

Good Sok & Bad Sok

(ឆ្កែ អ្នកល្អ អ្នកបាប)

Long, long ago in one village there lived two boys whose names were both Sok. The villagers called one boy Good Sok and the other boy Bad Sok.

Bad Sok was a mean, bully boy. When playing, he would often cause a fight and beat up other children. Bad Sok was from a well-off family. He was so spoiled by his parents that other villagers found him so infuriating and detestable.

Good Sok had no parents. He was brought up by his grandmother who was so old and so poor. Good Sok was a nice boy. He loved to play peacefully with other children. The villagers liked him and took pity on him. They often provided him with food. Seeing this, Bad Sok was so jealous of Good Sok. Bad Sok became meaner, beating up and swearing at other kids mercilessly. The villagers and Bad Sok's parents were caught up in the storm of quarrelling with one another even more often, trying to back up their own children and to accuse the others' of causing all the troubles.

Time passed, one day Bad Sok came to see Good Sok and asked, "Why don't you go into the forest with me to get some bamboos to fix the floor of your run-down house?"

Good Sok replied, "I'm so poor. I don't have any appliances to cut down the bamboos nor food to take with me into the forest."

Bad Sok spoke with a friendly manner, "Don't worry about appliances and food. They are all on me. You just bring yourself".

Then they both went to see Good Sok's grandmother. The old woman was not keen to let her grandson go into the forest. "Don't go," She said. "The forest is too remote. It may not be safe".

Bad Sok told her not to worry, "It is alright," he reassured her. "Your house is so run-down. When we get some bamboo planks, we can fix the broken floor so that you won't fall into the holes".

Eventually, the old woman gave in. "OK, but would you please take good care of your younger brother?" she pleaded.

Bad Sok packed food and wood cutting appliances, and the two boys walked into the forest to find bamboo trees. They set out to work together. Good Sok worked harder, so he made more bamboo planks than Bad Sok did. At noon they stopped working to have lunch. They sat opposite each other, eating. Suddenly, as quickly as a lightning flashed, Bad Sok grabbed his knife and thrust it into one of Good Sok's eyes. Good Sok jumped up and howled, "Ow! Why did you poke my eyes?"

Bad Sok replied, "All the food and appliances are mine. How dare you eat my food! How come you made more bamboo planks than I did?"

Good Sok cried, "You said all food and appliances were on you. That was why I came. Now you can take all the bamboo planks if you like. But please don't kill me".

Bad Sok shouted, "Shut up!" He poked and twisted the knife into another eye of Gook Sok. Blood was streaming down Good Sok's face and was dropping onto his chest. He was blind and the pain was unbearable. He was thinking about his lonely, old grandmother who was waiting for him at home when Bad Sok pushed him to the bank of a nearby river.

"Say your prayer and be good food to the fish!" Bad Sok shouted and kicked Good Sok off the river bank.

Bad Sok believed that Good Sok was dead. He collected all the bamboo planks and carried them home. That evening, he walked over to Good Sok's house and told the old woman that her grandson was eaten by a tiger. Upon hearing the horrible news, the old woman was wailing and beating her chest. Bad Sok secretly smiled with satisfaction and went away. He continued to display his idleness and bully the village children as he pleased.

Let's get back to Good Sok. After Bad Sok poked both of his eyes with a knife and kicked him off the river bank, Good Sok tried to keep himself afloat and let the rushing current carry him down the stream. He kept praying "Oh Buddha ... Oh Buddha" all along the way. Along this river, there was a shrine housed a powerful spirit of the land called Neak Ta. This Neak Ta had a servant who was a crocodile. The crocodile also possessed a magical power. If he liked, he could resume a human form. In that particular afternoon, Neak Ta's crocodile was hungry, so he came out of his shelter from under Neak Ta's house and swam up the river to look for food. After swimming for a short while, the crocodile saw Good Sok floating down the stream. He quickly swam over to that human, happily thinking, "Wow, this is my lucky day to have a human for a meal!" When he came close to his prey, the beast heard the non-stop whispers "Buddha Oh Buddha ..." The crocodile's curiosity was aroused. He looked upon the human's face and found two holes where the eyes should be. The beast decided to take the human to his master. So the crocodile swam under Good Sok's body and carried him on his back.

Reaching home, the crocodile turned himself into a man and took Good Sok to see his master. Good Sok told Neak Ta about what had happened to him. After hearing the story from the beginning to the end, Neak Ta shook his head, "Ah, Bad Sok is such a mean boy. But, don't you worry, Good Sok. I'll help restore your eye sight and send you back home safely". Neak Ta used his magic power to heal the wounds and restore Good Sok's eye sight. Then he put some sand onto Good Sok's palm and told him to clutch the sand tightly, "Wait until you get home and ask your grandmother to lay out a mat in the house before you open this hand," Neak Ta instructed Good Sok.

Good Sok climbed onto the crocodile's back and the beast took him back to the spot where Bad Sok kicked him off the river bank into the stream. After thanking and saying good-bye to the kind crocodile, Good Sok continued his journey home on foot. The old woman was overjoyed to see her grandson back and alive. When he finished telling his grandmother his suffering caused by Bad Sok and his luck after meeting the crocodile and Neak Ta, Good Sok asked his grandmother to lay a mat in the house. As soon as he opened his palm and drop the sand onto the mat, the little grands magically turned into silver coins. There's no need to talk about the grandmother and grandson's astonishment and joy. The two used the silver coins to buy new clothes as well as other provisions and to build a new house. They became known as the richest couple in the village.

Bad Sok was so curious of how Good Sok was not just still alive and got his eyes back but also was so rich. When he got an opportunity, Bad Sok came to see Good Sok and confessed that when they were cutting the bamboos in the forest, an evil spirit took control of his soul and forced him to hurt Good Sok. Bad Sok also probed on how Good Sok managed to stay alive and how he acquired his wealth. Good Sok thanked Bad Sok for creating an opportunity for him to be rich first, and then he talked about how Neak Ta had helped restore his eyesight and offered him a handful of sand that turned out to be a heap of silver coins. After hearing the

story, Bad Sok was drowning in the river of greed, so he plotted to take an adventure like the one that Good Sok had gone through.

One day Bad Sok came to see Good Sok and proposed that they go into the forest to cut the bamboos one more time. At first Good Sok rejected Bad Sok's proposal, fearing that Bad Sok was trying to kill him again. Bad Sok pleaded, "That time I was possessed by an evil spirit. I never meant to harm you. This time I'll be more careful. Oh, my friend, please believe me and forgive me."

Good Sok agreed to accompany Bad Sok into the forest, "Don't worry, older brother. I'll come to cut the bamboos with you. I won't forget that you helped me get such great fortune."

Early next morning Bad Sok got food and wood cutting appliances ready and both Good Sok and Bad Sok set out for the forest. They chopped the bamboo trees down and made bamboo planks as before. At noon they stopped working and sat down to have lunch. While they were eating, Bad Sok handed his knife to Good Sok and asked Good Sok to poke one of his eyes. Good Sok refused to do so. But Bad Sok kept pleading, "Please poke my eye the way I did to yours the other day. Oh my friend, please be kind to me"

Good Sok took the knife, poked and twisted one of Bad Sok's eyes. Bad Sok found it so painful, but because he wanted to get rich as soon as possible, he asked Good Sok to poke another eye and to push him to the river bank. When they reached the river bank Bad Sok asked "When I kicked you off the bank into the river, what did you do?"

"I tried to stay afloat and I kept praying Buddha Oh Buddha," Good Sok replied.

Bad Sok ordered Good Sok to kick him off the bank into river and to take all the bamboo planks home. Good Sok did as he was instructed and went home.

Once in the water Bad Sok was trying to swim along the stream and shout as loud as he could, "Buddha Oh Buddha", waiting for the crocodile to come and find him and take him to Neak Ta. Bad Sok waited and waited, but the crocodile never appeared to rescue him. The pain and exhaustion were so overwhelming that he eventually sank and died in the river. His body got rotten and eaten by all kinds of fish.

Time passed, but Bad Sok's skull was still bobbing along the stream, ceaselessly chanting "Buddha Oh Buddha ..." until it reached a *kompong* of a rich man known as Moha Sethei. That afternoon, Moha Sethei's daughter was playing in the river with her servants at the *kompong*. When she saw the floating skull that could chant "Buddha Oh Buddha", she asked a male servant to pick the skull up. With amazement Moha Sethei's daughter took the skull home and showed it her father. Moha Sethei was also astounded by the skull that could chant "Buddha Oh Buddha". He thought it was a magic skull, so he ordered it washed and kept safely.

Everyday Moha Sethei usually went to pay homage to the king and attended the morning assembly at the royal palace with the king's ministers and other royal members. That morning while waiting for the assembly to commence, Moha Sethei proudly boasted that he possessed a magic skull that could relentlessly chant "Buddha Oh Buddha". No one believed him. Moha Sethei kept boasting, "If you don't believe me, would you dare to bet? Tomorrow I'll bring the skull to this assembly hall. If it doesn't chant 'Buddha Oh Buddha', I'll give you 100 pieces of my gold."

The four head ministers agreed to bet with Moha Sethei. They wrote out the betting contract carefully. The next morning Moha Sethei couldn't wait to show people at the palace his magic skull and to collect 100 pieces of gold from the four head ministers. Moha Sethei carried his

100 pieces of gold and one of his servants carried the skull. Along the way to the royal palace, the skull kept chanting “Buddha Oh Buddha ...”. When Moha Sethei and his servants passed through the palace gate, suddenly the skull became dead silent. At the assembly hall everyone was crowding around Moha Sethei and his magic skull that didn’t make a sound. Moha Sethei ordered the skull to say its usual chanting, but the skull remained silent. No matter how angry Moha Sethei was and how loudly he shouted at it, the skull remained unperturbed. Moha Sethei lost the bet and had to offer his 100 pieces of gold to the four head ministers who took the gold and said mockingly “Moha Sethei brought a magic skull that can chant so loudly. It made us all deaf!” Everyone at the assembly hall was laughing madly. Losing face, Moha Sethei hurriedly said goodbye to the ministers and headed home. As soon as Moha Sethei and his servants got out of the palace gate, the skull started chanting “Buddha Oh Buddha” ceaselessly again. Moha Sethei was so furious that he ordered a male servant to break the skull and throw it away into the river.

However, that servant was too lazy to break the skull into pieces as he was ordered. He threw it whole back into the river. The skull continued its journey along the river and tirelessly chanted “Buddha Oh Buddha” until it reached the *kompong* of a temple. That afternoon a monk came to the *kompong* to have a bath and found the chanting skull. The monk took the skull to the temple and invited his fellow monks to come and offer a blessing before he cremated the skull to release its soul from any forms of sin. The kind monk also thought of a way to make good use of the ash from the cremation. He mixed the ash with black ink and he used the mixture to paint the temple columns. He used the left over mixture to paint his oxcart.

A few days later, the monk had a desire to visit his relatives, so he asked his pupils to tie two oxen to the cart. Once the cart was ready, the monk got in and drove it to his village. When there were no other people around, the cart let out the usual noise. But when there were any couples travelling past, the cart would let out some strange repeating sounds like “You whore! You whore! ...” The husbands heard the swearing and got so angry for they thought that the monk was swearing at their wives. They used coarse language to swear back at the monk. No matter how hard the monk tried to deny that it was not him who made the swearing sound, no one believed him.

The monk continued his journey. At one point he was passing a procession of a magistrate. Suddenly the cart made some strange noises that sounded like “Bloody magistrate! Bloody magistrate!” The magistrate’s servants heard the swearing and got so angry that they chased after the monk with the purpose to catch him and punish him. The monk forced the oxen to run fast and managed just a narrow escape from the magistrate’s servants.

The monk was so upset and thinking that his cart had never made such strange noises until it was painted with the mixture of black ink and the ash from that skull. “The skull must be a curse,” the monk concluded. When he returned from his trip, the monk decided to burn the cart at the same spot where he had cremated the skull.

Later on, at the cremation site, where Bad Sok’s essence still remained, there sprang up a kind of grass with sticky burrs that hooked themselves onto the clothes of any people who happened to walk through them. This kind of grass spread throughout Cambodia and are known as Smao Kontreuy (Burr Grass). Bad Sok managed to remain a nuisance until the present days.

Uneducated manner can lead to self-destruction.