THE BEGGAR KING
Long ago there was a king named Anup Singh. His kingdom was called Anupnagar.

King Anup Singh was very rich. He had many palaces and many servants. He was very ambitious. He kept a large army. He often fought with his neighbours and expanded his kingdom.
The king was fond of hunting. It was his favourite sport. One day he decided to go on a hunt. He started with a large party of attendants for the jungle where they expected good game. The jungle was far away. They were riding on fine, mettlesome horses.

When they reached the jungle the day was well advanced. For hours they rode through the jungle without coming across any game. Then, at last, they sighted a deer. The king set his horse at it. The deer ran at great speed and the king followed. It was a long chase. In the end the deer escaped.
King Anup Singh was disappointed. He was tired and wanted to get back to his companions. But they had been left far behind. The king had lost his way. He shouted for his attendants at the top of his voice, but there was no reply. The king wandered in the jungle for a long time hoping to find a way out. The day was almost over and darkness was setting in. The king was worried.
He wanted to get out of the jungle before it was night. He directed his horse on a straight course and rode on.

Soon it was night and there was no moon. The king could not see anything. He hoped his horse would carry him out of the jungle. The horse went on and on, and finally the king came out of the jungle.

He looked around. There was no village to be seen anywhere. The sky was covered with dark clouds and it started raining. It would be difficult to return to the palace that night, thought the king. He decided to take shelter in some village.
He did not know where he was. His horse, however, continued to go forward.

At last the king saw a light. He was happy and moved in the direction of the light. It was a village. The king stopped at the first house and knocked at the door. It was a farmer’s house.

“Who is it?” asked a voice from inside.

“A traveller seeking shelter for the night,” said the king.

The farmer’s wife opened the door and asked the king to enter. The farmer welcomed the visitor respectfully and said, “Please consider this as your house. Make yourself comfortable. It is our good fortune that we have a guest at times.”
The king did not tell them who he was. He said he was a royal messenger returning to the city after a long journey, that he could not proceed further because of the rain and darkness.

The farmer said, "A guest is a guest, whether he is a messenger or a king. We shall do our best to be of service to our guest."

The farmer took out some clothes and gave them to the visitor to change, and said, "Remove your wet clothes and take some rest. My wife will give you food while I go and look after your horse."

The farmer's wife prepared the meal. It was simple, but the king was very hungry and he ate it with relish. The farmer made a bed for the guest. The king lay down and soon fell asleep.
The king got up early next morning. But the farmer and his wife were up even earlier and had milk and fruit ready for him.

The king was very pleased with the welcome he had at the farmer’s house. He thanked the farmer and his wife for what they had done. He took out a piece of paper from his pocket, wrote something on it and handed it over to the farmer and said, “If ever you are in difficulty or in need, come to the city and show this chit to anyone there. You will get whatever help you want.”
Then the king took leave of them, mounted his horse and rode away. The farmer stood staring after the king in astonishment and dropped the little piece of paper. But his wife picked it up and put it safely in a box.

Years passed. The farmer and his wife continued to live happily. There was enough rainfall every year, the crops were always good, and they grew more and more prosperous.
Then came drought, parching the brown land. Famine followed. People starved, cattle died, and the whole village was on the verge of ruin.

The farmer's wife remembered then the little piece of paper that she had kept in the box. She reminded her husband of it. The farmer was not happy about going out and seeking help; but the whole village was hungry, and so he decided to go to the city and try his luck.
Early next morning the farmer took the chit and started for the city. He had to walk a long distance to reach it. He grew very tired. He sat down under a tree to rest and soon fell asleep.

He was roused from sleep by someone shouting. He looked up and saw a policeman in front of him. The policeman ordered him to go away.

The farmer then took out the piece of paper and showed it to him.
The policeman looked at the chit, immediately bowed, and requested the farmer to follow him. He took the farmer to the gate of the royal palace and whispered something to the guard. The guard then took the farmer into a splendid courtyard and entrusted him to an officer. The officer took him to a beautiful marble temple. At the door of the temple the officer asked the farmer to go straight in; inside was the king whose chit he had in his hand.
The farmer was astonished to see that it was the king who had stayed with him as a guest. The king was inside the temple, praying.

"O, Almighty," the king said, "I am grateful to you for all that you have given me. I want more. Give me more and more—give me all things—and bless me."

The farmer heard the king pleading and begging. He turned back and quickly walked out of the temple and out of the splendid palace courtyard. At the gate he threw away the piece of paper and walked back the long way home.
The guard saw the paper lying near the gate. He took it to the king.

"Where is he?" the king demanded. "Bring him in immediately."

But the farmer had gone, and was not to be found anywhere. The king was furious. He blamed his servants in the palace for sending the farmer away. He decided to go to the farmer himself and find out what he wanted.
The king started with a large party for the farmer’s village. It was midnight when they reached there. There were no lights in the village and it took some time for the king’s party to find the farmer’s house.

At last the king found the farmer and his wife. He asked the farmer why he had returned without seeing him.

The farmer said, “I came to beg for your help. I saw you praying in the temple. There you were on your knees, begging God to give you more. I then thought you were a bigger beggar than I. Therefore I could not expect anything from you—and so I came away.”
The king stood still for a while, thinking. Suddenly, he touched the farmer’s feet and asked for his forgiveness. He then turned to his companions and ordered immediate help not only to the farmer and his family, but to all the other people who suffered because of the famine.