

The story of the palm tree

Long, long ago there was a young palm tree which lived in the desert. She loved life, and looked forward to experiencing everything that came her way. She felt joy in each sunrise as the first rays of sunlight touched her branches, she was happy when birds came to rest in her shade as the day grew hotter, she danced in the desert winds that blew through her leaves, and she listened with a grateful heart to the silence of the night. She thanked God for the gift of being alive.

One day a man passed by. He had run away from a nearby town where people had cheated him, and now he boiled with anger as he crossed the pitiless heat of the desert without food or water. In his fury he resented the youth and happiness of the palm tree, and shouted at her: „Hey, you, palm tree, why should you be so happy when I am so miserable? If I have to suffer, then you will suffer, too“. On saying that, he picked up a big, heavy stone and slammed it down on top of the tree's trunk.

The palm tree could hardly breathe as she watched the man running away, still grumbling about his life. For a moment she was completely still, feeling nothing other than numb, confused and deeply shocked. But then the pain started; it began to fill her heart, spreading from top of her trunk to the smallest twig at the tip of her longest branch. It was an overwhelming pain that left her unable to feel anything else. She felt her heart break and in her desperation she cried long and loud but there was nobody to hear her; the desert was silent, and the dark night was the only witness to her suffering.

For a long time she did nothing, hoping every minute, every hour, every day that the pain would finally stop. She was both sad and angry; her life had been so beautiful, so full of promise, and it had been twisted into this painful and unjust existence. She did not want to suffer any more, and after some time she decided to try and do something to end the agony. If she could only move the stone ... She took a long, deep breath and tried to push it away, but it wouldn't move. She tried again, gathering all her strength, but she could not move the stone a hairsbreadth; it remained in place, its weight still crushing down upon her. She kept trying, over and over again, her strength ebbing away as she grew more and more tired, until she finally realized that she was incapable of pushing the stone away and she gave up.

That sense of hopelessness grew within her, and for a long time she couldn't see any way of fighting the pain. She wanted to live, yes, but if life promised nothing other than this pain, why bother to endure it? Why should she wake up in the morning if nothing but desperation waited for her? She no longer felt pleasure in the sunlight, the birdsong, the evening breeze; she began to hate life, and wanted to die. „If life is only pain“, she cried to the desert silence, „then I don't want to live any more“.

Overwhelmed by these feelings of helplessness, she drifted off into sleep. But when she woke up the next morning, she knew that something had changed. At first she didn't know what it was, but then she realized she could feel cold, nourishing water coming up through her roots into her trunk, soothing her and easing the pain. She tried to understand what was happening, and then she realized – the weight of the stone, as it had been crushing her, had also pushed her deeper into the earth, until finally she had reached an underground stream.

Its restoring powers gave her a moment of renewed hope, and she felt strength coming back into her branches. Although she could still feel the stone, as heavy as before, she was once again able to feel the power to grow pulsing inside her. After a time of grief that had seemed endless, this was the first moment of joy she had known and it filled her heart until it felt as if it would burst.

The water continued to nourish the palm tree, and enabled her to grow until she became one of the biggest trees in the desert. All the while she carried the stone, it's weight always there, sometimes hurting more and sometimes less, until she learned to accept it as a part of herself, and embrace the stone with her leaves as if she were protecting her most vulnerable, most painful part. Despite the stone, she learnt to feel joy again, and to feel happiness when birds came to rest in her lush, inviting branches, and people sheltered beneath her from the sandstorms that ravaged the desert. Once again, she felt deeply grateful for the gift of her life.