

Fire, Water, Truth, and Falsehood

NORTHEAST AFRICA—ETHIOPIA



Long ago, Fire, Water, Truth, and Falsehood lived together in one large house. Although all were polite toward each other, they kept their distance. Truth and Falsehood sat on opposite sides of the room. Fire constantly leapt out of Water's path.

One day they went hunting together. They found a large number of cattle and began driving them home to their village. "Let us share these cattle equally," said Truth as they traveled across the grasslands. "This is the fair way to divide our captives."

No one disagreed with Truth except Falsehood. Falsehood wanted more than an equal share but kept quiet about it for the moment. As the four hunters traveled back to the village, Falsehood went secretly to Water and whispered, "You are more powerful than Fire. Destroy Fire and then there will be more cattle for each of us!"

Water flowed over Fire, bubbling and steaming until Fire was gone. Water meandered along, cheerfully thinking about more cattle for itself.

Falsehood, meanwhile, whispered to Truth. "Look! See for yourself! Water has killed Fire! Let us leave Water, who has cruelly destroyed our warmhearted friend. We must take the cattle high in the mountains to graze."

As Truth and Falsehood traveled up the mountain, Water tried to follow. But the mountain was too steep, and Water could not flow upwards. Water washed down upon itself, splashing and swirling around rocks as it tumbled

down the slope. Look and see! Water is still tumbling down the mountainside to this day.

Truth and Falsehood arrived at the mountaintop. Falsehood turned to Truth and said in a loud voice, "I am more powerful than you! You will be my servant. I am your master. All the cattle belong to me!"

Truth rose up and spoke out, "I will not be your servant!"

They battled and battled. Finally they brought the argument to Wind to decide who was master.

Wind didn't know. Wind blew all over the world to ask people whether Truth or Falsehood was more powerful. Some people said, "A single word of Falsehood can completely destroy Truth." Others insisted, "Like a small candle in the dark, Truth can change every situation."

Wind finally returned to the mountain and said, "I have seen that Falsehood is very powerful. But it can rule only where Truth has stopped struggling to be heard."

And it has been that way ever since.