

#104 The Pot of Wit March 20 2021

You know that Birbal was one of the Nine Jewels of the Emperor Akbar, renowned for his wit and wisdom. Whatever problem the Emperor was facing, it seemed that Birbal could find a solution. But life with an emperor is never easy, and once it happened that the two had a terrible disagreement. Akbar became so angry that he banished Birbal from the capital.

Banishment is a harsh penalty, but Birbal knew that it could have been still worse, and so he promptly went into hiding far away, and nobody in the palace knew where he had gone.

After some time, though, Akbar's anger cooled, and he began to miss Birbal. His other ministers were wise, each in their own field, but none had the quick mind that Birbal did. Finally, Akbar told his advisors that they must search for Birbal and bring him back to court. But Birbal was well hidden and nobody knew how to find him.

Then Akbar had an idea, and he issued a proclamation: within a month every village in his kingdom must submit a pot to the court, and the pot must be filled either with gold and jewels or with wit. The ministers and officials were puzzled by the emperor's command, but obediently they spread the proclamation throughout the empire.

All this time Birbal was hiding in a very small, remote village far out in the countryside and when the emperor's proclamation arrived, the village elders were very worried. They certainly had no idea how to fill a pot with wit, but neither did they have gold or jewels.

"Never mind," Birbal told them. "Give me a pot, and I will take care of the matter."

Birbal went to the field where he was growing melons, and arranged one of the plants so that a small melon hung down inside the neck of the pot.

Then he waited. At the end of the month, the melon had filled the pot entirely, so that it could not be removed. Cutting the stem of the melon Birbal gave it to the village elders to send to Akbar, and he instructed them to include a note that said, "With wit this pot has been filled. And who has the wit to enjoy the melon without breaking the pot or the fruit?"

When this pot was presented to Akbar, he knew very well whose wit had filled the pot – and in this way he was reunited with his minister.