

The story of Kamba, the Wise Tortoise – **Maxwell Mandinyenya**

I was told this by my mother when I was a boy.

Long, long time ago, there was a very serious drought in the world. There were no rains for the whole year and all the wells, rivers and dams dried up, save for one well that still had water. All the animals used to come and drink water from this well; soon it would dry up too. So the king of the animals, Shumba the Lion, called a meeting.

All the animals attended the meeting and decided that they needed to dig another well as soon as possible before the remaining one dried up – except for one animal. Tsuru Magen'a the Hare refused to join in the digging.

The other animals tried to convince him, but Tsuru wouldn't listen!

The following morning all the animals met and began digging. They all agreed that Tsuru shouldn't be allowed to get water from the new well since he had refused to help.



As they dug, the old well dried up. Deeper and deeper they dug, faster and faster, day and night, everyone taking turns but no water came out. Nzou the Elephant, Mbizi the Zebra, Shumba the Lion... they all tried but still no water emerged.

Kamba the Tortoise wanted to try, and asked again and again, but because of his size the others wouldn't allow him. Everyone had now lost hope of finding water, and again Kamba asked. What did they have to lose? So they let him dig.

Kamba started digging, singing, "*Kwengweru kwengweru nemamvura machena. Kwengweru kwengweru nemamvura machena.*" ("Scrape, scrape, clean water, come out.")

In no time, clean water gushed out... there was jubilation and ululation for Kamba!

After drinking water to their hearts' content, everyone went home. They returned the next day, only to find Tsuru's footprints and droppings by the new well that he had refused to dig. They agreed to take turns to guard the well so Tsuru won't be able to drink water from the well.



Mhene the Impala was the first to stand guard. Hidden behind a nearby mound of sand, Tsuru watched and waited; soon Mhene was tired and fell asleep. Tsuru came and lapped up all the water he needed before he went away singing, “*Ndini Tsuru Magen’a, ndasiya ndagezera mutsime renyu... mungandidiii, Mwangwana panani?*” (“*My name is Tsuru Magen’a, I bathed in your well... what can you do to me, who will be there tomorrow?*”)

The following day the animals were most unimpressed with Mhene. They chose Nyathi the Buffalo to guard that night instead, but again Tsuru played the same trick. All the large animals took turns but still Tsuru would outwit them.

Kamba tried to convince them that he could deal with Tsuru but he was turned down. “If Tsuru could beat Nyathi and Nzou, what more can you do, tiny Kamba?” they charged. However, after everyone had been beaten, they finally allowed Kamba to guard.

Kamba then went and put some sticky wax on his back and settled down to wait for Tsuru. The hare came loping along and, finding Kamba by the well, he laughed his heart out. “So they have sent you tiny Kamba to guard? What do you think you will do here? Kikikikikikiki!”

Kamba responded “I will fight you away from my well!” Tsuru laughed and moved forward to push Kamba into the well but his left hand got stuck on Kamba’s back. He said, “Ah, I still have my right hand!” But that stuck too.



“I have a left foot!” and “I have a right foot!” All got well and truly STUCK.

Now Tsuru was trapped, stuck fast to Kamba the whole night until the morning, much to the jubilation of all the other animals when they arrived. They had finally apprehended Tsuru Magen’a – the troublemaker!

The moral: It’s not the size that matters but brains, talent and efforts. And never despise others because of their small size or what they look like!

