

The Four Dragons

An Ancient Myth from China

A long time ago there were no rivers and lakes on earth, only the Eastern Sea. Four dragons lived in this sea - the Long Dragon, the Yellow Dragon, the Black Dragon and the Pearl Dragon. One day the four dragons flew from the sea into the sky to soar and dive and play.



“Come here quickly!” the Pearl Dragon called out suddenly, and the other three dragons looked down to where he pointed. On the earth they saw many people putting out fruits and cakes and praying. An old woman knelt with a thin boy on her lap and murmured, “Please send rain, God of Heaven, to give our children rice to eat.”

There had been no rain for a long long time. The crops withered, the grass was yellow and the fields cracked under the scorching sun.

“The poor people will die if it doesn’t rain,” said the Yellow Dragon. The Long Dragon nodded. “Let’s go and beg the Jade Emperor for rain!”

The dragons flew to see the Jade Emperor in his Heavenly Palace. He was in charge of all affairs in heaven and on earth. But he was not pleased to see the dragons. “Why do you come here instead of staying in the sea and behaving yourselves?”

The Long Dragon stepped forward. “The crops on earth are dying, your Majesty, I beg you to send some rain.” The Jade Emperor wanted to get rid of the dragons so he pretended to agree. “You return and I’ll send some rain tomorrow”, he said.

Ten days passed and no rain fell. Seeing the people suffer made the dragons very sad. They knew the Jade Emperor only cared for himself and not for the people. But then the Long Dragon had an idea. “Look, there is plenty of water here in the sea. We could scoop it up and spray it into the sky. It would come down as raindrops!”

The dragons agreed this was a good idea. “But,” said the Long Dragon, “we will be in trouble if the Jade Emperor finds out.”

So all four dragons scooped up the sea water, flew up to the sky and sprayed it over the earth. On the ground, the people cried out with joy as their wheat stalks began to grow again.

However, the God of the Sea told the Jade Emperor about the rain. “How dare the four dragons do this without my permission?” he shouted. The Jade Emperor ordered the Mountain God to place a huge mountain on top of each dragon, so that they could never escape.

But the dragons were determined to do good for the people forever and turned themselves into four rivers flowing into the sea. And so China’s four great rivers were born – the Heilongjian (Black River), the Huanghe (Yellow River), the Yangtze (Long River) and the Zhujiang (Pearl River).