

Urashima Tarō

A fable from Japan
In simple English
The Stories First Foundation

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A traditional Japanese story

By Claire Walter



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A Japanese folktale
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Dedicated to Dibyendu, whose box is full of
promising days.

Long ago in Japan, there was a young man named Urashima Tarō. Tarō was only 18 years old. He was quiet and kind.

Tarō lived alone in a small house near a fishing village. But Tarō did not go to the village much. The people in the village saw how Tarō stayed away. They thought he was strange. Some laughed at poor Tarō.

But Tarō liked to be alone. He especially liked to be alone on the water. It was quiet and calm.

One day, Tarō left his house early. He walked to his boat. Suddenly, he saw something on the beach. He saw some children from the village. “HA! HA! Get him!” laughed the children.

Tarō thought they were laughing at him. He started to walk away. But then, he looked closer.

The children were not laughing at Tarō. They did not even see him. “What are they laughing at?” thought Tarō. He walked closer.



Tarō came closer and saw the children. They had a turtle, and they were hitting it.

Tarō was surprised and cried, “Stop!” But the children just hit the turtle again. The turtle walked a little, but it was badly hurt.

“Stop hitting the turtle!” repeated Tarō. This time, he got the turtle. He held it in his hands.

The children looked up and saw Tarō. He had turned red. The children stopped immediately. “It’s just a turtle,” said one.

Tarō was angry. But they were just children. So he calmed down. “Is it just a turtle? Or something more?” The children were curious. So Tarō started to tell a story:

Once there was a princess so beautiful and so good, all of her people loved her. Her father was the Dragon King. He was good and kind.

One day, a Sea Witch saw the beautiful princess. People loved the princess and cried out her name. But the people hated the witch.

The Sea Witch hated the princess. One day, she used her magic to turn the princess into a turtle. But the princess’s heart was so kind. The witch could not hurt her.

The witch said the magic words, and the princess was more beautiful than ever. Now, the princess could turn herself into a turtle or a person at will.

Some days, she is a beautiful woman. Some days, she is a beautiful turtle.

After hearing the story, one child started crying. He looked at the turtle and said, "I am sorry." Then, the other children said "Sorry", too. One by one, the children quietly left the beach.

Tarō held the turtle in his hands. "You must go back in the water," he said to the turtle. He went to put the turtle in the water. But then he looked closer. He saw the turtle was badly hurt.

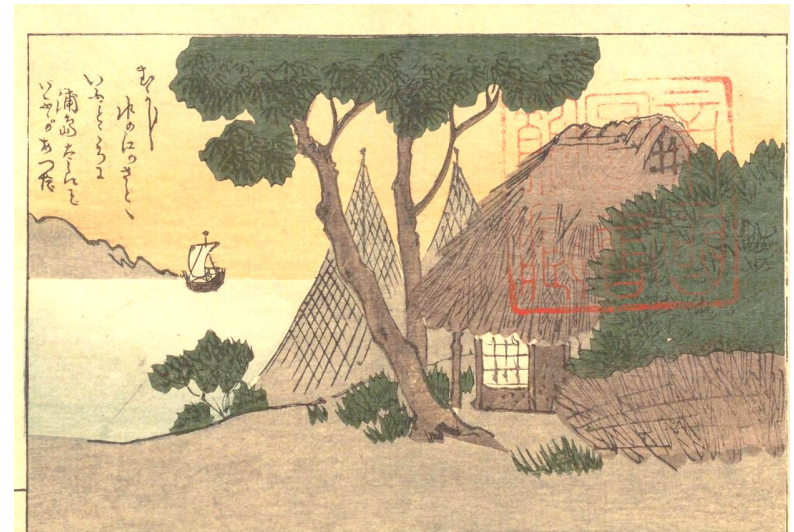
"I must bandage you," said Tarō. As he walked with the little turtle, he looked at it closely. "You are all alone, too," he said.

At home, Tarō sat down with the turtle. The turtle's back was badly hurt. Tarō bandaged it.

Then, Tarō gave the turtle different foods. He wanted to see what the turtle liked. The turtle started eating happily. Tarō smiled down at him.

Every day, Tarō bandaged the turtle's back. Tarō was happy caring for his little friend. But he knew the turtle's home was in the water.

One day, Tarō said sadly, "It is time, my little friend. You must go back home."



That day, Tarō left home. Again, he held the turtle close and walked along the beach. As he walked, he thought, "How strange. It is just a turtle. But I am so sad to say goodbye to my little friend."

As he walked, Tarō passed the village. He saw friends walking and laughing together.

"It is better to be alone," said Tarō to his turtle. "Friends are not bad when they are with you. But one day, we must say goodbye to every friend." Then Tarō got in his boat and left.



On this day, the water was very quiet. Tarō rowed and rowed. Soon, he was far from the beach.

Then, Tarō stopped the boat. He held the little turtle. “Goodbye,” said Tarō kindly. Then, he set the turtle in the water.

The minutes passed. Tarō could not see any other boats. He was all alone. Then, Tarō heard a voice. “Thank you,” it said.

Tarō was very confused. “Who said that?” he cried. Tarō looked around, but he was alone.

“Thank you. You saved me,” the voice said again.

Finally, Tarō looked down at the sea next to his boat. Tarō was amazed! He saw the turtle again. The voice came from the turtle! “What magic is this?” thought Tarō.

“Do not be afraid,” said the turtle. “I am a magic turtle. I live in the palace of the Dragon King. But one day, I went to see your village.”

The turtle told Tarō her story. In the village, the people were cruel to the turtle. They laughed at her, and they hit her. But not Tarō.

“You were kind to me. You were my friend,” said the turtle. “Please, come with me. Come to my home.”

Suddenly, the turtle grew very big. She was bigger than the fishing boat.

Tarō was amazed, but he was not afraid. He knew his turtle friend was a kind creature.

Tarō got out of his boat. He sat on the turtle's back. Quickly, the turtle took off on the water.

The turtle swam for many days. She went faster than any boat. Tarō just looked on in surprise.

Tarō saw the sun set. He saw the sun rise again. But it was as though only a few minutes passed.

It was all so beautiful, so amazing. Tarō could not think of what to say. He just smiled and held onto his turtle friend.

Soon Tarō looked up. In the distance, he saw a beautiful beach. "Come with me," said the turtle. "My palace is this way."

"Your palace?" said Tarō. He saw that his friend was more than just a little turtle.

The turtle and Tarō walked up onto the beach. They walked for days. But to Tarō, it was as though a few minutes passed.

Suddenly, Tarō saw a beautiful palace. "This way," said the turtle in a happy voice. "There is Ryūgu-jo, the Palace of the Dragon King."



Tarō looked closely at the palace. It was pure gold. They walked up to the palace doors. The doors were bright red with beautiful stones.

"This is your home?" said Tarō, surprised.

He turned and looked for his friend. He looked and looked, but the turtle was gone.



Where the turtle had been, Tarō saw a beautiful woman. “You are a woman?” he said in surprise. “But you were a turtle!”

The beautiful princess smiled. “Yes, that’s right. I am Princess Otohime. Some days I am a turtle. Some days, I am a woman,” she said.

Tarō looked at her strangely. Princess Otohime looked down sadly. Tarō saw she was sad and he said quickly, “You are beautiful.”

“Beautiful?” said the princess. “Some people think I am strange. But here, in my home, I can just be alone.”

Then, Princess Otohime smiled at Tarō. “Come to the palace with me,” she said. “My father will want to see you.”

Princess Otohime walked with Tarō to her father. “This is Tarō,” said the princess. She told her father the story. She told him that she had been hurt, but Tarō saved her.

The Dragon King listened quietly. Then he held his hand out to Tarō. “Thank you for your kindness to the princess,” he said. “We will have a special dinner in your honor.”

“Just one dinner?” said the princess. “Can’t he stay longer?”

“Tarō may stay for three days,” said the Dragon King. “But time is different for Tarō. He cannot stay longer.”

Tarō was confused. But Princess Otohime took his hand. “Come with me,” she said, smiling.

The princess took Tarō to a beautiful room. “This is your room,” said the princess. “And here are your new clothes” she said. She left the room.

Minutes later, Tarō came out in his new clothes. He was transformed. He looked like a king.

Then Princess Otohime walked with Tarō around the palace. Tarō was amazed at the beautiful rooms.

Soon they entered a room with a large table. It was the king’s table! The room was filled with colorful flowers. “This is the Spring room,” said the princess. She sat with Tarō, and they ate together.

After dinner, the princess told a story. Tarō listened closely. The princess’s story was magical. At times, it was happy. At times, it was sad. But every minute was so beautiful, Tarō lost all sense of time.

Tarō listened quietly as the story ended. “Thank you!” he said with a smile.

Then the princess walked her friend to his room. “Good night,” she said kindly.

Tarō sat quietly in his room. “How strange,” thought Tarō. “The story ended so quickly!” Tarō did not know that many days had passed. To him, it was just one very happy day.

The next day, there was another dinner. Again, the princess walked with Tarō to the king’s table. The table was filled with the foods of summer. “This is the Summer Room,” said the princess.

Again, Princess Otohime and Tarō ate a delicious dinner. And again, the princess told a story. Tarō loved the story, and he didn’t notice time passing. The story ended and again, the princess said “Good night.”

Soon, it was time for the third dinner. On this day, the room was filled with the orange and red colors of Fall. “This is the Fall room,” said the princess.

But Princess Otohime looked sad. The princess knew Tarō must go home soon.



“Please, can you tell me a story?” said Tarō.

The princess smiled. She could not say no to her friend. She started to tell a story. Tarō listened closely. As he listened, he was very happy. A long time passed. But to Tarō, it was just minutes.

Then, the story ended. “Good night,” said Princess Otohime. She smiled bravely, but Tarō saw she was sad. She looked like she would cry. “Princess, you look sad,” said Tarō.

“Tarō, do you miss your home? Do you miss your friends?” said the princess.

Tarō thought about his old home. He thought about the village and the people who did not love him. “You are my friend,” said Tarō.

The princess thought about Tarō, living all alone. She held his hand. “Yes, I am,” she said.

Then, they said “Good night.” Tarō went to his room. He thought about Princess Otohime. It was so strange: he loved his time with her, but he was sad. The more beautiful the day, the faster it went.

The next day, Tarō and the princess ate in the Winter Room. It was quiet and calm. Then Princess Otohime said, “Thank you for your visit, Tarō. But you must go back home.”

“Go home?” said Tarō. “But I am so happy here. Please, can I stay?”

The Princess saw that Tarō was sad. “Here, take this box,” she said. “Look at it and think of me. But do not open it.” Then, she gave Tarō a beautiful box.

Then, the princess made Tarō promise not to open the box.

“I promise,” said Tarō. He smiled at his friend. He could not say no to the princess.

The Dragon King came to say goodbye to Tarō. He said goodbye to Princess Otohime, too.

“Don’t worry, Father,” said the princess. “I will come back quickly.”

Then, Princess Otohime and Tarō got in a little boat. But Tarō could not row the boat. He was too sad.

“Please, I do not want to go home,” said Tarō. “I want to stay with you.”

“I’m sorry. You must go,” said the princess.

“Come, sit in the boat with me and I will row,” said the princess. So Tarō sat with the princess. Then, the princess rowed back to the village.

Finally, the boat came up to the beach. Tarō’s home was close by. The time came for Princess Otohime to go. The princess looked like she would cry. “Goodbye, Tarō,” she said.



“Please stay, princess,” said Tarō. “I care about you. You are my friend.” Tarō thought for a moment. Then he said quietly, “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” said the princess. “But you must go. Goodbye.”

Quickly, she went back to the boat and started to row.

Tarō sat on the beach. He looked on as the princess left. Then Tarō started to cry.



Once, being alone made Tarō happy. Now, it made him so very sad.

Finally, Tarō had to go home. He started to walk back to his house. Tarō passed through the village. There, he saw people from the village walking by.

Tarō looked closely at the people. They looked different. The village people's clothes looked strange. The houses looked different, too.

The people thought Tarō was strange. As he walked by, he heard, “*Who is that?*”

Tarō looked for people he knew. But the people of the village were all strangers.

Then, Tarō heard a voice. “Tarō?” cried the man. “Is that you?”

Tarō stopped and looked. There, he saw an old man. He looked very surprised.

“Hello, do I know you?” said Tarō. He looked at the old man in surprise.

“My name is Kato. When I was a boy, you saw me on the beach. I was hitting a turtle with a stick. You told me to stop,” said the man. “But the next day, you left. You were gone for 100 years!”

Tarō was so confused. He did not know what to think. To Tarō, it had not been 100 years, but only a few days.

Tarō thought for a minute. Then, he told the old man about the Dragon King's palace.

“Time is different in the palace of the Dragon King,” explained Tarō. “I was gone for a few days. But you say I was gone for 100 years!”

Then, Kato saw the box. “What is that?” he said in surprise.

“A gift from the princess,” said Tarō sadly. “We were together for some time. It was such a happy time. But then I had to say goodbye to her.”

“I am very old,” said Kato. “I have said goodbye to many friends. One day, we must say goodbye to everyone we care for.”

Tarō and Kato looked sadly at the box. “What is inside?” Kato asked Tarō.

“I cannot open it,” said Tarō. The princess said not to.”

Tarō just looked sadly at the box. Old Kato saw Tarō was sad and confused. “I will go now,” he said. “Goodbye Tarō.”

Tarō said goodbye and Kato walked away. At that moment, Tarō was so very lonely. He did not know what to do. So he went out fishing in his boat.



Most days, the water helped calm Tarō. But on this day, it was too quiet. Tarō sat sadly in his boat.

In no time, he got a few fish. Tarō went home with the fish for his dinner. But then he thought about his dinners with the princess. Now, he would eat alone.

Tarō sat on the beach and looked at the box. He thought about the princess.

“What was inside?” he had asked.

“Our time together,” said the princess.



“Our time together,” thought Tarō. All he wanted was their time together. Tarō took the box. Quickly, he opened it.

Then Tarō looked at his hands. They were wrinkled and old. He looked at his hair. It had turned white. He was now an old, old man!

“*You opened the box...*” said a voice from the water. Taro looked around, but no one was there.

Tarō sat on the beach. “It was her,” he said sadly. He heard the princess’s voice one last time.