

# Salt & Roti

A very poor woman lived alone with her only son. So poor were they that the only food they ate was salt and roti (a type of flat unleavened bread).

Every morning the mother got up early and prepared this meal for her son. The boy gladly ate it and went briskly to his place of work. To arrive there he had to pass through an area where the king's elephants were kept. Each day, in order to test his strength, he would pull the same elephant by the tail and attempt to shift the elephant from the spot where it stood.

The men who took care of the elephants noticed that all except one of the elephants were robust and healthy. This elephant, they observed, seemed to be getting weaker and thinner by the day. The men went to the king and reported what they



had observed. The king ordered some of his guards to keep watch over the animal to find out the cause of its ill-health.

The next day, the guards saw the boy pulling at the tail of that very elephant. They thought that the boy had to be very strong to attempt to pull an elephant. They were certain that this was the cause of the animal's problems.

The guards reported what they had seen to their king. "The boy is so strong that by pulling at the tail of the elephant he is causing the animal to become sick," they said.

The following day, the guards noticed that the elephant had died. They rushed to the king and said, "The strength of the boy was too much for the elephant. Now the animal has died." At once the king decided to find out what caused the boy to have such great strength. The king's men were sent to visit the boy's mother.

"What do you give your son to eat?" they questioned the woman.

"All we ever eat is salt and roti," replied the mother.

The men thought that the salt was the reason



why the boy was so strong. They therefore ordered the mother to give her son roti to eat but without any salt. The mother did as she was ordered by the king's men.

"Where is the salt?" the son asked when his mother offered him the roti.

She answered that they did not have enough money to buy salt. She said this because the king's men had told her not to mention to her son the real reason for the change.

From that day on, the boy ate as best as he could. However, he found that the food lacked

taste because it contained no salt. He did not enjoy the roti as before and as time passed he ate less and less food. Soon he became quite weak and thin. Then he fell ill.

The news of the boy's ill-health quickly reached the palace. The king and his men became convinced that it was the salt that had given the boy such great strength. The king could not control his excitement. He called an urgent meeting of all his servants, all his soldiers and all his friends.

"We have found a great secret! We have found a great secret!" he said to them. "This secret will make us stronger than elephants. Our kingdom will be the most powerful in the land. No enemy will dare to challenge us!"

Everyone was anxious to hear the great secret. They could not believe their ears when the king told them, "From this day on, none of you must eat any other food but salt and roti! This is an order! Anyone who disobeys this order will be punished!"

And the king's men who were standing at his side, shouted, "Salt and roti! Salt and roti!"

And as the meeting ended and the people left, they murmured to each other, "The king is mad! The king is mad!"

