

The honest woodcutter - Aesop's Fables

[Aesop's Fables](#) has a large number of stories and some of them are the stuff of legends. The story of the "[Mercury and the Woodman](#)" also has many other names and is called as "the honest woodcutter" or "The golden Axe" or "the lumberjack and mercury". It is indexed at position 173 in in the Perry Index. It is the story of a very honest woodcutter and how he interacts with God Mercury.....

Story of the honest woodcutter:

Once upon a time, there was a poor woodcutter who was very honest. He used to cut wood in the forests and sell it in the market for some money. He was very happy with his life.

One day the wood cutter cutting wood in the forest. It was a hot day and the wood cutter was very tired. His palms were filled with sweat and his ax was slipping. His hand slipped and the Ax flew from his hand straight into a deep pond.

The wood cutter began to cry. He was very poor and could not buy another ax. The woodcutter needed an ax to cut wood and so he sat near the pool in despair and cried.

On hearing his cries, God Mercury appeared before him from within the pool.

Mercury asked, "My child, what has happened? Why are you crying?"

The wood cutter said, "My ax has fallen into the deep pool. Without it, I cannot make any more money to eat."

Mercury said, "Do not worry, I shall fetch your ax for you."

The test of honesty

Mercury dived into the pond and when he came out, he had a golden ax in his hand. It was stunning and magnificent.

Mercury asked the wood cutter, "Is this your ax?"

The woodcutter was very honest and replied, "No. That is not my Ax."

Mercury laid the golden ax on the bank and dived inside again. When he came out, he had a gleaming silver ax in his hand.

Mercury asked the wood cutter, "Is this your ax?"

The woodcutter was very honest and replied, "No. That is not my Ax."

Mercury laid the silver ax on the bank and dived inside again. When he came out, he had a wooden ax in his hand.

Mercury asked the wood cutter, "Is this your ax?"

The honest woodcutter replied, "Yes. That is not my Ax. Thank you so much."

Mercury said, "I admire your honesty. I shall give you all the three axes."

Saying so, Mercury gave him all the three axes, dived into the pool and disappeared.

The happy wood cutter narrated this tale to all the wood cutters in the village. They grew jealous and they wanted the gold and silver axes.

They threw their axes into the pond and cried. When Mercury appeared and showed them the golden ax, they were all dishonest and said, "Yes, it is my Golden Ax".

Mercury gave them a hard whack over their head and sent them home. They did not get their wooden ax as well.

What is the moral of the story?

The moral of the story is "*Honesty is the best policy.*" The moral can also be interpreted as "*Honesty is always rewarded and dishonesty is always punished.*"

Other stories which you can read

[The Dog and the Hides](#)

[The Cock, The Dog and the Fox](#)

[The Farmer and the Snake](#)

[The Farmer and the Stork](#)

[The Cat and the Birds](#)

Questions on "Mercury and the Woodman"

1. Who are the main characters of the story?
2. What happened to the axe? Who agreed to help the woodcutter?
3. Which material was the first axe made of?
4. With what metal was the second axe made of?
5. What was the third axe made of?
6. Which axe did Mercury give to the woodcutter?

7. What happens at the end of the story?
8. Explain is the moral of the story?

Answers:

1. The main characters of the story are the God Mercury and a honest woodcutter
2. The axe fell into the pond. Mercury offered to retrieve the axe for the honest woodcutter.
3. The first axe was made of solid gold.
4. The second axe was made of solid silver.
5. The third axe was made of wood.
6. Mercury gave the woodcutter all the three axes as a reward for his honesty.
7. The other woodman neighbors threw their axes into the pond and cried. When Mercury appeared and showed them the golden ax, they said, "Yes, it is my Golden Ax". Mercury gave them a hard whack over their head and sent them home. They did not get their wooden ax as well.
8. The moral of the story is "*Honesty is the best policy.*" The moral can also be interpreted as "*Honesty is always rewarded and dishonesty is always punished.*"