

# A Giving Heart

*A Collection of Stories and Fables  
from Various Religions in Singapore*



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## Foreword

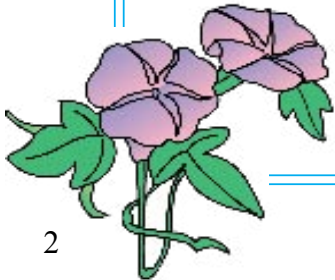
Singapore is a multi-racial and multi-religious nation. While respecting each other's space, we also seek to enlarge the common space in which we live, work and play together.

In appreciating the rich diversity of our society, the Inter-Religious Harmony Circle (IRHC) is proud to present 'A Giving Heart', the third in a series of such books which began in 2005. This special collection of stories, graciously contributed by the IRHC members, revolves around the spirit of giving and sharing. Each story takes us on a journey that shows how generosity and kindness can bridge the divide between human beings.

Through this book, we share the messages that are central to the heart of every religion and hope to inspire our readers to reflect on the importance of giving and sharing.



CHAN SOO SEN  
Chairman  
Inter-Religious Harmony Circle



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## 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the New Coat

Abbás Effendi was better known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He was humble, kind-hearted and selfless. 'Abdu'l-Bahá always thought of others before himself and preferred to do things that would benefit everyone. Because of his selflessness, 'Abdu'l-Bahá bought simple, inexpensive clothes and food for himself. If he had extra clothing or food, he would give it away to those in need.

One day, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wife thought that she would surprise him with a new coat for he was going to be entertaining the Governor of 'Akká very soon. She examined his old coat. "Such an old coat is not good enough for such an important occasion with such an important man!" she thought. So, well ahead of time, she went to a tailor and ordered a fine new coat for 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She hoped he would not notice that his old coat had been replaced. After all, all he usually desired was to be meticulously clean.



On the day of the Governor's visit, the new coat was laid out for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but he went searching for his old one. He asked for his old coat, saying that the one laid out could not be his. His wife attempted to explain that because of the importance of the occasion she had bought him a new coat. But, 'Abdu'l-Bahá could not accept it. He told her that for the price of the new coat, five simple ones, like the one he usually wore, could be bought. He told her that there was no reason to spend so much money for an expensive coat just for him. Since however, she thought that he truly needed a new coat, he sent the expensive one back to the tailor and ordered five simple, ordinary coats for the same amount of money.



Happily he told her, "Now you see, I have a new coat, but I have four new coats to give to others who need it as well!"

## How to Give Away Poverty

The Buddha had a great disciple called Mahakasyapa, who had the habit of generously creating opportunities, especially for the poor, to let them cultivate merit through their acts of charity.



One day, he came across a penniless old woman. Despite her poverty, he held out his alms bowl, politely inviting her to bestow upon him an offering of food. When the poor woman saw his empty bowl, she began to weep with shame, saying sadly, “I would very much like to give to you whatever I have, but I’m afraid I have nothing at all!”

Mahakasyapa replied, “But you do have something! You have clothing on you. True generosity is not determined by how much you give, but rather by the sincerity with which you offer whatever you can for the benefit of another.” Upon hearing this, the old woman tore off a piece of cloth from her sleeve, and offered it to him with great joy. “This little piece of cloth might come in useful someday to patch your robes!”



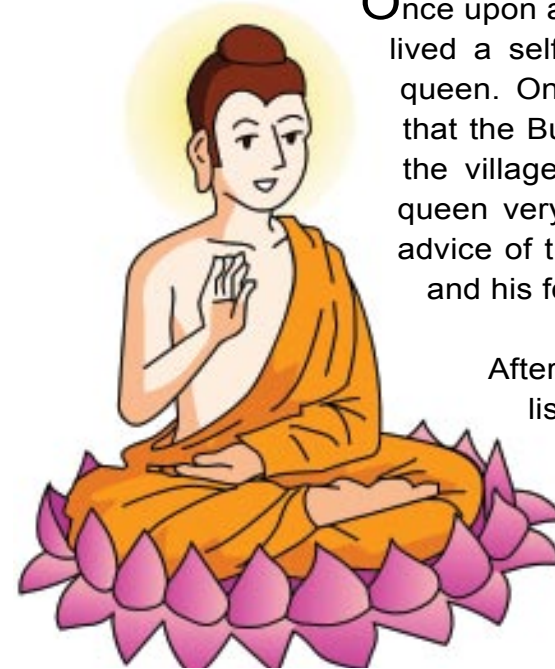
Buddhists believe that poverty can be ‘given away’ by the practice of generosity. By the very act of giving, we are able to give up our miserliness and recognize how ‘much’ we actually have. We can then be grateful for what we have even if it seems ‘little’. Though at first, even sparing a cent might hurt, one can soon get over it. In this way, one finds that true generosity also leads to an awareness of one’s real wealth.

In another such story, a disciple of the Buddha named Ananda asked a poor village girl for a drink of water. Ashamed of her lack of status, the girl remarked, "I fear my lowliness might contaminate your nobility." Ananda graciously replied, "I ask not for your status but for water." Hearing this, the girl's heart leapt with joy, and she offered the thankful Ananda a refreshing bowl of water.

Buddhists believe that a poor person giving little might, in fact, gain more spiritual merit than a rich person – for the sacrifice is more. However, rich or poor, it is best to give simply, with a truly generous heart, to benefit others - the gift of effort, time, comfort, life, freedom... and most of all, the gift of teachings of truth.



## The Generous Queen and the Selfish King

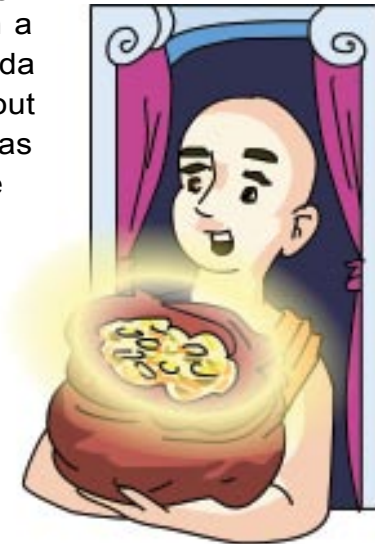


Once upon a time in ancient India, there lived a selfish king and his generous queen. One day, they received news that the Buddha had arrived at one of the villages in their kingdom. As the queen very much wished to seek the advice of the Buddha, she invited him and his followers to visit the palace.

After spending an entire day listening to the Buddha's wonderful teachings, the queen felt that she should offer a worthy gift as a token of her great appreciation. Accepting the offer, the

Buddha asked Ananda to receive the queen's gift. It turned out to be a big bag of gold. The queen was confident that the wise disciples of the Buddha would put it to good use.

However, when the king heard about his wife's gift, he became very suspicious. "Ananda must have tricked the queen into giving him so much gold!" he thought, and so he called for Ananda to question him.





The king asked, "What are you going to do with so much money?" Ananda replied, "I will go to the market and buy all the cloth that we can carry."

"But what will you do with all the cloth?"

"We will sew five hundred suits of clothes."

"But what will you do with the new clothes?"

"We will give them to the many villagers dressed in rags."

"But what will you do with their old clothes?"

"We will make them into new quilts."

"But what will you do with the old quilts?"

"We will make them into new pillows."

"But what will you do with the old pillows?"

"We will make them into new rugs."

"But what will you do with the old rugs?"

"We will make them into new doormats."

"But what will you do with the old doormats?"

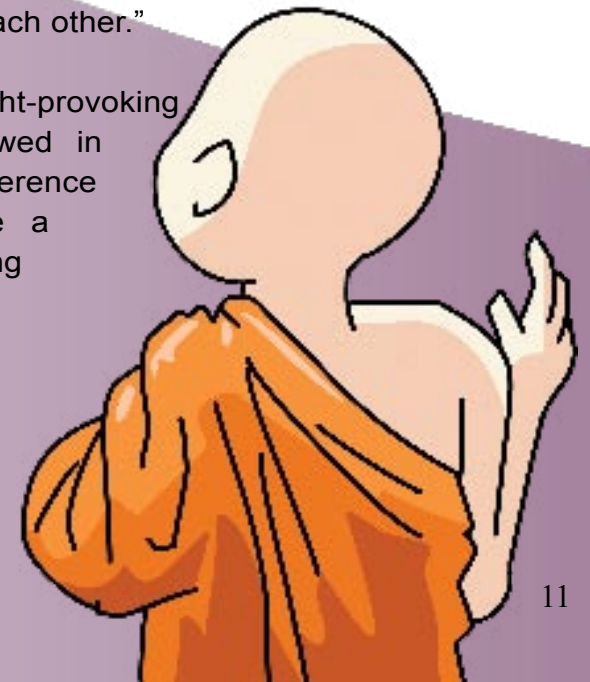
"We will make them into new brooms."

"But what will you do with the old brooms?"

"Well, Your Highness, we will take them apart and use them for plastering the walls of our houses - to strengthen them. Praise to the Queen! All these blessings for so many are made possible only with the generosity of Her Highness."

"In this way, Your Highness, everything that comes to each of us, no matter how great or small it is, should be used thoughtfully and thoroughly with great care and purpose. Nothing is really ours to own forever, since everything we have in the universe is a temporary gift lent for our use. Therefore, whenever possible, these gifts should be shared. May all be mindful of this in the passage of life. And may all treasure and share their blessings with each other."

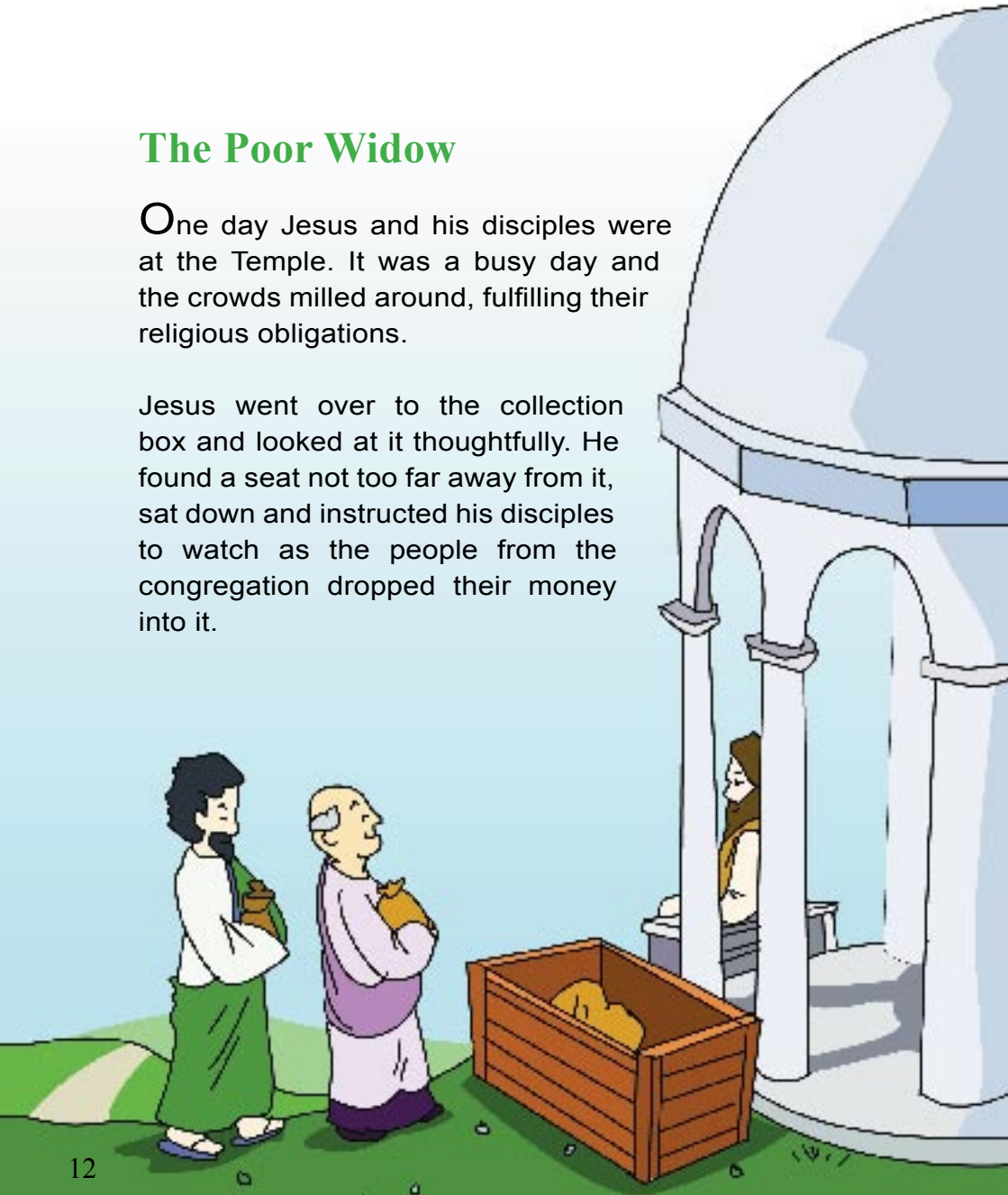
Hearing these thought-provoking words, the king bowed in repentance and reverence and resolved to be a more giving and caring king.



## The Poor Widow

One day Jesus and his disciples were at the Temple. It was a busy day and the crowds milled around, fulfilling their religious obligations.

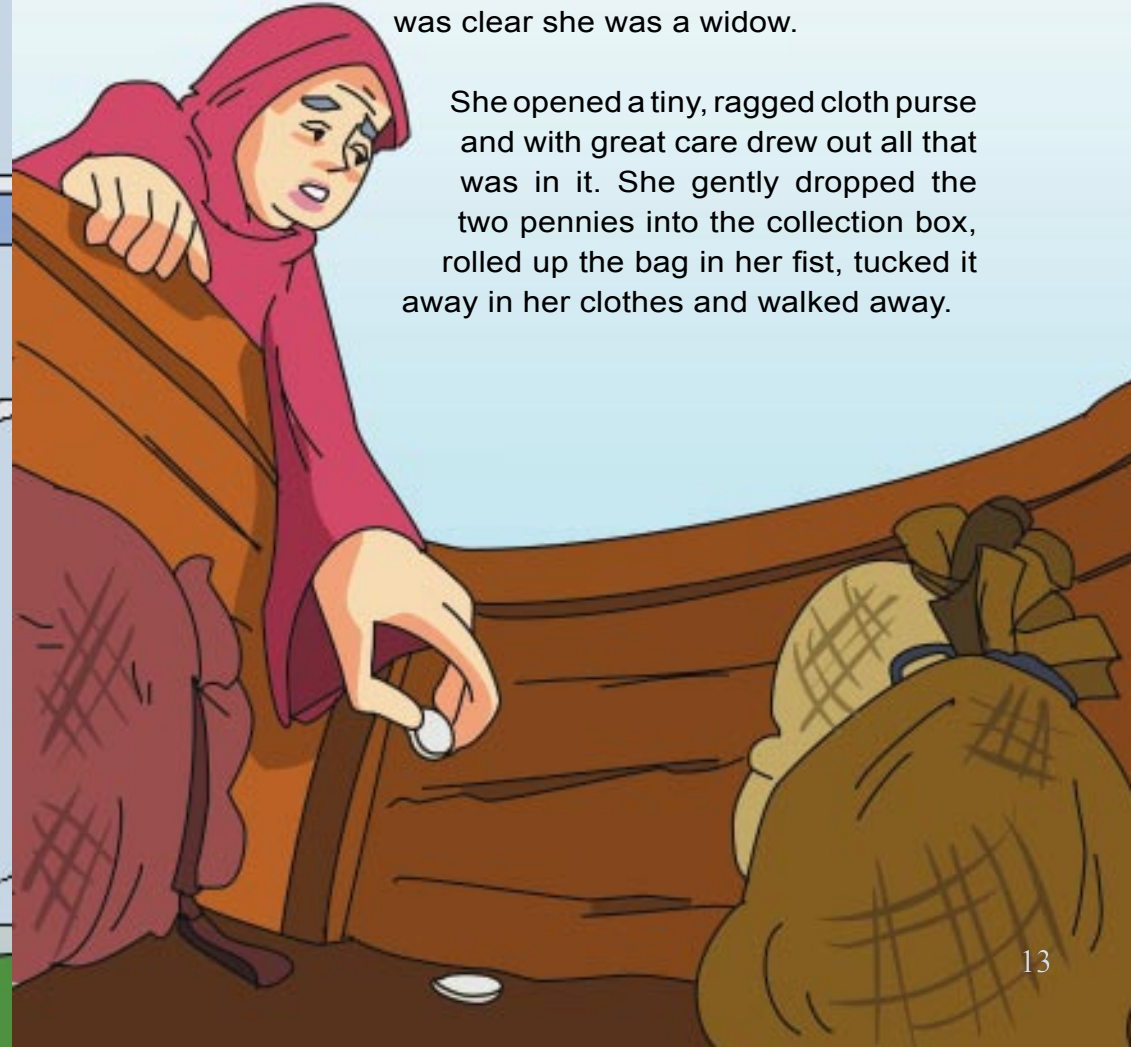
Jesus went over to the collection box and looked at it thoughtfully. He found a seat not too far away from it, sat down and instructed his disciples to watch as the people from the congregation dropped their money into it.



Many rich merchants strode by proudly. They took out large amounts of money and dropped them into the box with self-satisfied smiles. It was clear that they could well afford the donations.

Jesus noticed a poor old lady standing in the corner. She waited until all the rich people had made their offerings. Then, when she thought no one was watching, she came up quietly to the box. From the way she was dressed, it was clear she was a widow.

She opened a tiny, ragged cloth purse and with great care drew out all that was in it. She gently dropped the two pennies into the collection box, rolled up the bag in her fist, tucked it away in her clothes and walked away.



Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “Did you see what I just saw? I assure you, in the eyes of God, this poor widow has given more than all the others who went before her have given. For they gave a tiny part of what they have, and they have much. But she, poor as she is, has given everything she has!”



## A Different Birthday Party

Nine-year-old Sean McCarthy, was very excited! His birthday was coming soon and he always looked forward to that. He wondered how he could make it extra special this year. He knew his friends would come and enjoy themselves. He knew they would bring him presents. They always did!

Then, one day, while waiting for his mother to pick him up from school, Sean glanced at the monthly newsletter. A picture of a young boy, about his age, caught his eye. The boy looked straight into the camera, and though he smiled, his face was gaunt and bony. The boy lay on the ground with grime and dirt all around him.

Sean skimmed the headline and then read, with growing concern, of the plight of young refugees who had had to flee their homes and live in very difficult conditions. He read of lives without any of the conveniences that he took for granted - no telephones, no televisions, no electricity and no computer games. But that was not all – there



were children growing up with no homes of their own, no drinking water, and nothing but the tattered clothes on their backs. Worse still, some of the children had no parents, and no adults to care for them.

“What can I do for them?” Sean wondered to himself. All through the drive home he was quiet and thoughtful.

The next day, he told his mother, “Mom, when you organise a birthday party for me this year, I want to do something different.” “What do you want to do, Sean?” his mother asked, half expecting him to ask for a wild theme party. She was surprised by his reply.

Showing his mother the newsletter Sean said, “I want to ask all my friends not to bring me any presents. Instead, the money that they would have otherwise spent on me should go to the refugees. I want them to donate the money for the cause of the refugee children.”

Sean’s mum, Vivien, started to act on his idea and an email was sent to all of Sean’s friends and their parents.



The email highlighted the plight of the refugees. When his friends read it, they were all very eager to contribute to this charitable project.

On the day of the party, all his friends came, bringing with them whatever amount -- big or small -- that they had saved. A special box had been made for their donations. They put in their contributions happily and wished Sean a happy birthday.

At the end of the day, the collection came to four hundred and ninety-five dollars. It was the biggest amount of money that Sean had ever held in his hands in his whole life! He was very grateful for this and thanked all his friends for sharing with him the joy of helping the refugees and the less fortunate ones in life.

As his father pointed out, one little act of kindness is all it takes to make a difference to others. He quoted the world famous and well-loved Mother Teresa, “We all don’t have to do great things for God, but we all can do small things with great love. This is more important.”



## Shibi Rana – The Righteous

The king Shibi Rana was so famous for his truthfulness, justice, and honour, that the God of Righteousness, Dharmaraja, himself, decided to test the strength of Shibi Rana's character.



Shibi Rana was alone on the terrace of his palace when a dove flew frantically towards him trying to escape from the clutches of an eagle. The dove landed on the king's lap and pleaded, "Oh King, please save my life!"

The king had vowed to protect anyone who sought his shelter. As a just king, it was his duty to see that the rich and strong did not exploit the weak. However, this was a new problem. Was he obliged to protect a bird? The king then decided that even trees, animals and birds required protection and help.



He said, "Have no fear, my son." and readied himself to face the rapidly approaching eagle.

The eagle landed in front of the king and said, "Oh King, you have hidden my prey. Please release him so that I can appease my hunger."

The righteous king understood the eagle's demand. This was a dilemma. How was he to protect the dove and at the same time allow the eagle his rightful prey?

He offered the eagle an equal amount of meat from his royal kitchen. But the eagle insisted on having his prey, the dove, as his food. After some discussion the eagle agreed to set the dove free on two conditions. "Oh King, I shall let the dove go, if an equal weight of flesh from your body is offered to me as food. But, if a single tear drops from your eye I will not accept your flesh as my food."

Shibi Rana agreed. He thought that a pound or two of flesh from his body would not kill him and would save the life of the dove.

The king called for the knives and the weighing scales. The dove was placed in one pan, and what seemed to be an equal amount of flesh from Shibi Rana's right thigh was cut and placed on the other pan. But strangely, the pan with the dove always weighed more even as additional flesh was added! In this way, almost the whole of the right half of the king's body was cut. Still the dove seemed to weigh more!



At this juncture, a teardrop appeared in the left eye of the king. The eagle objected, "Oh king, I cannot accept food given in distress. The tear shows that you are unhappy. So give me back my prey and you shall regain your normal health."

Shibi Rana smiled, "Behold, Oh eagle, my left eye is not crying out of grief. This is a tear of joy. Now the left half of my body will also be used to honour the word I have given to you. If only the right half had satisfied you, the left half of the body would have been denied this great opportunity of sacrifice! Therefore, my dear friend, the left eye cries out of joy!"

The eagle and the dove disappeared and in their places stood the God of Righteousness - Dharmaraja and the God of Heaven - Indra. They granted many boons to Shibi Rana, who ruled for many more years.



Shibi Rana was a noble king, ready to give up his life to keep his word. Similarly, each of us has our own duties to fulfill, as students, as children, as brothers and sisters and as parents. We have duties in our homes and at work. We should know our duties well and carry them out selflessly.

## Prophet Muhammad - A Gift for All

**B**ilal bin Abi Rabah, a close companion of the Prophet Muhammad, had borrowed money from a non-believer. When the time for repayment drew near, the latter said to Bilal, "If you do not pay my loan in time, I will make you a slave in lieu of your debt! You will return to the days when you tended to your master's sheep in slavery."

After the evening prayer, a very worried Bilal came to Prophet Muhammad and confided in him, "There is no way I can pay this debt so quickly. I have no choice but to go into hiding."

By God's will, the next morning, the ruler of the city of Fadak sent the Prophet some gifts. The Prophet did not keep the gifts for himself. Instead, he said to Bilal, "God has provided a means to pay your debt. Take these four camels which are laden with gifts sent by the ruler of Fadak, and pay your debts." Bilal went immediately to do so.

When he returned, Prophet Muhammad asked: "Is there anything left of the gifts?"

Bilal replied, "Yes, there is something left over."



The Prophet, who constantly preached the universal value of giving and sharing, said, "Distribute it all among the poor, so that I may be at ease."

Evening fell and there were still some gifts left. After the prayer, Bilal said to the Prophet, "The needy ones have not arrived, and there is still some left." The Prophet then decided to spend the night in the mosque waiting for the job to be completed.

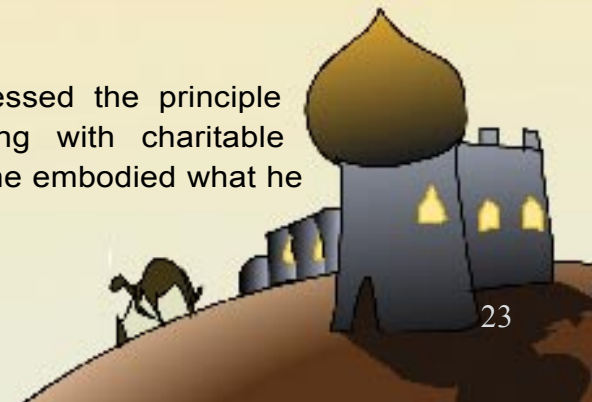
The next day after the morning prayer, Bilal informed the Prophet, "God has freed you from this responsibility. Everything has been distributed."

Prophet Muhammad then thanked Allah, and went home.

In another such story, a companion, 'Uqba Ibn Harith, recalled that once, after the noon prayers, the Prophet made a quick visit home before he hurried out again.

When asked why he had done so, Prophet Muhammad replied, "I had collected some gold coins for charity and wanted to distribute them immediately. I did not want the gold to remain with me until the next day. It was intended for charity and I was worried about delaying its distribution."

Prophet Muhammad stressed the principle of integrity when dealing with charitable causes and, in this way, he embodied what he preached.

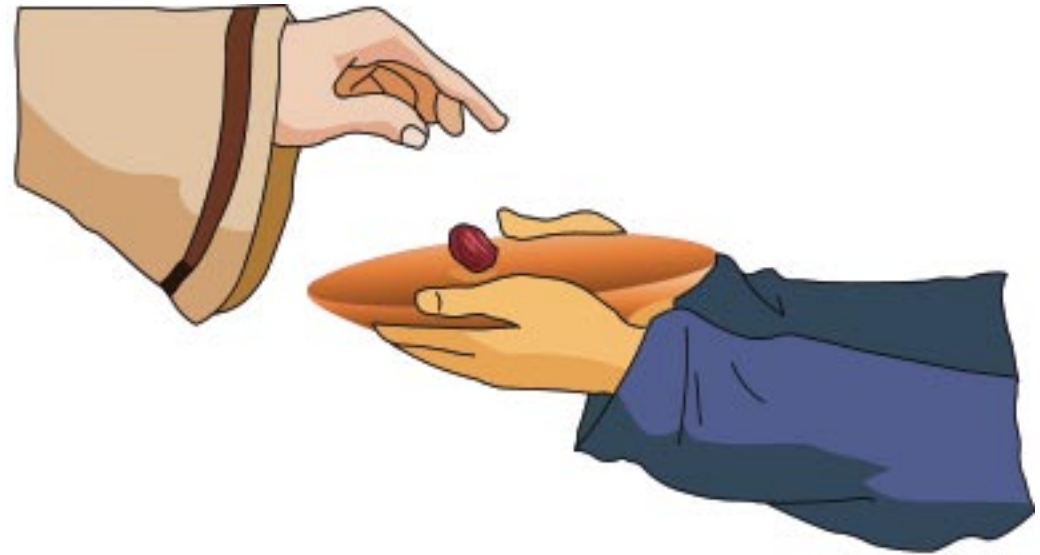


## Honour Your Daughters

One day a poor widow, accompanied by her two daughters, came to Prophet Muhammad's door and begged for alms. "We have nothing to eat. Please, I beg you, have pity on me and my daughters!" she pleaded. Aishah, the wife of the Prophet, wondered what to do. She had just finished her meal and had no money or food in the house at the time, except for one small fruit of the date palm. Still, she offered that willingly to the woman.



The woman accepted it and was grateful for what she had been given. She split the date in half and gave one piece each to her daughters, while she herself went hungry.



After they had left, the Prophet came in and Aishah related the incident to him. The Prophet was greatly touched by the spirit of sacrifice shown by the mother of the girls.

He explained to Aishah the importance of treating daughters properly, and pointed out that those who treated their daughters well and safeguarded their future, despite trials and tribulations, would be protected from hell.

In this way, the Prophet showed the value he placed on the women in society.

## Twice the Joy and Three Times the Blessing

Once there was a very rich man who was a miser. He was well-known in the town. “He is a billionaire, and yet takes great care not to give even one rupee to charity – not even by mistake!” some would complain.

“Yes, he is so stingy, if a fly were to fall in hot oil, he would grab it and squeeze the fly of the last drop of oil!” others would agree.

But, now an epidemic was spreading quickly in the area, and money was badly needed. The poor, the sick and the dying needed medicines, food and clothes.



A saint from the town did his best to help in every way he could, but while there was misery aplenty, money was short. The saint decided to appeal to the rich people of the town to help. Still, he could not get enough. He thought hard of a plan.



He went to the miser. “Sethji,” he greeted the man respectfully, “I have a request to make of you. If you will give me a cheque for ten thousand rupees in the morning, I will return it to you in the evening. I assure you, you will not lose a single rupee.”

The miser was surprised, but very curious. He considered the matter, and knew that the saint could be trusted. So he gave him the cheque.

The saint took the cheque to the other rich men in the town. When they saw the amount on the cheque, they were greatly surprised. If this notorious miser could donate so much, they could certainly do better! So, each of them gave as much they could.

In the evening, the saint took the first cheque back to the miser. “Sethji, thank you for making my task so easy. When people saw the amount you had given me, they were happy to give large sums of money too! Now, you can have your money back!”

However, the miser refused to take back his cheque. "Santji," he responded, 'I am amazed at the difference this cheque has made in my life. Many of the rich people you showed this cheque to came and congratulated me for my contribution. Others called me on the telephone to convey their admiration. They spoke of how impressed they were by the generosity a man like me had displayed. I never imagined that an amount like this - really quite insignificant to me - could bring me so much admiration, respect and love! The joy it has brought me is far more than the pleasure I get from keeping the money. So, to double my joy, here is another cheque for an equal amount."



Like many other religions, Jains believe that the act of giving brings a triple blessing. It helps the needy, it develops true generosity of spirit, and it brings a sense of divine satisfaction to the giver.

*rupee* – the unit of currency in India

*Sethji* – a respectful form of address for a rich man

*Santji* – a respectful form of address for a saint



## Warmth In Winter

In a town lived a very rich miser. Every time the local rabbi came to his door to collect funds for the poor, the miser would invite the rabbi in, offer the rabbi a cup of tea and talk about his business.

When the rabbi started talking about the plight of the poor people in winter, the miser would brush him off and tell him that poor people like to complain - it wasn't all as bad as the rabbi thought. In any case, he had no cash in the house at the moment, and couldn't give anything right now. Could the rabbi come back another time? The miser would then escort the rabbi to the door, go back to his warm and comfortable room and settle down in his favourite chair near the fireplace, very pleased with himself.

But the rabbi was not pleased. The poor had no money for food or wood for their stoves and they were cold and hungry.



One evening, the rabbi knocked on the rich miser's door. It was a cold and miserable night. Snow and sleet blew through the deserted streets. The miser opened the door, "Come in!" he invited the rabbi, as usual. But, the rabbi refused. "No," he said, "I won't be long."

And then, standing in the open doorway, he inquired after the miser's health and after the health of his family. He asked him about his business, and then he spoke about the affairs of the community. He spoke for a long time. The miser could not send the rabbi away, of course; he had opened the door for him himself. But he was getting quite uncomfortable. He had come to the door in his slippers and skullcap, dressed in a thin shirt and his house pants. The rabbi, wearing a warm coat with a fur lining, his biggest shtraymel (fur hat) covering his ears and heavy winter boots encasing his feet and legs, talked on and on. No, he didn't want to come in. No, really, he was on his way. The miser's toes became ice and stone.

Suddenly the miser understood. "Oh, Rabbi!" he cried. "Those poor people with no warm clothes or firewood for winter... I never imagined it could be like this. This is miserable. It is horrible. I never knew, honestly! Something must be done!" He went into the house and returned with a purse full of gold coins. He wanted to go back to his fireplace as soon as he could. He needed hot tea. The rabbi thanked him and took the money. He, too, was cold after that long talk, but he didn't mind.



The poor people would have a good winter this year.

The miser changed his ways that night. He became a regular contributor to the rabbi's funds for the poor and the destitute, for poor brides, for poor students, for Passover money and for many other causes. He had learned a good lesson that night!

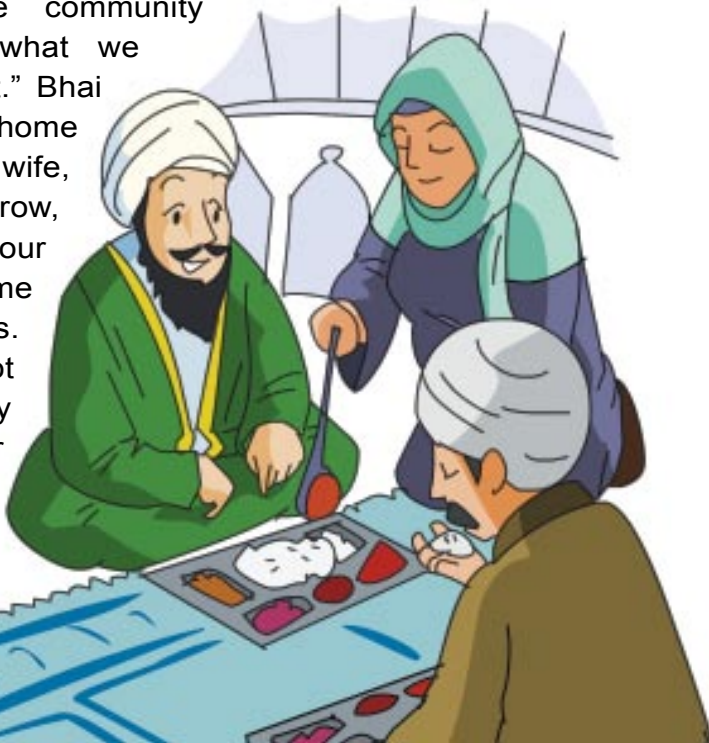


## Giving Without Expectation of Return

**B**hai Manjh, a disciple of Guru Arjun Dev Ji, would go daily to the nearby forest to collect dry wood, tie it into a bundle and carry it on his head to the Guru's kitchen. The wood was for the fire to prepare food for the devotees, the community and the travellers who visited the Guru daily. One day, the Guru was discussing the importance of contributions to the community and one of the disciples said, "Bhai Manjh makes a great contribution bringing wood daily for the fire".

The Guru asked, "Where do Bhai Manjh and his family get their food from?" "From the community kitchen," replied the disciple. The Guru spoke, "Bhai Manjh is not really contributing to the community. For his service, he and his family get paid in the form of food. We should always

give to the community more than what we take out of it." Bhai Manjh went home and told his wife, "From tomorrow, we will get our food by some other means. We should not expect any return for our service to the community."



From then on, Bhai Manjh would get up even earlier to gather wood. He would carry one bundle to the market, sell it and give the money he earned to his family for food and clothing. He would then go back to gather another bundle. This second bundle of wood, he would carry to the community kitchen for the fire to cook food. He would spend the rest of the day helping in the kitchen and dining hall with love and devotion. This continued for many years.

One day, when he was carrying the wood, such a dust storm arose that he could see nothing. Bhai Manjh stumbled and fell into a well. However, he did not let the wood get wet. He kept it dry by holding the bundle up on his head.



When Bhai Manjha failed to return at his usual time, people began to search for him. One man heard him call out from the well. The Guru and his disciples ran to rescue him. They threw a rope into the well and asked Bhai Manjha to pull himself out. Bhai Manjha called from the depths of the well, "Please, pull the wood out first. If it gets wet, it will not burn. If I am wet, nothing will happen to me." Bhai Manjha tied the bundle to the rope and it was pulled out. Only then did Bhai Manjha allow himself to be pulled out.

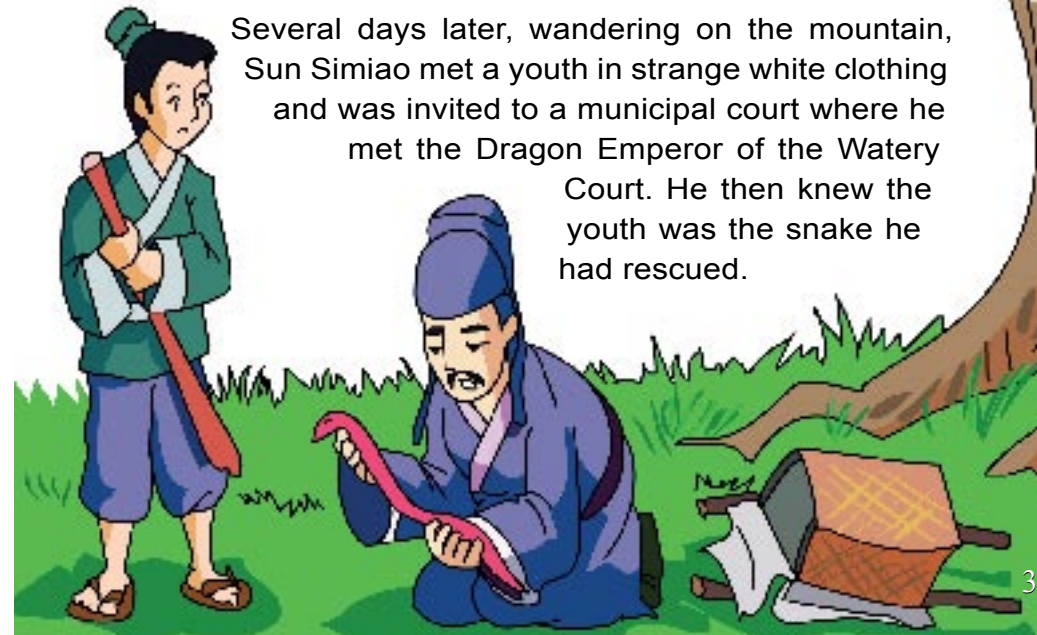
The Guru was very pleased indeed with the exemplary conduct of Bhai Manjha. He instructed all Sikhs to follow the example set by Bhai Manjha, to place the community above oneself and to give one's services unconditionally, without expecting anything in return.

## The Chinese Physician Sun Simiao

Sun Simiao was a famous Chinese physician who studied the Chinese classics and wrote some classic books of medicine, including 'A Thousand Golden Essential Prescriptions'. Over the centuries, people hailed his great medicinal achievements and he was regarded as a deity.

Sun Simiao lived in seclusion in the mountains and closely followed Taoist doctrine. One day, he saw a small snake being beaten by a shepherd boy. Sun Simiao took off his clothes and offered it to the boy in exchange for the snake. Then, he carefully tended to the wounded snake. Once it was well again, he released it into the thick bushes.

Several days later, wandering on the mountain, Sun Simiao met a youth in strange white clothing and was invited to a municipal court where he met the Dragon Emperor of the Watery Court. He then knew the youth was the snake he had rescued.



The Dragon Emperor entertained Sun Simiao lavishly and presented him with many treasures in gratitude for saving his son, but Sun Simiao firmly declined to accept them. He lived a simple life and did not need much. The Emperor then offered him more than thirty precious prescriptions. Sun Simiao accepted those with delight. He bade the Dragon Emperor farewell and returned to his mountain home. Sun Simiao found the prescriptions extremely effective. He included them in his book and was revered by the common people as “the God of Chinese medicine”.

Emperor Taizong of the Tang dynasty then summoned Sun Simiao to the palace. The Emperor looked at the old man with white hair, the young boyish face and the special air of a deity. Sun Simiao's Taoist posture convinced the Emperor that the physician knew the secret of immortality. But, Sun Simiao

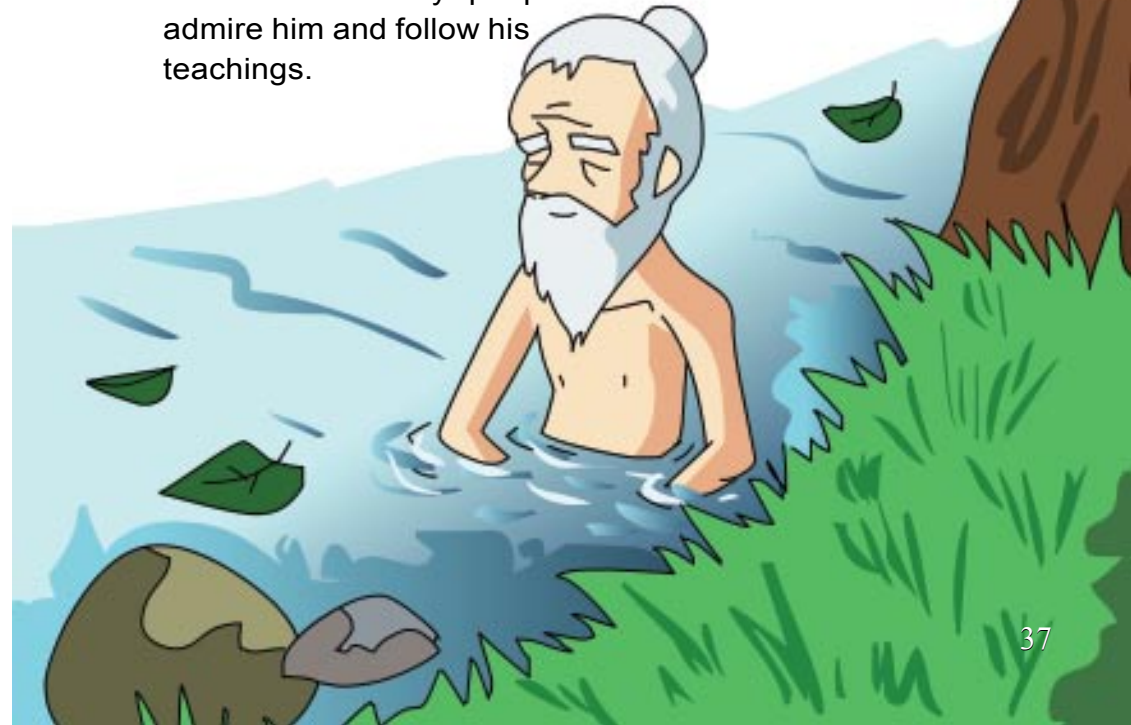
said, “I am a mountain hermit. I work hard at improving my medicines only to treat illness and to save the lives of patients during their natural lifespan. I have no supernatural powers that can bring the dead to life or provide immortality.”



Emperor Taizong was impressed with his honesty and wanted Sun Simiao to remain in the court as an official, but the physician declined. He returned to the mountains to serve the common people.

One day, as he bathed in the river, Sun Simiao passed away, still sitting majestically upright. It is said that a month after his death, his body remained life-like and even now, people look for the old path that he used to climb the mountain to gather his medicines.

Sun Simiao is revered not just for the Taoist doctrine he practiced and for his good health, but for the concern he showed for the people around him. He used his skills to relieve the distress of the common man. It is no wonder that many people admire him and follow his teachings.



## The Merchant and the Parrot

Once upon a time, there was a merchant who had a pretty parrot shut up in a cage. He was very fond of his pet and took great care of it. One day the merchant was going to travel to India. Being a generous man, he asked all his servants what kind of gift they wanted to have. Each of them asked for something and the merchant gave his promise to all.

Then the merchant said to his parrot, "And you, my sweet, what present would you like me to bring you?"

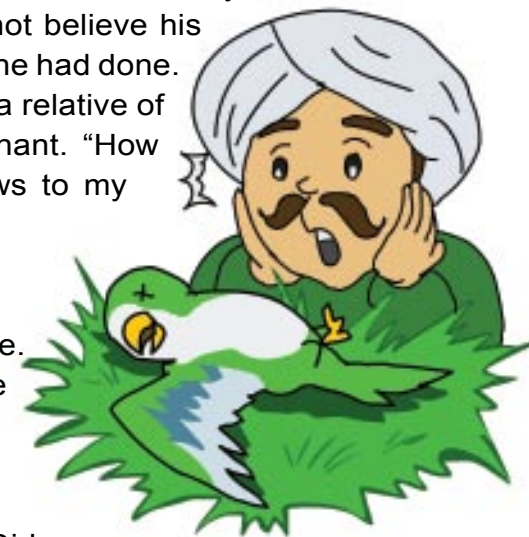
The parrot answered, "When you see the parrots in the lands that you visit, tell them all about me. Tell them that I want to see them, but I can't because I live in a cage. Ask them if it is right that I live in a small cage, while they live in beautiful big gardens. Ask them to remember me. A friend is happy when he is remembered by his friends."



The merchant agreed to give the message to the parrots in distant lands. At the end of his visit, he went to a big garden full of parrots. He conveyed his parrot's exact words to the parrots there. Once he finished his last sentence, one of the parrots began to tremble and fell down. The poor creature died immediately.

The merchant who could not believe his eyes, felt sorry about what he had done. "This bird must have been a relative of my parrot," said the merchant. "How can I convey this sad news to my parrot?"

A few days later, the merchant went back home. He gave all the presents he had bought to his servants. Then he went to his parrot.



"Where is my present? Did you give the message to my friends there?" asked the parrot. "Yes," said the merchant. "However, I regret what I did." "Why should you feel sorry?" asked the parrot.

The merchant reluctantly told the parrot everything that had happened. The moment the merchant finished his story, the parrot trembled, fell down, and died. The merchant remained silent for a while. Then tears trickled down his face.

## ZOROASTRIANISM

“What happened to you, sweet bird? Why did you die?” wailed the merchant. He began to cry hysterically. “Oh, my foolish tongue! If only you had not been in my mouth. You are responsible for all this mess!”

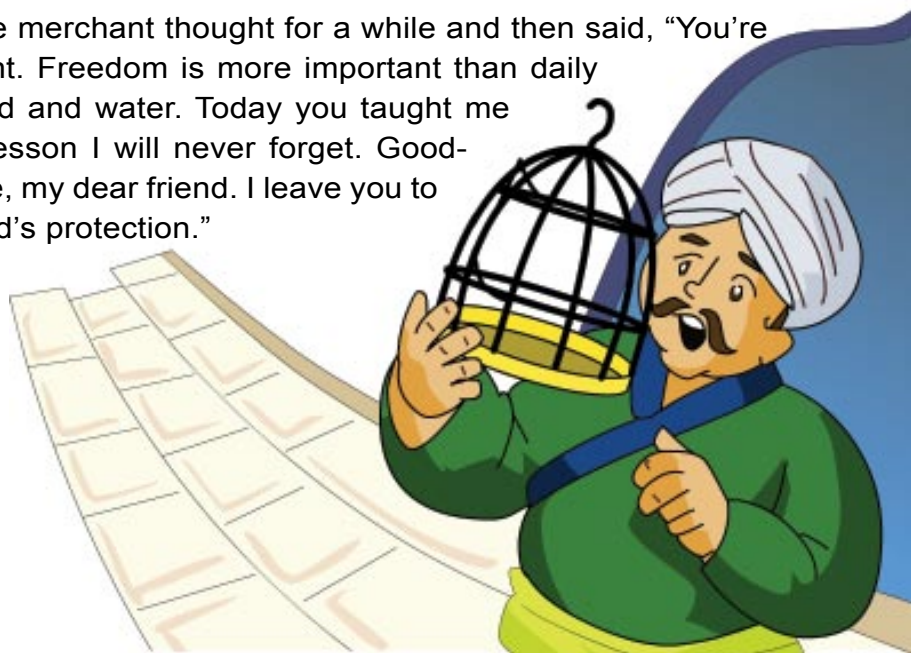


The merchant then opened the cage and the parrot flew out in a flash. It escaped out of the window and sat on a nearby branch.

The merchant whose sorrow had changed to amazement, demanded, “What’s going on here? Why are you behaving like this?”

“This is what the parrot taught me. He told me that the only way to get back my freedom is to die. You have always been a nice master to me, but I’m a bird and wish to be free. I don’t want to spend all my life in prison.”

The merchant thought for a while and then said, “You’re right. Freedom is more important than daily food and water. Today you taught me a lesson I will never forget. Good-bye, my dear friend. I leave you to God’s protection.”



## INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY CIRCLE

The Inter-Religious Harmony Circle (IRHC) comprises representatives from various religious groups in Singapore and is currently chaired by Member of Parliament Mr Chan Soo Sen. The IRHC promotes the spirit behind the Declaration on Religious Harmony, and encourages all Singaporeans to reflect on the Declaration during the week of the Racial Harmony Day (21 July) every year. The initiatives to promote the Declaration include this series of publications i.e. “Colours of Harmony” (2005), “Colours of Love” (2006) and “A Giving Heart” (2007).

## DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS HARMONY

We, the people in Singapore, declare that religious harmony is vital for peace, progress and prosperity in our multi-racial and multi-religious Nation.

We resolve to strengthen religious harmony through mutual tolerance, confidence, respect, and understanding.

We shall always

Recognise the secular nature of our State,  
Promote cohesion within our society,  
Respect each other’s freedom of religion,  
Grow our common space while respecting our diversity,  
Foster inter-religious communications,

and thereby ensure that religion will not be abused to create conflict and disharmony in Singapore.

**BAHÁ'Í FAITH**

The Bahá'í Faith was founded about 150 years ago by Baha'u'llah the Prophet. Followers of the faith believe that there is only one God and that all races should unite as one.

**BUDDHISM**

Buddhism was founded by Gautama Buddha in the 6th century BC. Buddhists believe that the Buddha had many previous lives, in which he was reborn in many forms. They honour the compassion and wisdom he showed in his earlier different forms and respect all nature.

**HINDUISM**

Hinduism is the oldest of the major religions in the world. Hindus believe in one God who may be worshipped in many different forms. All life is considered sacred. Doing good deeds for the benefit of mankind is the duty of every Hindu.

**ISLAM**

Islam means peace and submission to the will of one God, whom Muslims call Allah. Muslims believe that Allah has sent messengers to the world and the Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet. Believers are encouraged to live a life of peace with all creation.

**JAINISM**

Jainism is a religion of purely human origin. It teaches that human beings are responsible for their own actions. Ahimsa (Non-violence) is upheld as the supreme religion and is practised in all forms. Jains have a deep compassion for all forms of life and are vegetarian.

**TAOISM**

The followers of traditional Chinese religious practices are called Taoists. Taoists worship gods, immortals and saints. Taoism stresses loyalty, respect for elders and ancestors, and compassion to all human beings.

**CHRISTIANITY**

Christians believe in the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). They also believe that God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ to save the world from sin. The Bible, which Christians accept as the Word of God, teaches this. Within Christianity there are three main groups of believers, namely Roman Catholics, Protestants and the Orthodox Christians.

**JUDAISM**

Jews believe in one God and observe 613 mitzvot or God's commandments as they are taught in the Bible. Judaism teaches 13 Principles of Faith, among them the belief in the coming of the Messiah, who will bring peace to the world.

**DE JIAO**

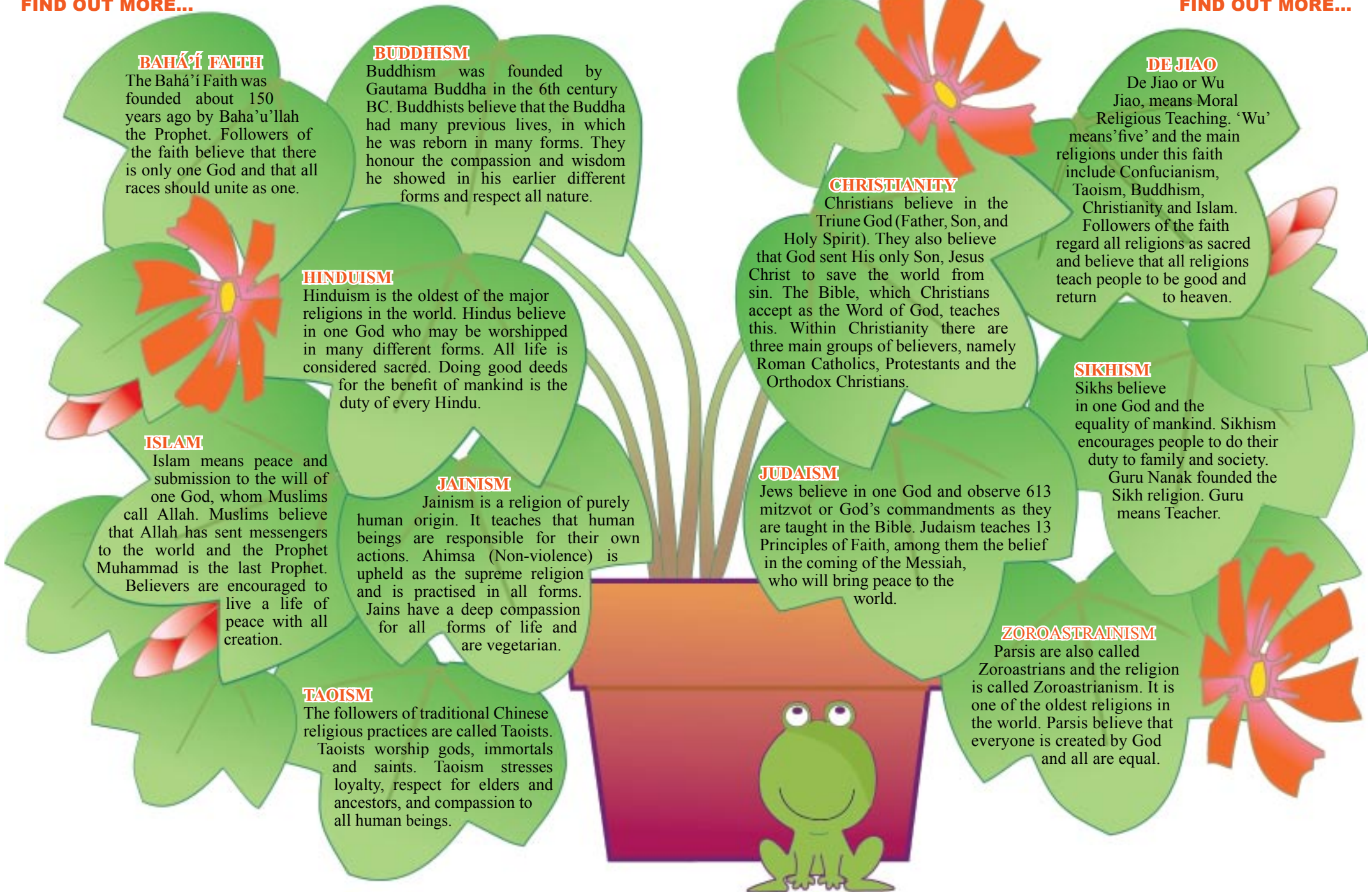
De Jiao or Wu Jiao, means Moral Religious Teaching. 'Wu' means 'five' and the main religions under this faith include Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Followers of the faith regard all religions as sacred and believe that all religions teach people to be good and return to heaven.

**SIKHISM**

Sikhs believe in one God and the equality of mankind. Sikhism encourages people to do their duty to family and society. Guru Nanak founded the Sikh religion. Guru means Teacher.

**ZOROASTRIANISM**

Parsis are also called Zoroastrians and the religion is called Zoroastrianism. It is one of the oldest religions in the world. Parsis believe that everyone is created by God and all are equal.



*Special thanks to the members of the  
Inter-Religious Harmony Circle (IRHC)  
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