



The Businessman and the Donkey

An Ethiopian Folktale

Teret'teret ("Are you ready to hear the story?")

Ye'lam Be'éret ("I'm ready to hear the story!")

Once upon a time, before cars clogged the roads, people used donkeys and horses to carry things from one place to another. Each day, the businessmen who sold goods at the market would load their wares onto donkeys' backs to carry items to the market for sale.

One day, the businessman who sold salt at the market loaded big bags of salt onto his donkey's back and started the long walk to the market. The weather that day was hot, the salt was heavy, and before long, the donkey began to get tired! As the donkey and the businessman walked along, the donkey cried and sighed, hoping that the businessman would let her stop for a rest. The businessman, who was also feeling hungry and hot, heard her cries and sighs, and found a nice, shaded area with lots of grass for the donkey to eat. He guided the donkey over to rest for a while. The businessman and the donkey ate and rested for a long while, but still the donkey was crying and sighing — she was happy to rest and did NOT want to continue on the long walk to the market. The businessman knew that they had no choice but to carry on; he thought they could make it to the market, sell some salt, and find a place to sleep for the night before returning home. So he pushed the donkey back onto the road and they continued on their journey.



Soon, they came to a nice, cool river. The river water looked so nice and refreshing to the donkey. She wanted to go for a swim. As she was walking by the water, she stumbled and a bit of the water splashed on the salt on her back, causing it to melt and dissolve, just a little bit. The donkey noticed this, and noticed that her load felt a little lighter! This gave the donkey an idea: she thought that if she got all of the salt on her back wet, her load would be lighter and she would have an easy walk the rest of the way. So, as they walked by the river, she pretended to stumble, trip, and then jumped right into the water! As soon as she was under the water, all of the heavy salt melted away and the donkey felt light and free! She was so happy! But the businessman was not happy at all. He was sad and frustrated that the salt that he had planned to sell in the market was all gone. The businessman had no choice but to return home, empty handed.

While the donkey slept peacefully that night, the businessman was awake worrying about his problem. What could he sell in the market if his donkey wouldn't carry the salt anymore? At last, he had an idea.

The very next morning, he loaded the donkey up with big bags of cotton. Cotton is much lighter to carry than salt. The businessman was sure that his donkey would be able to carry the cotton to the market without complaining so that he could sell it that day. Sure enough, the donkey found the load much lighter than before and she happily skipped down the road with the businessman walking beside her to the market. It was a lovely day and both the donkey and the businessman were feeling optimistic that it would be a good day at the market.

At last, they came to the river. The load today was much lighter than yesterday, but the donkey figured that no load at all would be better than carrying cotton. She remembered what had happened with the salt in the river, and so she thought she would trick the businessman again. So once again, she pretended to stumble, trip and launched herself right into the river. The donkey was under the water, waiting for her load to melt away as it did with the salt. But salt and cotton are very different. When the donkey tried to climb out of the river, she found that her load was ten times heavier than before! The cotton on her back had soaked up so much water that she could hardly hold it. The businessman had to pull and pull to help her out of the river. Both of them moaned and groaned all the way to the market. The businessman was satisfied that, at least, he could dry his cotton in the sun and sell it to earn money. But the donkey had a miserable trip and a hard day. She realized that what seems like the "easy way out" is not always the best approach.

