The Safe

Educational Value

Generosity

Moral of the story

Everything we give to others will, sooner or later, return to us, whether or not it be in a form we expected

Story

Once upon a time, a greedy, rich man hired a great mathematician. The rich man wanted the mathematician to find the best way for him to make the greatest profit in everything he did. The rich man was building a huge safe, and his greatest dream was to fill it with gold and jewels.

The mathematician was shut away for months in his study, before finally believing he had found the solution. But he soon found there were some errors in his calculations, and he started all over again.

One night he appeared at the rich man's house, with a big smile on his face: "I found it!" he said, "My calculations are perfect." The rich man was going on a long journey the next day, and didn't have time to listen. He promised the mathematician he would pay him double his wages if he would take charge of the business while he was away, and put the new formulas into practice. Excited by his new discovery, the mathematician was delighted to accept.

When the rich man returned, months later, he found that all of his possessions had gone. Furious, he went to ask for an explanation from the mathematician. The mathematician calmly told him what he had done. He had given everything away to people. The rich man couldn't believe it, but the mathematician explained it further.

"For months I analysed how a rich man could gain the maximum benefit, but what I could do was always limited. There's a limit to how much one man can do by himself. Then I understood the key was that many people could help us to achieve the aim. So the conclusion was that helping others was the best way to get more and more people to benefit us."

Disappointed and furious, the greedy man stormed off, desperate at having lost everything to the hare-brained schemes of a madman. However, while he was walking away disconsolately, several neighbours ran over, worried about him. All of them had been helped when the mathematician shared out the rich man's fortune. They felt so grateful to him that they offered him the hospitality of their houses, and anything such a special man might need. The neighbours even argued over who would get to help him.

Over the next few days, he saw the full results of what the mathematician had calculated. Wherever he went he was received with great honour, and everyone was willing to help him in whatever way they could. He realised that his not having anything had given him much, much more.

In this way, he managed to quickly set up flourishing businesses, but this time he followed the brilliant mathematician's advice. No longer did he keep his riches in a safe, or anything like it. Instead, he shared out his fortune among a hundred friends, whose hearts he had converted into the safest, most grateful and fruitful of safes.

Author:. Pedro Pablo Sacristán
