

Brave Cowardly Chief



Educational Value

Patience and wisdom

Moral of the story

Patience helps to solve problems at the right time, although this sometimes obliges us to endure great pressure.

Story

When young Nerino was made chief of the tribe, everyone expected that – as was the custom on the island – he would direct his attention to fighting the great fiery-eyed beast; a horrible creature that had terrorised the tribespeople for centuries. Nerino had promised to slay the beast and, though he was a good fighter, he seemed no better than the others who had previously perished in the attempt. The tribe reckoned that, as chief, he wouldn't last much more than a year. This was about the amount of time needed to train and prepare a band of warriors, prior to ascending to the volcano's summit, where their horrendous enemy lived. And once they got there, no matter how strong or brave they were, all the warriors would be annihilated within a couple of hours.

However, nothing was done. Nerino didn't train any fighters, nothing out of the ordinary was done, no new assault tactics were devised. When summer came - the time the monster attacked most frequently, engulfing all in flames from his fiery eye - all the tribe did was move their village.

Everyone looked worryingly and insistently at Nerino. They demanded that he fight, that he do something, that he should be brave and fulfil the destiny of a chief. But Nerino simply said:

-“I shall defeat the beast, but now is not the time.”

And so the years passed by, and Nerino became an old man. And though they respected him as their chief, and his strategy of moving their village around the island had saved many lives, all the people believed he was a coward.

Yet, just when no-one expected it, Nerino finally assembled a squad of fighters. He announced this suddenly, without warning, on a cold winter night. Snow was rare on the island, but now it blanketed the ground, and the band of warriors had to march out barefoot, with frozen feet. They hurriedly ascended the volcano and, at the summit, they approached the monster's cave. Nerino confidently entered, while his companions performed the usual death preparation rituals, ready to leave this life...

When they were all inside the cave they saw old Nerino standing over the beast. The monster was lying, curled up, on the ground, trembling and groaning, close to death. Nerino and his warriors easily took the creature prisoner.

On arriving back at the village, everyone wanted to hear about Nerino's fight with the monster. Not even the tiniest baby was absent when Nerino began telling his story:

-“I never intended to fight against something so terrifying, and nor did I do so today,”

he said, filling all with surprise and expectation. He continued.

-“Did none of you notice that the beast would never attack during the worst days of winter? Or that, after an especially cold spell, his fire was never very strong, nor his attacks very damaging? For many years I was waiting

for a snow as heavy as this one. All along, we didn't need fighters; we needed the cold. When we got to the volcano, the monster was so weak he couldn't fight. Finally we have put an end to fighting and death. Now we have the beast, and his fiery eye, at our service."

Everyone congratulated the chief for his wisdom, particularly those who had most criticised him for supposed cowardice.

And so it was that even the most impatient among the tribe learned that, sometimes, patience can be much more useful than action, even if it means you require the bravery to accept people treating you like a coward.

Author..

[Pedro Pablo Sacristán](#)

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