me its fantastic tale ... and I have suffered greatly ever since," replied the goat, mournfully.

"Okay, then prey tell, my 'righteous holy man' - what did 'that goat' tell you?" asked the very righteous holy man, completely at a loss to believe he was even bothering to listen to a word this silly old goat was speaking.

Unperturbed, the goat replied, "He told me that once upon a time, he too had also been a very 'righteous holy man', and that he too had been told by another goat the very selfsame story. And upon hearing its tale, he simply thought that either himself and/or the goat were crazy, and so he didn't listen either. Then, not too long afterwards, he died ... and then he too became a goat, with all his previous life memories of being a human still intact. And shortly thereafter, he was put to the knife by another very righteous holy man - who also happened to have been a good friend of his in his former existence -- and he remembered the kiss of that knife as if it was only yesterday: it hurt like hell, a recurring memory that remained fresh on his mind on every occasion thereafter. This kept on happening until 49 such horrifying experiences had occurred, and on the 50th occasion, he - the goat - suddenly discovered he could speak. So he told another very 'righteous holy man' who was about to relieve him of his life, his sad story. And of course, that righteous holy man totally disbelieved him and so, in a flash, that goat's life was ended. And mercifully, for that reformed and repentant goat, that was the end of its long and harrowing journey. Shortly thereafter, that 'righteous holy man' who had just ended that poor old goat's life - died suddenly, and awoke one day to find that he too had become a goat, with all the previous life memories of his human existence still intact. And, after adjusting to the shock of his new life, he was mostly content, as he thought life as a goat was fine, chewing grass, free of any responsibilities and generally having a quiet time of it all, when, one fine sunny day, he was suddenly separated from the rest of the herd and delivered up unto his former friend -- another very 'righteous holy man' --

who promptly proceeded to ... well, you know the next bit already, so I won't bore you." replied the goat, somewhat sadly.

"What a load of stuff and nonsense," said the very righteous holy man, "how do you know this to be true?" he asked.

"Well, I was that 'righteous holy man' who in turn became 'that goat'," replied the goat, sadly.

"Is that so," said the righteous holy man, quizzically, "and now I suppose you are trying to save your miserable hide by telling me this fabulous and quite unbelievable tale in the hope that I will spare you ... well, I won't, because you're just a miserable filthy stinking old goat and I am going to eat you for my supper, so there!" - he said, emphatically. And with that, he raised the knife in the air, ready to slash the mournful goat's throat when the goat spoke its final words...

"Master, I tell you my story not to have you stay your hand and spare my miserable existence, but to spare you the agonies which I and many others like me have endured for our sins. Be warned, for every goat whose throat we had slashed, we would suffer the same fate seven times seven; and as we all discovered, we only found a voice on the next occasion, it being the final day of release. So now, whether you believe it or not, I truly do look forward to my final rest. And now that I have told you these things, you must do as you think best. My time has come, I know, and truthfully, I feel naught but sorrow for you."

And with that, the very righteous holy man just laughed out loud and said, "what nonsense - I'm actually talking to a stinky old goat, absolutely ridiculous!" and then he slashed the goat's throat in one swift and practiced movement, thereby finally ending the debate.

Within a couple of days, this very righteous holy man met with a sudden accident and died. Well, he thought he'd died: when he eventually came to, he slowly opened his eyes and found himself in a barn - surrounded by many other goats, all looking rather mournful and sorrowfully at him, and because his memory was intact and as clear as day, he imagined that he'd drunk too much wine with his supper and had had a bad dream and fallen asleep in the barn. But when he tried to get up, his legs felt a bit weird ... and when he got up off his haunches, he stumbled and banged his chin on the hard earth ... and it hurt, so he let out an involuntary 'ouch!' - but the sound that reached his ears was not - 'ouch!' - it was but a bleat ... the bleat of a goat.

### **The End**

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author's note: The above tale was inspired by an old proverb (possibly?) or even by a similar such story that I must have heard / read / seen - somewhere or other, once upon a time.