

## 15. ISO, THE POOR MAN

There was once a man called Iso, who was very poor. He eked out a living cutting wood and selling it in the marketplace. With the money he earned he was just able to keep body and soul together. One day, as he set off for the bush as usual to cut wood, he met a wasla or wood spirit, which approached him and asked him what he was doing. Iso replied that he was going into the bush to chop wood, in order to earn enough money to buy food. Then wasla gave him a ring (mungay), and told him that with this ring he could wish for anything that he desired and his wish would be fulfilled. When Iso returned home, he asked the ring to give him food and money and, lo and behold, whatever Iso asked for, the ring provided him with. One day Iso wished to go on a long journey, but decided that it would not be wise to take the precious ring with him. For this reason he went to a neighbour and asked him to take care of the ring while he was away on his journey. Iso also told his friend not to ask the ring for anything. No sooner had Iso gone, however, than his neighbour did precisely the opposite of what he had promised to do. He asked the ring to procure him all sorts of things that he desired. When he realised what valuable this ring was, the neighbour went and bought another ring which resembled it very closely.

When Iso returned and asked for his ring, the deceitful neighbour gave him the ring he had just bought. Iso did not realise that the ring he had been given was not the right one, until he returned to his own home. Whenever he wished for anything, the ring was unable to obtain it for him. So Iso returned to his friend and neighbour and asked him what had become of the ring. But his neighbour put on an innocent air, shaking his head and assuring him that it was the very same ring as the one Iso had entrusted to him. So Iso was just as poor as ever, and once again he had to go into the bush to cut wood. When he reached the bush and started to work, the wood spirit approached him and asked him what he desired. Iso answered: "I'm really very sorry, wasla, but I have lost the ring you gave me and now I do not know what to do. I had hoped that the ring would make me very rich, but now I am just as poor as ever I was. For that reason I have resumed my old work of chopping wood and selling it." Then the wood spirit gave him a strange goat, which was able to produce money as soon as Iso wanted it. Iso thanked him and returned home.

It was not long before he decided to try what the goat could do, so he said: "Goat, make a lot of money!". To his great joy and amazement the goat produced large quantities of money.

After a time Iso decided to go on a long journey. He thought that it would be most prudent to leave the goat behind. So he went to his neighbour and asked him to look after the goat until his return. The neighbour expressed his willingness to do so, and Iso set off. However, it was not long before the neighbour realised that this was a valuable animal, and every time he asked for money, the goat produced it. When Iso returned home his friend the neighbour was unwilling to give him back his goat. In its place he gave him an ordinary goat. The two animals were so similar that Iso believed he had been given the right one. But Iso soon discovered that his neighbour had deceived him this time, too, because the goat was unable to produce a single coin. In his despair Iso went back to his

friend and neighbour and complained bitterly, but to no avail. The neighbour insisted that he had given Iso back the original goat, and that was all he could say. He declared that the things Iso left behind him in his charge while he was away on his travels always deteriorated after they had been with him for a while. Iso decided that there was nothing for it but to return to his old work. One day, when he was hard at work cutting wood, the wood spirit came to him and asked him what he was doing in the forest. Iso said that he was very sorry to have to admit that he had lost both the objects that wasla had given him. He begged wasla to give him one more valuable thing, and promised that he would look after it and take good care never to lose it. Then the wood spirit gave him a stick which was constructed in such a way that it would start beating as soon as Iso uttered a particular word, and would not stop beating before Iso had recited a certain spell. Iso now decided to play a good trick on his deceitful neighbour. He went to visit him again, and told him that he was about to set out on a long journey, and asked him if he would look after his stick for him while he was away. There was just one thing: he must be careful not to say to the stick: "Stick, start to play!" The neighbour immediately declared his willingness to do this, and promised to take good care of it; and so Iso set off.

The neighbour, who imagined that this stick was just as valuable as the other things Iso had asked him to look after, thought he would try out the stick and see what it could do, and so he said to it: "Stick, start to play!" Thereupon the stick started to beat the man long and hard. He had no idea what to do. He was unable to stop the stick, which merely continued beating him all the time. Finally the man was so bruised and exhausted that he collapsed on the floor. He lay there, while the stick continued its humiliating beating

of the poor man. At that very moment Iso came in and witnessed what was going on. He immediately ordered the stick to stop, using the following incantation: "Stick, stop beating my neighbour!" Thereupon the stick stopped beating. Then Iso said to his friend: "I believed that you have received everything, and more than you wished, from this stick, but I now want you to give me back the two other things, the ring and the goat, which you have kept". Then his neighbour gave him back the ring, the goat, and the stick. Iso returned to his home highly pleased with himself.

One day Iso wished to marry a very pretty girl. However, the girl's father insisted on very rigorous terms from her wooer before he would hand over his daughter. The father had dug a deep pit outside his hut, and promised that only the man who could fill this pit with money would be allowed to marry his daughter. Everyone in the surrounding district had attempted to do this, but none had succeeded. Iso, too, came to try his luck, and said that it was not difficult for him to fill the pit with money. It was admittedly a very deep pit, but with the help of his miraculous goat the pit was full to the brim with money next morning, when the girl's parents came out. And so Iso married their daughter, and they lived happily together.

However, Iso grew proud and conceited on account of the great success he had enjoyed. One day when he went to the shopkeeper to change some money, he was too boastful. Iso started brandishing a knife, and in so doing he cut the shopkeeper's arm. At that very moment the wood spirit punished him by taking back all three good things he had given to Iso. Then he no longer had the ring, the goat, and the stick. In a short while Iso was just as poor as he had previously been, and once again he had to make his way out into the forest to cut wood. This time however, no wasla came to see him. In this way Iso began and ended his life in poverty.