

## **How the Dung Beetle became King**

A long time ago there was a fertile valley, rich in all the animals and plants of the African savannah. Leafy trees lined the river, flowers and green grass carpeted the valley floor, hippos and warthogs wallowed in the shallows, mongooses scurried playfully between anthills, impala and sable nibbled on the sweet grass and baboons lay lazily under baobab trees to escape the scorching African sun. This was the Valley of the Four Kings ruled by the four kings: Elephant, Giraffe, Lion and Buffalo.

With the coming of hunters to the savannah plains, it was due to the efforts of these four, that the animals were able to reach this valley and thus escape the threat of the hunters. In the exodus, the animals had faced many dangers and obstacles which they would not have overcome had it not been for the Elephant, Giraffe, Lion and Buffalo. It was thanks to the Elephant's knowledge, memory and migratory experience that the animals took the right path when faced with a fork in the road. The Giraffe's elevated vision and ability to look far ahead forewarned the animals and thus helped them in preparing for approaching dangers. When faced with danger in hostile territories, the Lion's authority served the animals well as it was the Lion who planned and executed the strategy of overcoming the enemy. His strategies were also useful in hunting prey to feed the animals during the trek. When faced with crocodile-infested rivers to ford, rocky hills to climb and rifts to jump, it was the Buffalo's ability to inspire, organise and lead large herds across these obstacles that won him admiration amongst the animals, and therefore a shared kingship with the Elephant, Giraffe and Lion.

In this valley there also lived a dung beetle named Chituta who was in the business of moving and burying dung. This was not easy work, as it involved him building a ball of dung and soil, six times his size, standing on his head and rolling the ball to the intended new site, using his back legs. With so many animals about there was much work for Chituta as he travelled the length and breadth of the valley. The nature of his work meant that Chituta came in contact with most of the valley's inhabitants, but despite his laborious tasks; he always had the courtesy to stop a while and have a chat with them. Thus he was well liked and appreciated by the valley animals.

On his daily trappings, Chituta picked up on all that was happening in the valley: who was expecting a baby, where the sweetest grass was, how the brave little impala escaped from a pack of jackals.....and so on. Amongst all this idle chatter the animals also grumbled about the hippos hogging the water, the noisy gangs of hyenas and most revealing of all the leadership of the valley's four kings.

The animals felt that the Giraffe though he could see far ahead for miles around and could warn of any coming danger, did not really know what was going on right at his feet in the burrows and grass as he kept his head in the clouds. The Elephant though knowledgeable was thought to be too old-fashioned as he did not appreciate the changing times and was quick to dismiss any new ideas from the young. With the head-strong Buffalo the animals were tired of just blindly following him in herds and felt that they had no real input in how they were being moved about. They really only followed him because of his charisma. However it was the authoritative nature of the Lion that caused the most grumbling, especially when all the animals knew that the lionesses could carry out the strategy and hunting duties just as well, and yet the Lion's ferocity and position in the community, meant that nobody would dare bring these issues.

Chituta heard all this as he went about his business of diligently serving the valley animals. He lent such a friendly ear that the even the Kings were happy to openly chat while he worked about them. From the Giraffe he found out that most troubles came from the east, the direction in which the never-ending lake lay. From the Elephant he learnt about the old times, the safe migratory paths and also the locations of well-sheltered valleys that their ancestors once inhabited further inland. From the Buffalo, he learnt how to organise animals in herds and that the word 'Olaffub' spoken when herds of animals were in a panic calmed them down. And while observing the Lion teaching its cubs hunting strategies, Chituta learnt how to set up ambushes and the most effective attack formations. All this Chituta took in.

Then came that fateful year – the year the animals faced two great tragedies. Unbeknown to all the valley animals, their valley was part of a gorge designated as a new dam site. Thus when the river began to swell, the animals first moved to higher ground, thinking it was the normal seasonal change. However the raising waters did

not stop, and soon the animals were thrown into a panic, as the flood waters rose higher and faster. To add to the tragedy, hunters anticipating such a reaction had come inland in search of hides, and in the confusion were able to obtain many including that of the highly sought trophy animals; the Giraffe, Elephant, Buffalo and Lion. Thus in a single day the animals of the Valley of the Four Kings had lost their home and leaders.

Once the hunters had left taking their trophies with them, the frightened remaining animals congregated at what once had been the highest edge of the valley and was now the edge of a lake and watched in a bleak silence as the waters covered the last remaining treetops of their beloved valley.

Chituta who had escaped on the back of a rhino, made his way to the rhino's horn and stood at the tip of the horn, and in his loudest voice shouted 'Olaffub'. The animals immediately raised their heads and stood in anticipation. 'Do not worry' he continued 'we have all lost our kings and homes today, but don't worry, I know of another valley further inland not too far from here that we can go to.' Now even though the animals were a bit surprised to hear Chituta speak with such courage and authority they trusted him and as no one else had a better suggestion they decided to follow him. So Chituta arranged the animals in the way that the Buffalo had spoken about and they began their trek to the new valley. Chituta recalled the knowledge of all the old migratory routes Elephant had spoke about and thus was able to choose the safe paths. Also every few miles Chituta would order a baboon to climb the highest tree and look ahead for any dangers, paying special attention to the east as this was the direction the hunters were most likely to come from. Whenever there was any danger ahead Chituta held an 'indaba' with the lionesses and planned with them a strategy to repel any hostile intent. Whenever there was a river to ford Chituta organised the animal as he had learnt from Buffalo and lead them through it on the rhino's back.

Finally after six days and six nights of trekking through the savannah, the animals came to the valley of which Chituta had spoken of. Though it was well enclosed, with a river winding on a rocky riverbed, it was not as lush as their old home, as it had few trees, the grass was brown and there was not a flower or fruit in sight. Chituta was quite sure that this was the right place and sensing the despondency of the animals,

stood on the tip of the rhino horn and assured the animals that this was the place, and though it did not look like much now, if they were patient and trusted him, after the rainy season this valley would rival their old home. With much grumbling and reluctance the animals decided to give it a chance and thus the very next day Chituta began to put his plan into action. Everyday he would get down off the rhino's back, walk the valley floor, seek out dung from all the different animals, relocate and then strategically bury it. In his daily movements across the valley he had the chance to listen to the animals and also kept them encouraged with promises of better days ahead and also informed of all valleys' goings-on.

Days turned to weeks, weeks turned to months and finally the rains came. The animals were excited. Would their new home turn out to be as lush as their other valley, was the ground fertile enough? These were the questions on the animals' minds. They were not to be disappointed, as within a couple of weeks after the rains a miraculous transformation occurred as the once dry valley turned into a lush green valley. The river, now vibrant and full meandered across a plush green valley floor that was peppered by brightly coloured flowers. Much to the animals surprise their favourite fruit trees, grass and shrubs emerged all over the valley. Chituta seeing the delighted surprise of the animals proudly smiled in satisfaction, with a twinkle in his eye. Soon the valley was filled with all the sights and sound of a thriving fertile valley.....hippos and warthogs wallowed in the shallows, mongooses scurried playfully between anthills, impala and sable nibbled on the sweet grass and baboons lay lazily under baobab trees to escape the scorching African sun. This was once again a time of plenty and the animals were happy. In recognition of Chituta's courage, vision, organisation and most importantly diligent service the animals crowned him as their King, in what today, still remains as one of the most lush and prosperous valleys on the African savannah.

**Explanatory note**

*How the Dung Beetle became King: an allegory of leadership*

This tale seeks to convey two messages:

Firstly, that what is required is not a model based on any one leadership style but rather a fluid style in which the appropriate skill is called upon at the appropriate to time. There is a time for visionary leadership and a time for managerial leadership. There is a time for intellectually based leadership and a time for charismatic leadership. Most of these styles can be developed and it is for the would-be-leader to remain teachable and equip him/her-self.

*The four kings of the tale represent some common types of leadership:*

*Elephant – Intellectual / knowledge based leadership*

*Giraffe – Dreamer / Visionary leadership*

*Lion – Authoritative / positional leadership*

*Buffalo – Charismatic / managerial leadership*

*The Dung Beetle, by drawing on all of these various strengths, is able to lead effectively.*

The second message is that the bedrock of this fluid leadership model is service. Without this, although short term obstacles can be overcome, long term prosperity will be hard to attain. Leadership is influence and real influence is attained through service. It is only when one seeks to diligently serve the individual by listening, building relationships, encouraging and genuinely looking out for their best interests that the influence of the fluid leadership style will have significant and long-term impact.

*The Dung Beetle had a teachable spirit, he equipped himself, he developed key leadership traits that he wisely called upon as the situations demanded, he did not neglect his relationships and he steadfastly remained committed to serving others.*