



There was a rich merchant who had four wives. He loved the fourth wife the most and adorned her with rich robes and treated her to delicacies. He took great care of her and gave her nothing but the best. He also loved the third wife very much. He was very proud of her and always wanted to show her off to his friends. However, the merchant was always in great fear that she might run away with some other men.

He too, loved his second wife. She was a very considerate person, always patient and in fact was the merchant's confidante. Whenever the merchant faced some problems, he always turned to his second wife and she would always help him out and tide him through difficult times. Now, the merchant's first wife was a very loyal partner and has made great contributions in maintaining his wealth and business as well as taking care of the household. However, the merchant did not love the first wife and although she loved him deeply, he hardly took notice of her.

One day, the merchant fell ill. Before long, he knew that he was going to die soon. He thought of

his luxurious life and told himself, "Now I have four wives with me. But when I die, I'll be alone. How lonely I'll be!" Thus, he asked the fourth wife, "I loved you most, endowed you with the finest clothing and showered great care over you. Now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No way!" replied the fourth wife and she walked away without another word. The answer cut like a sharp knife right into the merchant's heart.

The sad merchant then asked the third wife, "I have loved you so much for all my life. Now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No!" replied the third wife. "Life is so good over here! I'm going to remarry when you die!" The merchant's heart sank and turned cold. He then asked the second wife, "I always turned to you for help and you've always helped me out. Now I need your help again. When I die, will you follow me and keep me company?" "I'm sorry, I can't help you out this time!" replied the second wife. "At the very most, I can only send you to your grave." The answer came like a bolt of thunder and the merchant was devastated.

Then a voice called out: "I'll live with you. I'll follow you no matter where you go."

The merchant looked up and there was his first wife. She was so skinny, almost like she suffered from malnutrition. Greatly grieved, the merchant said, "I should have taken much better care of you while I could have!"

Actually, we all have four wives in our lives.

The fourth wife is our body. No matter how much time and effort we lavish in making it look good, it'll leave us when we die. Our third wife are our possessions, status and wealth. When we die, they all go to others. The second wife is our family and friends. No matter how close they had been there for us when we're alive, the furthest they can stay by us is up to the grave. The first wife is in fact our soul, often neglected in our pursuit of material wealth and sensual pleasure. Guess what? It is actually the only thing that follows us wherever we go. Perhaps it's a good idea to cultivate and strengthen it now rather than to wait until we're on our deathbed to lament.

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