

The Giant Mango Tree

By Durk Meijer

1. A mango seed

Hi, my name is Nati and my home is on a tropical island east of Africa. Once, I met an old white bearded man in a long flowing robe sitting peacefully under a giant mango tree. The shade from the large and elegant canopy of this mighty tree provided coolness from the tropical sun and even shielded one from getting wet during some of the light rain showers. The man under the tree sat on a comfortable looking aged wooden chair, and when he saw me, he invited me to join him and take a seat in a second equally comfortable looking chair. I was but a young boy at that time, and I was honored to be the guest of this well respected man, whose life gained wisdom was written all over his face in wrinkles that changed with every word he spoke. I felt that I needed to stare at him in wonder when he softly smiled with his brilliant white teeth showing great joy from his deep brown weathered face that was surrounded by tiny little white curls covering his head. At that point his intense brown eyes sparkled like those of a young boy who just had found the biggest and sweetest mango ever. It was with this smile that he invited me to join him.

I eagerly hopped in the big wooden chair. I could not believe how comfortable it was, since it was made entirely of wood. It seemed to fit my body perfectly and when the old man asked how I was doing, I said that the only thing that could make it better was being with him under this majestic mango tree eating one of the sweet smelling ripe mangoes covering every branch of the tree. His wrinkled face shone again with a big broad smile as he uncovered the most beautiful mango from a burlap bag next to his chair and said, "Here you go. Now it is perfect right?" My eyes almost popped out in utter amazement, as I slowly reached for the best of best mangos I had ever seen. He laughed even more as he saw the spark in my eyes join his. Before he handed me the mango, he first took his knife and skillfully peeled the orange red skin off the firm and rich fruit. The fragrance of the beautiful emerging orange flesh made my mouth water and I couldn't wait to sink my teeth into it. Once in my hands, it seemed like it was too special to eat, but as the old man was getting another one ready for himself, he said, "Go ahead, enjoy it, I have lots more. Just don't throw the seed away." I wasted no time and before long rich mango juice was dripping down my chin and arms. Indeed, it couldn't get any better, at least I thought so at that moment. I was amazed how just one mango like this would fill me up, and before long I only had a large sticky seed left in my hand. I was embarrassed at the mess I made and how crazy I must have looked wolfing down that mango while getting covered in its juice. But the old man didn't seem surprised as he handed me a gourd filled with water for me to wash up with. I almost threw away the seed, but then remembering that he wanted me to keep it, I carefully put it next to me on the arm of the chair. After I finally thanked him for the mango and the water to help me clean up after my mango feast, I asked him, "Why do you want me to keep the seed?"

He looked at me with a loving, yet intense look, and said, "Do you know what is in that mango seed?" I had to be honest and say that at six years old I never had split one apart. After all they were very hard, so that was not a wise thing to do for a little boy like me. He then said, "Let me tell you a story." He didn't need to say that twice, since I loved stories and what could be better after eating the best mango in the world while sitting in a comfortable chair in the shade of a giant mango tree. The old man started, "When I was about your age, I was just like you, except that there were almost no mango trees left on this island." As I looked at him in complete disbelief, he continued, "Yes, it is true. The trees had just about all been cut down, and all I remember is just the few rotten remains of one tree trunk still sitting in the middle of our village that was about as tall as you. I loved mangos, but it was rare to get one. They had to come from another area on the island, and they were very expensive. One day my father brought a mango home for my brothers, sisters, and me. We were excited as my mother carefully divided the rich orange flesh of the mango into seven pieces. I suggested that there should have been nine pieces, but my mother insisted that this mango was just for us children. I decided right then and there, that I would make sure that my parents would eat mango again too, so I asked my mother if I could have the seed. With great delight she handed me the seed, thinking that I just wanted it to glean the last remains of the mango, lest any would be wasted. I indeed gnawed on it until there was nothing left but a bare seed. I then asked my father, whom I affectionately called Papa, what a good place would be to grow a mango tree. He laughed with compassion and told me that anywhere and everywhere would be fine, since there were no trees left. We surely could use them regardless where they were growing, but I didn't want keep the seed for long since it shouldn't dry out, and then it wouldn't sprout anymore.

It was just then that the old tree stump had been dug up and its remains carried off. I was delighted with the soft dark brown soil that was left, and what better place to plant my seed than this rich soil which once had provided life sustenance for another mango tree. Yes, my tree was going to replace it for sure! I carefully watered the ground a little each day, but after a few weeks I was wondering if it ever would start to grow. I wanted mangoes for my parents by the next season at the latest, but for the longest time I couldn't see anything happen at the spot I planted my seed. Finally, I became so impatient that I started to dig to see if the seed was still even there. Oh yes, the seed had not walked off and I found it in no time. But I was just about to give up on this useless seed and was ready to pull it out and throw it away, when I noticed a green sprout coming up right next to the seed. I carefully cleaned around it and found that it was connected to the bottom of my seed. It actually seemed to grow out of the seed, and it looked amazing. For some reason, I had not pictured it this way in my mind. Wow, it was growing after all. It was just going much slower than I had anticipated. Without damaging the new growth, I carefully covered the ground back up and went to my Papa to ask him about how long it would take to grow a mango tree. Like always, he took the time to put me in his lap and answer my question in detail. I was shocked at his answer that it would take normally between three and five years to produce fruit. I almost started to cry, when he consoled me by telling me that both Mama and he would be glad to wait for their mangoes if I was willing to nurture the seed until it grew into a fruit

bearing tree. That sealed it for me. If they were willing to wait, then I would be patient too.

One month later I stormed into our little house calling out to Mama that my mango tree was sprouting up above the ground. Together with all my brothers and sisters, she right away joined me, and everybody rejoiced with me as they saw a tiny sprout push its way out of the rich brown dirt. My little brother, Amin, suggested that, after all, it may go faster than Papa had told me. In my heart I did hope that too, but I trusted my Papa, and I told Amin just what Papa had told me. Amin then said that he would help me too. From then on, we worked as a team to keep our little sprout safe since it was so small that anybody easily could step on it without ever knowing it, while the goats would surely find it and make it a tasty snack especially when the two small leaves became four, six, eight, twelve, and after a few months grew to look like a real baby tree. Amin and I took turns sitting next to the little tree to provide afternoon shade during the dry season, since Papa told us that its roots didn't go yet deep in the soil, and our little tree could easily dry out. It worked out well for me, since I had to learn to read French for school and hiding under my large sun hat, I often forgot the time and spent hours reading, while Amin took advantage of it to play with his friends. I didn't mind, since the only schoolbook I was able to bring home was a geography book and it took me to many places, all over the world. In the beginning the pictures were the biggest guide to learning about far-away places, but my curiosity taught me to read French with understanding."

2. The old man's father sharing his story

"One day I asked Papa why all the trees had been cut down and again he took me in his lap to share the story. It was a difficult story for me, since some of the things made me very sad and yet there were some happy things too. Papa started, 'Several centuries ago, people from another part of the world arrived on our shores in ships and they wanted to trade some of the things they had for food. Sometimes one of their ships needed to be repaired and then they traded to buy wood. Initially this seemed like a mutual blessing since we liked the colorful woven cloth they had, as well as some of the utensils they shared like knives, pottery bowls, and even shovels. After a while, some asked if they could stay and live on our island, so they could help the other ships when they came by our shores. Since they knew the ways of the people on those ships, as well as their languages, our people gave them a nice piece of land to stay while they were living with us. Soon, they started to build their homes and that is first how we noticed how different they were. Their homes were big and had doors that they kept always closed. They didn't like it at all when we visited them, which seemed to be very unkind. We always welcomed visitors, and we made sure that they got something to eat. We didn't even have doors. Also, if someone needed a place to sleep, we offered them the best place, which we had done every time some of these people from the ships visited us. Before long they put up fences, and they didn't even want us to come near their homes. This made us worried, but by that time it was too late.

Just a short time later, five large ships came and many people were brought to the island. One large group was wearing very strange clothes and they had long knives, which later we learned were swords. They told us that they needed to protect our island from enemies that wanted to attack our island. We never had enemies before and we didn't understand. They demanded that they needed many buildings at different places and that they needed lots of wood and stone to build with. We didn't realize how much wood and stone they wanted over the years, but they also didn't give us any choice as they threatened us with their swords if we wouldn't help them get the wood and stones. They also didn't even want to pay us for it anymore, since they said that it was for our safety. This made some of our people very angry and then the foreigners used their swords to kill some of them. They also threatened everybody with the same fate, if they would disobey them in any way. As more of them kept coming, our people quickly grew scared. Later they brought guns too, and they took over all the land and made our people to be their slaves. Over time these foreigners even started to load the wood from our trees onto their boats. Again, they said that this would help us, but we never received anything in return. Our island started to change and look bare, while the soil started to wash away. Our gardens barely yielded any crops anymore and sometimes people went hungry, something that we never had known before. Still, it seemed like the foreigners always had enough. Most of them treated us like we were not even humans, since they only used us to work for them.'

With a serious look on his face my Papa continued sharing his story. 'Grandfather taught me that we should not judge all people the same, just because some or even most might be unkind. As a boy I once went with him to visit one of the foreigners and he seemed different. He treated the people living near him with great respect and his house always was open. When we arrived, he right away invited us into his home and offered us something to eat. He also took care of the land and didn't allow the other foreigners to cut trees from his land. He also was trying to keep the other foreigners from cutting more trees, but they didn't listen to him. He was so nice! He even gave me a book! I was so honored that he wanted me to have something so special. He knew that I couldn't read and if I could have, I would have had to know his language, but he said that one day I might be able to read and that I should keep it for that day, since the book was a book of truth.'

My Papa continued, 'Just after I married Mama, the foreigners suddenly started to leave. It seemed like not one was left behind, not even the nice man I had met. Then we were told that we needed to elect our own leader, so we could become a people again with our own identity. This was not easy, since so much had changed over these many years and many of our ways had gotten lost. But since we still were a peaceful people, we started to find our ways back. The hardest part was that our island had changed, since almost all the trees were gone, and our gardens didn't yield much anymore. Now there were also many big buildings that nobody was living in. In the beginning nobody even wanted to live in them, but slowly people were starting to use them, since there were only a few trees left on the island and we didn't want to lose them. One of the places where there were still trees, was where that man lived that gave me the book.'"

3. A book full of stories

The old man took a deep sigh and continued, "My Papa just had given me the greatest history lesson ever, a story I would never ever forget! But when he had finished, there was one burning question on my mind about the book and I asked him: 'Papa, did you ever find out what the book said?' He had a high fever when he was a young teenager, which severely affected his eyesight, so he never had the chance to go to school and learn to read. My Papa suddenly realized that, until this day, he had not even thought about the book again, and he had never found out what it said. Still, he had put it away in a very safe place. He told me to go into our house and look on the shelf where we kept our cloves and other spices. Behind the spices there should be a brightly colored cloth with a book in it. I wasted no time to find this treasure and brought it quickly to my Papa. He then carefully opened the thick cover of the spice fragrant book and in awe, I right away noticed that it was written in French, the same language that I had learned in school. I blurted out enthusiastically, 'Papa, you may not be able to read, but I can and I can also translate it for you!' He smiled softly as he squeezed me tight against his chest and asked if Mama could maybe listen too. I thought that was a fabulous idea and said that maybe all the children could join us. I did ask him if he would mind if I read it first by myself, so I could really understand what was written and tell it in our language with meaning. So, we agreed that we would do a little every day. I would read it first on my own while guarding my mango tree, and the next morning I would tell it right before breakfast to the whole family.

I was captivated by the book, but since there were so many new things to learn from it, I only read real small passages, one at a time. First, I read the passage over and over again, then thought what it should be in my own language, and finally spoke it out loud until I could tell it easily. The book started with how everything was created by someone called Elohim as well as Yahweh, which I later learned meant Supreme God and Eternal One. In my heart, I wished that he was right there with me to help me understand and tell it right to my family. It was amazing how much it helped that I had read the geography book so much, since it had many of the words that were in the first part of this book. On the fourth day, I was reading the passage where it talked about God letting the earth sprout the plants and trees, every one after its own kind according to its own seed. This made me think of my little mango tree and I was proud to have helped and put my seed in the ground for God to make it sprout. I then realized that I could do that with every kind of seed and that it should also be good, just like in the story from the book. So, from that time on, every seed I received, I planted and before long others joined me in doing the same, starting with my brothers and sisters, and on to my friends. In no time, it seemed like everybody who heard the story wanted to join in, so God could make more plants and trees sprout after their own kind; guava, papaya, pomelo, lychee, rambutan, lemon, plum, avocado, passion fruit, bread fruit, dragon fruit, star fruit, and also nuts like macadamia, cashew, and almond. It was amazing. We also learned that with some seeds, we needed more than one to grow in order for them to produce fruit. Since the soil had eroded a lot, it did take a lot of hard work, but we trusted God to help us. After all he was the creator and he had told the seeds to produce.

As a family we quickly learned from the book that in the beginning everything had been good and that God gave life without there being death. The place sounded just as wonderful as our island before the foreigners came, but Papa said that even before the foreigners had come to us on their ships, that there was death. Even on our islands it had not really been good. The story told us also that God warned the people that he had not made them to know good as well as evil, by telling them not to eat from one specific tree that would give them the knowledge of good and evil. He told them that they would die if they ate from that tree and at that point God had only given them life. The first two people that God had made, a man and a woman, chose to eat from the tree anyway and when they did, they were immediately changed. They suddenly were afraid, and they were not willing to be responsible for what they did. The man, God had created, even blamed both God and the woman that God had given to him. It was a very sad story for me to learn, since everything had been good until that point. Can you imagine that everything was good and still the people chose to eat from the only tree that God had told them not to eat from? It was given to them to warn them so they would not know evil and experience death."

At this point the old man noticed my little mind racing and, while stroking his curly white beard, he asked, 'Nati, are you wondering if the fruit that was on that tree could have been a mango?' Amazed about how the old man so quickly realized what I might be thinking, I only could stumbly say, "Uh yes, was it?" Again the old man's face smiled with wrinkles of kindness, responding, "I had the same question too when I read the story, but God didn't tell us what kind of fruit it was, except that it looked beautiful and it that is was good for food. The fruit was not the problem, but it was the people deciding to pick and eat from this particular tree -- the tree that would give them the knowledge of good and evil." As I glanced up at the canopy filled with luscious mangoes, I felt very relieved by his wise answer. After offering me and taking himself a drink of water from the gourd, the old man leaned back in his cozy wooden chair and continued his story.

"The next story I read from the book, showed us the devastating effect that evil had on the people. It told us that Cain, a son of the one who God called the mother of all living, killed his younger brother. Earlier God had seen Cain's anger and even warned him and encouraged him to stop his anger. Then Cain lied to God about killing his brother and denied any responsibility. On top of that, when Cain learned of the consequences to remind him of his horrible deed, he complained to God about his punishment. In spite of his attitude, God promised Cain that He would protect him. Even though Cain also falsely accused God of leaving him, in the end it was Cain who left God's presence instead." At that moment, the old man wondered out loud, "Oh, to be in God's presence like Cain initially was. God loving me enough to warn me and give so many opportunities for me to come back to him, even when I would choose evil. It made me wonder what it would be like to talk with God, just like I did with my Papa, by hopping in his lap and looking in his eyes." For a moment it was like the old man was in another world, gazing at the murmuring water flowing over the smooth rocks in the creek on the other side of the pathway. Then he looked at me again, his eyes filled with compassion, and with a serious face, he continued.

"Nati, in the next story it was very interesting to learn about a man named Enoch. He was different from all the other people, since he had close fellowship with God and then, he didn't die! but rather God took him. Still, it seemed like other people ignored God and rather just did whatever they wanted to do, even to the point that one day the people's evilness was so great that it grieved God to His heart. God then said that he would wipe out all people from the earth. Except... for a man called Noah and his family. When I understood this for the first time, it reminded me of my papa's story of what happened in our country when the people on the boats started to come. The man who gave my papa the book was a little like Noah in the midst of all the other people. We knew that it didn't fit the story all the way, but nevertheless, it reminded us that this man, like Noah, was different from all the others. In the Bible story, God next brought a great flood of water covering the whole world."

Seeing my eyes grow like saucers hearing about that much water, the old man quickly added, "Yes, including where we are living." I pondered for a moment and then asked how there was enough water, since all the water I knew about was in the sea, the rivers, and the creeks. The old man gently smiled and said, "At the time I read the story first, I didn't know either, but we simply chose to believe it. I recently learned that there is enough water in the air for it to cover the whole world almost two and a half kilometers deep. That is like walking from this mango tree to the beach down the trail. Even our highest volcano would have been under water." Again, I was in awe of the wisdom and knowledge of the old man. Just then large grey clouds drifted by and it started to sprinkle a little, as if to help me see right away where all that water was stored. This made the old man smile even more, but just about as he was to continue, all the talking about water suddenly reminded me that I started my journey this morning to bring water to my brother, who was working in the fields just a bit further up on the pathway. I blurted out without any consideration to the old man, "Oh no, I will have to leave for a little, since I forgot something very important. I will be right back. Will you please wait for me? I need to take my brother his water or he will get thirsty." Without even waiting for his response, I quickly ran off. My brother had forgotten his water, and mom had asked to bring it to him before midday. I had left early that morning, so time wise I still was doing fine. When I gave it to him, he had no idea that, for quite some time, I had been distracted on the way. He was just happy that I brought him the water. That relaxed me enough to share with him that I would have a very special story to tell when he would come home that evening.

4. Three years of stories

On my way back to the giant mango tree, I did feel embarrassed by how I had rushed off without allowing the old man respond to me. When I returned, he was still sitting in his comfortable wooden chair. His eyes were closed and there was such a peaceful look on his face! I had never seen anything like that before. It was if he was smiling, yet he was not. With the great imagination of a little boy, I thought for a moment that he maybe had died. No, that was a ridiculous thought and his body was not limp either. I was staring at him for what seemed a very long time, without realizing that he had opened his dark brown eyes. I only realized it, when his smile changed to a loving grin and he

showed his bright white teeth once more. He then teased me by saying, "So Nati, running off, without giving me the chance to respond... hmmm. Then he quickly continued, I'm glad you did remember your brother and that you were concerned for him. The way you responded, showed me that you love him. I also know that you felt bad for not allowing me to respond. That means a lot." I was wondering how he was able to know what I was feeling, but it didn't seem important. I just wanted to hear the rest of the story the old man was telling me. He even recognized that eagerness as he said, "Now Nati, are you ready to hear the rest of the story?" I couldn't help but nod enthusiastically. After a brief smile, the old man's face right away became very solemn and his voice sounded very sad as he continued.

"It didn't seem to go much better when Noah's descendants started to fill the earth, since within a few generations all the people on the earth were again doing only what they mistakenly thought was good. This time, God confused the language they spoke. Now the people were suddenly speaking many different languages and they couldn't understand one another anymore, so they scattered over the whole world. One would think that they now would have felt lonely for God, but people didn't want to be with God. As a little boy, this was very sad for me, because I loved nothing more than to be with my papa. I couldn't imagine living without him. Still, I was glad to read, that there were always some people that wanted to be with God. God always was ready to provide the opportunity for people to come to Him. He showed this in many different ways.

Later stories told us that God gave people commands for living. These commands were given to help them see that they were not really seeking God and that they needed His help. The people over and over again experienced the consequences of doing what they wanted to do instead of what God wanted them to do. Yet, if anybody sought God with all their heart and honored what God knew was best for them, then they experienced wonderful blessings. God really became amazing to me and my family. He really wanted the best for people. Still, it was painful to read about the terrible things that happened to many. Sometimes, it even felt like God was cruel."

The old man continued, "We realized however, that God only told us the stories that He wanted us to have. There were many things that happened that we didn't know about, including things about people who seemed to be innocent. We are not able to know everything that happened throughout time. We don't even remember all the things that happened in our own lives. Why did we even need to know and why couldn't we just trust God. He knows everything and He also loves people more than we ever could love anybody. This made it clear to my family, that things happened because people did what they thought was good in their own eyes. It reminded us continually of the disastrous effect of us knowing good and evil and how we humans are affected by it. It was an awakening. It reminded us also again of the foreigners coming to our country, killing our people and raping our land. We were wondering if there would be another story where God would kill most of the people, like with the flood. Other stories we read in the book, shared several promises that showed that God would actually do the opposite, by providing a very specific way back to Him."

At this point the old man had to wipe away some tears, since it reminded him of his own struggles to simply believe God, despite how much he had read the book. Then he got up from his chair and came over to give me a big hug, after which he looked straight in my eyes with an intense, yet loving expression. He really wanted me to listen closely at this moment and then proceeded slowly, "Oh Nati, you precious young one, the simple faith that you have as a child. Make sure you guard it and never loose it, even when you grow old like me." He then returned to his chair, sat down and continued his story with a renewed energy, like after shedding a burden.

He said, "We learned also that God started to use the generations coming from a man named Abraham, who trusted God. They were examples for us to learn from, and through them God would provide the specific way for people to come back to Him. I don't know exactly why, but for some reason Abraham, just like Noah, reminded me of the man who had given my papa the book. Throughout the stories, God showed the nations of the world that He was God of all people, and that He was the only one that could give people life in a world that is good, without ever having to die. God also confirmed this by making specific promises, that He would do at different points in time. Many other stories showed how God used various men and women through time to fulfill these promises. In one story God used a young man named Joseph, who was sold as a slave by his brothers to people from a neighboring country. Even after being wrongfully imprisoned, he became the second most important person in that country. God used him to fulfill part of his promise to the descendants of Abraham. Joseph protected his family, even in the midst of a severe famine.

There was also a story about a woman named Ruth, who was not a descendent of Abraham, but who wanted to follow the God of creation, the same God that Abraham had trusted. She became one of the mothers in the line of generations through whom God would provide the way for all people to come back to Him. She actually was the great-grandmother of a shepherd boy named David, who was chosen from among his brothers and sisters to become the king of the descendants of Abraham. The stories also told us that one of the descendants of Abraham would be the only one that could restore the world to where everything would be good again and also that there would be no more death. With excitement in our hearts, we were more and more looking forward to learn how God was going to do this.

We now had been going through the book for almost three years and even though it seemed that we were making slow progress, it gave us time to think about everything in detail. Sometimes stories were repeated and different things were highlighted. Then we looked at the previous story to make sure that we did get all the details right, and we learned to understand how the stories belonged together. It was like our little Mango tree, which now had grown to be taller than me, despite that fact that I had been growing too every year. It was continually growing with its seasons of changing leaves and growing new branches."

The old man smiled with a sweet delight as he seemed to visualize himself standing next to the little Mango tree. Since he was doing most of the talking, I saw that he might

be thirsty again and the gourd was now empty. I offered to refill the gourd from the brook, and he gently nodded his head as he confirmed his thirst. Then the old man said, "And you wouldn't mind another Mango, would you Nati?" I couldn't deny that I loved to get another one, so I just smiled. While I fetched us a gourd of cool water from the brook nearby, he carefully peeled another luscious Mango for me. Once we finished our refreshments, I eagerly asked him if he would be willing to continue telling his story. The wrinkles on his face almost seemed to fade away as he with great delight responded, "Certainly."

5. A new creation

I cuddled back up my comfortable wooden chair. Then, with an expression of joy on his face, the old man resumed his story. "After three years, the group of listeners had grown way beyond our family. Some people went home to tell the stories to the rest of their family and then they started coming too. This meant that we repeated telling some of the stories and every time we did, we all learned more truths that we didn't see before. Some started their own group to retell the stories to other people and sometimes we simply did get together to make sure everybody kept telling the stories accurately, clearly and naturally. It was helpful to learn from each other, especially when we came to more difficult parts in the book.

The stories showed us again and again that the Eternal One was the God of all of creation and as such He continued to be God of all the people of the world. There were stories about a descendent of Abraham named Daniel and the kings he was serving. Because of the testimony of Daniel's life, these kings all learned who God really was. One of these kings specifically told all the people in the whole world in their own languages so that they would know about this one true God. God confirmed His promises by giving Daniel many details of things that would happen in the future. Many stories from the book told us that God would be coming to earth in the form of a man in a miraculous way. We became more and more amazed at the details about God coming to earth as a man. How could that ever be true? It was just like my mango seed becoming a tree, but how could it ever produce mangoes! There were not even yet flowers on it. I knew it would happen, because some people had sown berry seeds and within a year they grew berries and in the same miraculous way my mango tree would produce mangoes. Even though I didn't understand, I could believe now also that God could come to earth as a man."

The old man now looked at me with a look as if he was uncovering the greatest treasure in the world. He continued, "It was in the fifth year of my little mango tree when we saw for the first time flowers. By now I was eleven years old, and we had been reading the stories from the book for almost four years. It was amazing to see the flowers develop into tiny green mangoes. During this time, I was also reading the stories about the birth of Jesus and that He was the one man that was really God. Next, we enjoyed the stories of how He grew up and what He did in His life. We learned many beautiful details about how He cared for all people. We had learned from other stories that He also was going to die and then that after three days He would come to life again. All of

us cried a lot about how they treated Jesus and how He died because people rejected Him, but we also were extremely happy when we learned that Jesus became alive again. He actually died for everything that separated us from our Creator. Because He took care of everything that separated us from our Creator, Jesus became alive again. This demonstrated how our relationship with Him could be restored again. In other words, it was God, who in this way offered a restored relationship with himself. Eventually, He would even create a new world where everything would be good. Since we wouldn't be separated from God anymore, there now also would be no more death." As the old man changed his voice, he interrupted the story by clarifying something to me directly, "That new world is still coming, but if we embrace what Jesus has done, then we already have a relationship with our Creator again. So, we, in a real sense, are the first parts of that new creation." Then, with a smile on his sweet wrinkly face, he continued his story, saying, "The stories of Jesus were like the blooming flowers on the mango tree that died after a while and then first grew into little green mangoes and eventually into the best big delicious ripe sweet orange red mangoes ever.

When the first little green mangos appeared on our tree, my Papa sat down to talk with me. He sounded quite serious and I wondered if I had done anything wrong. He assured me that everything was okay, but he had learned from the man who gave him the book, that we should pick the first crop of mangoes from the tree before they ripened. He further explained that this would help the tree grow stronger and produce better fruit from then on. I wanted my parents so much to have their first mangos from the tree and this waiting any longer was extremely difficult. Papa then said that it was another picture that looked a little like what God did when He came to earth as the man called Jesus. Jesus had already chosen to die for everything that separated us from Him, and He became alive again so that we can live a wonderful life with Him in the future. I then understood the comparison that those unripe mangoes giving their life were like Jesus giving His life. The big difference was that we still could have mangoes if we didn't cut them from the tree, but we could not have life with God in the future, if Jesus had not given His own life. Because Jesus became alive again, it showed that His death paid for everyone's death in the whole world and that He died in our place. My Papa had understood this, as he had memorized the stories I had translated and had shared them with other people, but I had never realized this until he shared it with me in comparison to the first mango crop. I now was more than ready to cut them off and, even though it was sad to cut off the beautiful fruits, I was ready for the best possible mangoes the next season. Most important, I also wanted to live a wonderful life in the future. As Papa retold me some of the stories I had read before, I soon understood that all I needed to do was to embrace this beautiful gift from God and that I would miraculously become a new creation through what Jesus had done. Oh, that wonderful experience of embracing at that moment what God had done for me."

At this point the old man radiated a youthfulness that made me forget all his wrinkles, and all I could see was a young man's face shining more beautiful than I ever had seen any face. I totally had forgotten where I was, because I felt that I was part of the story. I, Nati, was that boy in the story, and right there I also embraced what God had done for me. I let out a scream of delight and realizing what I just had done, I asked the old man

if I now also really was a new creation. He responded simply by saying, "Nati, if you accepted what Jesus did for you and what He is giving you, then you certainly are a new creation." "But what does that really mean?", I asked. Then the old man gently leaned forward in his chair to get closer to me and said, "It means that you now have a new life that will never end. Your body will die. But then God will give you a new body with this new life that God already has given you. Like I told you earlier, we are the start of a new creation. God also is creating a new world for us to live in, and there will be no death at all in that place. In one of the last stories we read from the book, we learned that in that new place, there will be only a tree of life. By our choice for God, we acknowledge that we cannot deal with knowing good and evil, so we turn away from that and turn to God. Once we make that choice, we can live in that world where there is only good. Then we have life abundantly with God and for ever more."

After the old man had finished, I pondered for a moment. This really sounded so great, that I had to share it with my parents, but I had one more question that was burning on my heart. I needed to know if this was the mango tree from the seed that the old man had planted in the middle of the village. His face became very sad, and then he spoke very slowly and stumbling, as if the words were difficult to say. "No, that tree has been cut down to make place for a statue of one of the presidents, who wanted to honor himself and thus be remembered by the people. The tree reminded people of the Eternal God, and the president rejected the stories from the book. He believed that people needed to do many specific things before they possibly could be accepted by his god. So that president fully rejected that only God can make us a new creation."

Then the old man cheered up and continued with renewed enthusiasm, "It was under this tree, that we are sitting right now, that my grandfather and Papa first met the man that gave my Papa the book. As a matter of fact, his house stood right over there", he finished, as he pointed to several fig trees growing on top of a heap of stones in a shady place next to the creek." Then he looked slowly up to the majestic mango tree and said, "The food he offered them to eat that day was actually a mango from this same tree... hmmm, that was about one hundred and twenty years ago. Some people say that this majestic tree is actually almost three hundred years old. I wonder how many mangoes this tree has produced over its lifetime, and how many of those mangoes had their seeds planted and they in turn produced more mangoes and more mango trees."

I learned from my Papa that my mango seed also had come from this tree and we did try to count the mangoes for the sixty years that it stood in the center of town. Not counting the first fruits that we cut off before they ripened, I started with a harvest of 9 mangoes, just enough for each of us in our family. The next year it produced 24, and when the tree was ten years old we counted 561. After that we made rough estimates, since we were sharing the mangoes just like we were sharing the stories from the book with everybody in town. When the tree was twenty years old we tried to count one more time and we came to 2743 mangoes. It may have produced well over 100.000 mangoes in its lifetime." Looking up at our lovely shade tree once more, I saw the eyes of the old man roaming the branches and fruits, just as if he was asking it how many mangoes it had grown over the last few centuries. Then he looked at me again and said, "Nati, only

God knows how many mangoes and how many mango trees, as well as how many generations of mango trees have come from this majestic miracle of God. What do you think?" I simply said, "I don't know either," and picking up the mango seed from the armrest of my chair I continued, 'but I now know what is inside my mango seed -- another mango tree with many more mangoes.'" To that the old man laughed out loud, and with great excitement in his eyes he added, "Yes, that is true for mangoes, but how about you in the same way become like a mango tree sharing the fruit of your new life, so others also can learn about God and become a new creation?" I thought that this was a wonderful idea and my mango seed growing into a fruit-producing tree could help remind me. Otherwise other things in life might make me doubt the miracle of new life I had received and how wonderful it is to share that miracle of new life with others.

It was amazing how the morning had passed so quickly, yet at the same time it felt like I had spent a lifetime under that giant mango tree. So much had happened and I certainly went home a different person from when I arrived. To add to that, the old man took the burlap bag from which he fetched the mangoes and filled it to the top with more sweet ripe mangoes, so that I barely could carry it. Once more sharing his warm inviting smile, he wished me a good journey home and said, "Every mango is worth a story, what do you think?"

Over the years I had many chances to sit in the comfortable chairs with the old man under the tree and learn from him while eating more mangoes. Later he lost his sight, but the twinkle in his eyes never left, nor the sweet smiles radiating from his wrinkled face. Twelve years later he suddenly died, just when the fruit on the tree was ripe. I knew that I would miss him a lot, but he now finally was able to fully enjoy being a new creation. We buried him under the giant mango tree and right there, in his memory, I told this story about the giant mango tree, after I had given everybody a luscious sweet orange red mango to enjoy... of course from the giant mango tree.

The End.
