



Fifteen honest coins

(A story from China)

Once a poor woman and her son lived in a little village. Each day they would rise before dawn to gather twigs in the mountains. The boy would then carry the twigs to the marketplace to sell as firewood. With the money he got, he would buy things they needed, such as oil, eggs and rice, before he returned home.

One day when he was at the marketplace waiting patiently for people to buy his twigs, he suddenly discovered a small bag of money that someone must have dropped. He did not know what to do with it, so he hurried home to show his mother.

'Mother, look what I found!' They opened the bag and both counted fifteen gold coins.

'The person who has lost this will be worried. You must go straight back to the marketplace and find out who lost it. The person may be as poor as we are and is planning to use the money to buy rice and oil. Just stand in the spot where you found the bag, and the person will eventually come back to look for it. I feel very bad about keeping these coins, so hurry now and find their owner.'

So as his mother wished, the boy returned to the marketplace to find the owner. Not long after, he noticed a merchant looking in all directions as if he had lost something.


'Sir, have you lost something?' the boy asked.


'Yes, I lost a purse. I must have dropped it somewhere.'

'Is this your purse, sir?' the boy asked the merchant.

'Why, yes!' he exclaimed and immediately began counting the coins inside.

'One, two, three ... fifteen! Only fifteen! I had thirty coins in my purse. You must have kept fifteen for yourself. How dare you steal my money!'





'I am an honest person, and I tell you, there were only fifteen coins in the purse', the boy cried.

They started to argue, and before long a crowd of people had gathered to see what was happening. The argument got worse, each accusing the other of being dishonest. The people in the crowd urged them to settle their dispute by going to see the judge. So a long line of people marched to the judge's office.

'How many gold coins were in the bag?' the judge asked the boy.

'Fifteen, sir.'

And did you count the coins by yourself?'

'No, my mother was there, and we counted them together', the boy replied.

Upon hearing this, the judge called for the mother to come and asked her the same question.

She replied honestly that there had been fifteen coins in the bag.

'I told my son to return to the marketplace immediately to try to find the owner.'

The judge took a long look at the woman and her son, and then asked the merchant, 'How much money did you lose?'

'I lost thirty gold coins. This boy has stolen fifteen coins from me. I demand that he return them immediately!'

The judge took a long look at the merchant as well and considered what would be fair. After a while, a faint smile appeared on his face, and he declared, 'Since you insist that you lost a bag with thirty gold coins inside, this bag could not possibly be yours, so you cannot claim it'.

Looking at the boy, he said, 'Since you found the purse and no-one has rightfully claimed it, you may keep the money to buy things that you and your mother need. The case is closed!'

Everyone in the courtroom but the merchant felt satisfied that it was a wise decision.

