



Cosmos Ebooks

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Introduction

Panchatantra has been widely acclaimed as a book for children. But the wisdom contained in it is for all ages. In fact, if one goes beyond the narrative, the moral of the stories is more for grown-ups. It is a book about righteous but pragmatic way of leading a decent life in this world. Dispersed throughout the stories are words of wisdom either in the form of quotations or simple statements relevant to the themes. But these statements are equally valid and useful even if taken out of context.

It is the purpose of this booklet is to present these gems as a separate collection. Panchatantra was written more than two thousand years ago and the stories reflect the conditions prevalent in those days in India. So there are some aspects of the stories that may appear strange in our time and in other cultures. However, most of these words of wisdom are universal and useful at any time in any culture. And only those are presented in this collection.

In order to maintain a close correspondence with the sequence in the book these gems are grouped in five parts, each belonging to a given *tantra* (section) of the book. Some of these statements occur in more than one section; sometimes the words are not exactly the same but the content is. In this collection, however, the repetition has been avoided giving only the first occurrence.

From Tantra One

There is almost nothing in this material world that does not require money for accomplishment. Therefore a wise man should make every effort to acquire wealth.

Wealth attracts friends and relatives. It makes a person feel important and even wise.

In this world people long to be relatives of a wealthy man, but in the case of a poor man his own relatives forsake him.

With wealth an ordinary man becomes great and commands respect even without other qualities.

Wealth can make an old man feel young, while in poverty a young man feels old.

There are six ways of earning money – 1) begging, 2) working for someone whether in private enterprise or for state, 3) farming, 4) acquiring special knowledge, 5) money lending, and 6) doing business. Of these the most respectable is business because: A beggar has to approach many persons to collect anything worthwhile. In service one may not get proper salary and be unhappy. Farming takes long time and patience. To acquire knowledge one has to spend a lifetime. In money lending one risks defaults. Business is the only occupation where money can be earned using one's own ability to minimize risk.

Life has any worth only if it sustains many other lives. Otherwise even birds manage to fill their stomach using only their beaks. Just meeting the body's needs is no life at all.

Life need not be long but great. Lived with honor and dignity even a short life is better than living long like a crow.

If one does not treat friends, relatives, and other living beings with loving care, he might have as well not lived.

Even animals – dogs, horses, and others can understand spoken words, but wise men can understand even thoughts not yet expressed. They can read other's minds.

The inner thoughts of a person can be known by his gestures, gait, hints, eyes, and from changes in facial expression.

The tenets of wise conduct of life can be both used and misused. A wise man can clearly see the consequences of both in a given circumstance and acts accordingly.

The worldly wise know that there are things that can be told to some people but not to everyone. Then there are things that should be kept to oneself. Also there is a right or wrong time for saying things. One should say things only after giving careful consideration to all factors.

One who does not feel distressed in the face of a calamity and does not show exuberance in prosperity is indeed a jewel in humanity.

Horse, weapon, scripture, man, and woman all become meritorious or worthless depending on whom they are associated with. Anything with merit remains meritorious only with a capable person.

Intelligence can accomplish things more easily than army and weapons (i.e. physical power).

The world keeps going only because the wily and wicked never get their wishes fulfilled and eventually fail in their sinister plans.

Money always causes pain. There is pain in earning, pain in safekeeping, pain in making it grow, and pain in spending. It is not worth it.

One who has control over all sensual feelings in his youth is a true saint. Everyone can call himself saint when passion has drained off. In great men the old age comes first to the mind and later to the body. For lowly persons old age comes only to the body, it never comes to the mind; they never lose attachment to worldly pleasure.

An arrow sent by an archer may or may not kill a person, but a statesman's intellect used as weapon can destroy a whole nation along with its government.

A diligent and persistent man is always prosperous in this world. But a lazy and coward believing only in destiny never goes anywhere. Therefore one should forget destiny and actively pursue his dream. If he does not succeed, then he should try to find what went wrong and correct it.

Sometimes just appearance creates fear. Even a non-poisonous snake creates fear with the show of its hood.

Using force cannot do something that can be done by scheming. With clever scheming even a weak person can defeat a strong enemy.

A government that keeps the welfare of public as the top priority prospers; one that disregards public interest perishes.

One who does not take care of his enemy and disease right when they appear, succumbs to them even if he is strong. These should never be neglected.

As a rule one should not develop attachment to anyone; if he does, then should not forsake the person. Without attachment one does not face the risk of losing anything just as a person sitting on the ground has no fear of falling.

Everyone treats well the person who has done some favor. A real gentleman is one who treats well even a person who has done harm.

Excellent, average, and low qualities appear in anyone or anything due to association with person or things of the corresponding type.

The innate nature of a person cannot be changed by advice or instruction. Boiled water will get eventually cold.

One should never trust a person whose character, lineage, and strength are unknown.

In this world a person who does not listen to well wishers and friends, faces ruin.

Even in bad times one should keep calm and not lose patience. With calm mind it is possible to find a way out of the difficulties.

If the enemy is much stronger, one should run away or hide in a safe place. There is no other way to save life.

One who confronts an enemy without considering and understanding his power, gets destroyed like a moth flying into a lamp.

A suitable combination of weak things also becomes invincible just as a rope woven from straw can contain an elephant.

Common folks are usually blind followers. They do not think for themselves.

Being pleased with the service a master rewards a servant only with money, but after being honored by the master the servant may even give his life for him.

A person facing calamity should save himself by any action good or bad. He can practice ethics and morality only if he is alive.

Anyone, who retains his attachment to material things even in the face of death, loses his life as well as possessions.

Mean people have only destructive attitude to others not constructive. The ferocious wind can only uproot trees, it cannot put fallen trees back on their roots.

The real ability and sharpness of intelligence in people are clearly seen only in critical situations - like bringing peace to conflict in the case of a statesman and curing an apparently incurable disease in the case of a doctor. In normal conditions anyone can claim those distinctions.

A dry wood cannot be bent and a stone cannot be cut with knife. Similarly advice will not do any good to one not worth advising. It is wasted on someone who would not listen.

It is better to have a learned enemy than an ignorant friend.

Losing material possessions and losing a loved one (or a trusted servant) are both disastrous. Still the two events cannot be equated. Possessions can be regained but the person can never be brought back.

From Tantra Two

A person whose intellect does not get fogged even in the face of calamities can get past them unscathed using his intelligence.

Great men maintain equanimity both in prosperity and adversity just as sun appears red while rising as well as setting.

A man visited by friends everyday is indeed happy. This happiness is unique and cannot be compared to any other.

A bird can locate its food from great distances but is not able to see a trap even close by.

Mutual trust and respect are the basis for progress and prosperity.

Friendship between most men is based on favor and obligation. Friendship between fools is based on fear and greed. But friendship between gentlemen occurs just by seeing each other.

Knowledge and royalty cannot be compared. The king gets respect only in his own country but a learned man is respected everywhere.

One should not make someone friend whose lineage, capabilities, and actions are unknown.

Wise men can know the worth of a man on sight. Clever men can guess the weight of an object by taking it in hand.

Wealth makes one ever enthusiastic but also arrogant and vain. It also gives strength and a false sense of knowledge but they all vanish with the wealth.

A person, who is poor from the beginning, does not feel as much pain as another who acquires wealth and then loses it.

A man gets what is his due nothing more nothing less. Therefore he should not be overjoyed at gain or grieve at loss.

One who does not change on getting fortune or fame is worthy to be a true friend.

A true friend is one who remains friend even in one's adversity. Anyone can be a friend in prosperity.

The shade from a cloud, the affection of a bad person, youth, and wealth are all short-lived.

The wealth earned with considerable effort and pain, guarded as life itself, and not spent even for one's own needs is as good as nonexistent because it does not go with the person when he dies.

What is the worth of wealth that benefits only the owner and not other people?

If a person spends even a small fraction of the time and effort, which he spends in procuring the wealth in working towards his spiritual uplift, he can attain nirvana.

For a person with steady mind there is no difference between native and foreign lands.

If a person has intelligence, he does not feel unhappy even in a foreign land. For learned persons there is no distinction between native and foreign.

What is difficult for an able person, what is far for traders, what is foreign for learned, and who is not his own for a soft-spoken?

What is not to happen will never happen and what is to happen will surely happen. What is not to be yours will be lost even if it comes to you.

A person's karma follows him everywhere. Just as light and shadow are inseparable so are the person and his karma.

Just as clapping cannot be done with one hand, result cannot be obtained without action. Just thoughts and intentions do not bring results, they have to be translated into action.

One, who runs after uncertain things neglecting certain ones, loses both. (A bird in hand is better than two in the bush.)

Wealth can have only three states – given in charity, spent in enjoyment, and loss. If it is not given in charity or enjoyed, it is lost.

The highest and noblest wealth for man is contentment. True happiness can come only to those who are contented and have peace of mind.

A contented person experiences bliss all the time, while one without contentment is always miserable.

When one has control over the mind the sense organs automatically come under control and there are no desires. According to sages cessation of desire is the peace of mind. Desires do not get satisfied with acquisition of wealth.

Truly good men are like rubber balls; even if they fall they bounce back. A fool falls like mud and gets stuck to the ground.

It is easy to find people who would always give pleasant advice. It is hard to find those who would give unpleasant but beneficial advice, still harder to find ones who would listen to that advice.

In this world only those are true friends who would give unpleasant but beneficial advice. Others are friends just for name's sake.

One should cultivate good friends in order to overcome adversity. Without friends it is very hard to go through bad days. Miseries never come alone.

When in adversity a person only laments with confused and agitated mind, the lamentation only increases the misery. Only a quiet mind can help in getting through it.

A person's enthusiasm foretells the success or failure of an undertaking. But only wise men can discern that.

One, who makes good friends and is never insincere to them, will always overcome his enemies.

From Tantra Three

If there is a possibility of loss of life in dealing with an evil person one should use reconciliation and show friendship. One can get another opportunity only by keeping alive.

Since victory is uncertain in war especially with an enemy of equal strength, one should attempt reconciliation. War should be engaged in only when diplomacy, reconciliation, and other measures fail.

One who is blinded by vain superiority causes destruction of both parties in war just as similar glass vessels break each other on collision.

If the outcome of war is in doubt and there is no obvious gain, one should never initiate it.

Reconciliation with an enemy of questionable integrity is always dangerous. Even after signing a treaty he may change his mind and not honor it.

Wise men wait for suitable opportunity to deal with the enemy, meanwhile keeping their thoughts and intentions strictly to themselves.

One should also not face an enemy alone and try to gather a coalition of friends. Even large and well-rooted trees standing alone are swept away by strong winds, but small and weak trees in close proximity in a group remain unaffected.

Even a mighty and glorious person cannot face enemy alone. Therefore it is best to be in a group especially of like-minded.

Otherwise a person should seek protection of a powerful group. No one sympathizes with a weak person. The forest fire is intensified by the wind but the same wind extinguishes a lamp.

Just as a small tree surrounded by big trees in a forest cannot be uprooted by wind, even a weak person surrounded by strong ones cannot be harmed.

The association with great men always leads to progress and prosperity. A water drop on a lotus leaf shines like a pearl.

Sometimes reason dictates the use of duality and deceit in dealing with a strong enemy. Do not trust him but pretend to be friend and reconciliatory waiting to find and exploit his weakness.

When learned men decide on the use of certain tenets of political ethics after group discussion and considerable thought, their efforts are always rewarded by success.

The body perishes, wealth can vanish, and no one knows when death will come; therefore only thing that one should collect is virtues (dharma). The life of one who does not practice dharma is no life at all.

A person without dharma is as insignificant and disgraceful as a moth and a mosquito. Practice of dharma is the only thing that distinguishes man from animals.

Those who work only for meeting their physical needs are like animals meant for serving others.

Very briefly this is the essence of dharma: To do good to others is virtue, to harm others is vice. Practice it in daily life and do not do anything to others that you deem harmful to you. Cutting down trees and killing animals are all such acts.

To tell the truth is justice.

The wound inflicted by weapons will eventually heal, but that created by words never heals. Therefore one should never use abusive and hateful words because they act like poison.

A wise man even if very powerful should not entertain enmity with anyone. Who in his senses will take poison just because the doctor is on hand?

A wise man should not publicly say disgraceful words to anyone or even truth that may hurt.

First dictate of wisdom is not to initiate an action without considerable thought; the second sign of wisdom is not to abandon an initiated action without taking it to a successful completion.

A weak man should never even think of enmity with a powerful one if he cares for his well being. He should adopt a flexible

attitude and behave gently; otherwise he faces destruction like a moth flying into a lamp.

An enemy should be eliminated while he is still weak, as waiting can prove dangerous.

An opportunity for one's progress should be availed of as soon as it appears. If it is missed, it may not come again.

The man having a wife, who loves him more than her life and is always ready to be helpful, is indeed blessed. Wise men do not consider a house without wife a home; it is just a place to stay like any other. That is why wife is called the goddess of the home.

Poverty, disease, and misery are all fruits of one's karma.

One who commits sins does not obviously care for his soul; the consequence of the action has to be borne by him in the next life if not in this.

Those who offer bad advice disguised as good, are certainly enemies even though pretending to be friends.

When a person in authority heeds advice of inept counselors and acts even unknowingly against the interests of the people and the country, he loses everything.

A person who anticipates troubles and takes action to ward them off, enjoys happy life; one who does not think and act before the troubles come, suffers and regrets.

When ill luck looms large a person thinks of friends as enemies, mistreats them, and cannot discriminate between good and evil.

A wise man should achieve success in his efforts without caring for respect and even ignoring insults.

Even though a forest fire burns all the trees it does not burn their roots and in time they grow again. But a slowly building frost can destroy the trees and the roots as well.

The greatness of a person well versed in (moral-based) political science lies in not abandoning a job once started even in the face of calamities.

People with low level of intelligence never start an action with fear of obstacles. Those at the middle level start but leave it unfinished when obstacles appear. But wise ones (with high intelligence) do not abandon the action and complete it in spite of heavy odds. Great men never feel easy until a job is finished.

A wise person, who gets rid of loan, enemy, and illness in entirety, never suffers in life.

A person having both intelligence and courage attains success effortlessly.

The company of generous, brave, and learned makes a person meritorious. He acquires wealth easily, which brings supremacy and respect.

Wise men do not show negligence even toward ordinary acts and perform them diligently.

The head of a state should take it for granted at the inauguration itself that he would face difficulties, even calamities. No one in this world is immune from these.

Wealth, prosperity, fame, and all such worldly things are transitory. One should not let them bring pride and arrogance, but use them judiciously for the common good of people.

From Tantra Four

Sages have prescribed atonement for all sorts of bad actions, but for ungratefulness there is no atonement.

A wise person should stay away from anyone who covets a friend's possessions.

To give something to a friend, to take something from him, to take meals together, to tell him even inner thoughts, to seek and give advice are six signs of affection and regard.

One who is not trustworthy should never be trusted. But too much trust in anyone is undesirable.

One should not continue friendship with a person who has tried to harm one in anyway.

Taking revenge is justified with a person who had treated one badly in days of distress or had made fun of one's bad condition.

Those adept in political science get rid of a strong and troublesome enemy using a stronger enemy against him, just as a thorn in the body is taken out using a needle. One should never associate with a person whose nature, lineage, and residence are unknown.

Natural enemies cannot be friends just as fire and straw cannot exist together.

When all possessions and even life are in danger one should show humility even to the enemy in order to save them.

One should take food that is easy to eat, easy to digest, and is beneficial for health.

Wisdom lies in giving up a part rather than losing the whole.

A person wearing soiled clothes does not mind sitting in dirt; similarly one who falls into vice once, is prone to forget virtue and keep on falling.

When a person does something reprehensible with full knowledge of the nature of the action it is only a course of destiny. If it were not so no one would ever indulge in such actions.

Even if life is in danger one should not do anything improper, nor should he stray from his righteous path. This is what dharma is all about.

An entire army becomes motivated when a single man shows patience and enthusiasm; on the other hand even a single person's defeatist attitude makes the army demoralized.

The parrot and starling get caught because they talk and sing, but the heron does not because it keeps quiet. Silence is golden.

An evil person does not change his nature even in the company of kind and gentle men their overt instructions notwithstanding.

A home without wife is not home. But even the shade of a tree is home in the company of a faithful wife.

If a person does not have his mother and soft-spoken wife, it is not a home. For him the home and the forest are the same.

When destiny goes against you all sorts of trouble crop up. Hunger pinches more when there is no money, a sore point on the body gets hit more often, and enemies become more aggressive when one is already in trouble.

When a person acts on advice from his elders and friends he does not encounter difficulties in life. On the other hand if he disregards such advice because of foolishness and arrogance, he faces disasters.

Those who preach goodwill and help others are blessed in this life as well as beyond.

If a person treats well only those who have done him good, he is just ordinary. But the person who treats well even those who have done him wrong is really great and a true gentleman.

In order to win over a person one has to use different mean – courtesy with people of superior nature, wits with powerful, enticement with people of inferior nature, and courage and bravery with equals. If negotiation and enticement do not work one should resort to creating rift.

Wealth and prosperity gained without one's own efforts may give material satisfaction but degrade self-esteem.

From Tantra Five

An intelligent but poor person is always worried about taking care of the basic needs of the family and his intelligence becomes ineffective. Even if he has a beautiful house, it looks sad like a sky without stars and rugged as a dry pond.

A poor person becomes worthless, people ignore him as if he did not exist and he were a phantom, transient like bubbles in water. In their eyes a rich person is more important than a meritorious one. An inappropriate behavior of a rich person is usually disregarded but a poor person does not get recognition even for good deeds.

The dreams of a sick, worried, and bewildered person never come true.

With old age hair become white, teeth become weak and fall out, eyes and ears become weak, but the man's desire is the only thing that does not age; it gets younger and stronger.

One should never take any action without fully knowing the details and weighing in the pros and cons so as not to have any regrets afterwards.

The attachment to one's own child is stronger than to parents, friends, and any other relation.

One should not be exceedingly greedy; at the same time one should not completely forsake the desire for obtaining things. A little sense of greed is necessary for getting ahead in life.

It is better to live in a forest with no amenities than to live penniless among kith and kin. Friends, relatives, and sometimes even family members desert a person who has no money. It is a hard fact of life that without wealth it is very difficult to attain fame or command respect.

Beset with worries of life one even lies to get rich, forsakes family, and goes to a foreign land to fulfill his ambitions.

With courage a diligent person eventually gets what he wants if he is persistent and risks even his life working towards the goal.

Anything can be accomplished by dedicated hard work. What one calls destiny is simply a hidden quality in the person that comes out in the open with energetic effort.

The character of a courageous person and the conduct of a generous one – both are uncommon.

In this world pleasure and comfort come only after subjecting the body to certain amount of pain and discomfort.

Discriminating intellect is superior to knowledge; even a highly learned and knowledgeable person faces ruin without this intellect.

The wealth that serves only the owner and does not benefit others is no wealth at all.

Only narrow-minded persons make distinction between mine and not mine. For benevolent and generous ones the whole world is one family.*

*For those interested in Sanskrit original:

“Vasudhaiva kutumbakam” is an oft-quoted Sanskrit phrase and is a part of the verse here.

Ayam nijah paro veti ganana laghuchetasam

Udarcharitanantu vasudhaiva kutumbakam. (PT 5-37)

Even a perfect knowledge of scriptures, arts, and sciences does not do any good without commonsense.

The real friend is one, who stays with you in festivities, times of distress and bereavement, and when surrounded by enemies.

In the face of total loss and destruction a wise man foregoes half of his possessions and tries to do with the remaining because it is very hard to bear total loss.

Even a highly intelligent and wise man goes through suffering, while an ignorant simpleton enjoys life. Such is the irony of fate!

The wishes and efforts of evil minded persons do not always succeed, otherwise the world would have vanished long time ago.

The intellect of a wise person can get immediate access to places where even sun’s rays and air cannot reach.

Greed feeds on itself. A person having hundred dollars wants thousands that having thousands wants millions, and the millionaire wants to become billionaire. Greed comes from desire and man's desire never ends. Even when a man has everything in the world, he wants to go to heaven.

Thoughts of beauty, enjoyment, pleasure, morals, etc. come into mind only with proper nourishment of the body. A famished person cannot think of these things.
