

## Synopsis - The Three Questions of Tarongoy

Tarongoy is a very generous man who had given away much of his wealth to the poor, the sick and the hungry. When he has nothing left to give, he starves and asks himself if being generous begets any reward. He shares his meagre food with a hungry old man, who tells him of a powerful anito who will give him the answers to three questions.

Tarongoy journeys to the anito with his one question. Along his quest, he is helped by three people, all with an important question for the great anito. Now carrying four questions, Tarongoy must decide if he will continue to be the generous one and set aside his own question, or break a promise in order to find what he seeks the most.

## The Three Questions of Tarongoy

Once upon a time, in the island of Mactan, there lived a young man named Tarongoy. He was born to a wealthy family, but his parents raised him to be a generous man who cared little for wealth. Much of what passed to him, he gave away. He gave gold to the poor, shared his food with the hungry, and took care of his sick friends and neighbours.

However, it was not to last. Tarongoy had given so much away, that he ended up with nothing left to give away. He ran out of money, and was soon reduced to scrounging for food wherever he can get it. Since he was not a good farmer or hunter, he had a hard time finding anything to eat.

At one point, Tarongoy finally managed to catch a fish too old and slow to swim away from him. He sat beside the river and built a fire. After scaling the fish, he cut it open and started cooking. The smell made him hungry, and he was licking his lips as he waited for the fish to cook. However, a frail, old man was also drawn to the smell. When Tarongoy saw the old man, his heart was filled with pity. He wished he had more than that small fish to give the old man. Nevertheless, Tarongoy invited the old man to sit by his fire, and gave him the fish he was cooking to eat.

While the old man finished the fish, Tarongoy felt his stomach rumble. He laid himself down, filled with the sort of doubts kind and hungry men get. In despair, he asked out loud, "what is the reward of a generous man?"

The old man looked at him and smiled.

"I'm afraid I cannot answer your question," said the old man. "But I know someone who can."

"Who?" asked Tarongoy.

"In the island of Sugbu, there is a powerful *anito*," said the old man. "The people of Sugbu call him *Agipo*, because he started out as driftwood. But he has since risen and become the most powerful of *anitos*. He brings rain that feeds the crops that feed the people, and is said to favour men and women as generous as he."

"He will answer my questions?" Tarongoy was now sitting up.

"It is said that, in his generosity, he gives everyone who comes to him the answers to three questions," answered the old man. "Since you only have one, you should seek him out and ask him."

Tarongoy decided to seek out Agipo right away. With only the clothes on his back, he started the long journey to the island of Sugbu. He walked for many days, and spent the nights sleeping by the roadside.

One night, he got caught in a thunderstorm. He was soaking wet, and shivering from the cold. Desperately, he stumbled upon a nearby village and knocked on the doors of the villagers, asking for a place to spend the night. They turned him away. Finally, in one of the larger houses, a rich merchant took pity on him and let him in. He

gave Tarongoy a fresh set of clothes, while his servants prepared a fine meal. While Tarongoy was eating, the merchant kept him company and asked him where he was headed. Tarongoy told him of his journey to find Agipo, that he may have his question answered. The merchant was intrigued. He had a request for Tarongoy.

“I do not ask for much, my friend,” said the merchant. “But if it’s no trouble, can you ask the great Agipo a question for me?”

“Of course,” said Tarongoy. “I only have one question after all. The great Agipo will answer three.”

“I thank you, my good man,” said the merchant. “You see, I have a problem with my only daughter, Amihan. She is a beautiful young woman, who has a good heart and a kind word for everybody she meets. And yet, just as she came of age, the gods struck her with blindness, and she now spends her days cooped up in this house because she cannot see. I want to know, can her blindness be cured?”

Tarongoy promised to ask the merchant’s question. When Tarongoy left the merchant’s house, he had two questions to bring to Agipo.

Tarongoy continued on his journey. After several days, he came upon the sea shore. He asked the fishermen who went out to sea if any of them will take him to Sugbu. None of them would, because Tarongoy had no money. They did warn him to leave the shore by nightfall, because the area had many bandits. Tarongoy wandered

along the shore, saddened that his journey must now be cut short. In his despair, he forgot the fishermen's warning.

As he laid himself down by the beach to go to sleep, he was surrounded by bandits. The bandits wanted to take him on their boat in order to sell him as a slave. Tarongoy cried out for help. As soon as Tarongoy cried for help, there came the sound of a howling wind.

When the bandits looked up, they saw a gigantic bird hovering above them. The bird had bright red feathers, and on his tail were ten golden feathers, each the size of a fisherman's boat. The bird squawked angrily, and began clawing and pecking at the bandits. The bandits all turned and ran away, leaving Tarongoy unharmed. The bird then turned to him.

"Are you alright?" asked the bird.

Tarongoy nodded and thanked the bird, getting on his knees and hugging the bird's feet. The bird found him amusing.

"So, what are you doing on my beach, little man?" asked the bird.

Tarongoy told him that he was on a journey to see Agipo, the greatest of the *anitos*. He recounted his tale, including the two questions that he must ask Agipo.

"It seems like you have room for one more question," said the bird. "Might I ask a favour, little man?"

“Anything,” said Tarongoy.

“I will take you across the sea,” said the bird. “I only wish for you to ask Agipo a question for me.”

“Of course,” said Tarongoy. “I only have two questions after all. The great Agipo will answer three.”

“Ask Agipo this,” said the bird. “For years, I have waited and grown. I have protected the fishermen from the storms and the tides. And for all that, I am not yet a *sarimanok*. When will I become a *sarimanok*?”

Tarongoy nodded and promised the great bird that Agipo will hear his question. The bird, satisfied with his honesty, took him on its back and took to the sky. The bird carried him across the sea and dropped him off on the shore of the island of Sugbu. Tarongoy now had three questions for Agipo.

Once in Sugbu, Tarongoy resumed his journey. However, he was not familiar with the island, and spent many days wandering around with no idea where to go. He asked around, but the people refused to tell a stranger where their rain god was.

In his wanderings, Tarongoy ended up in a village built around the great house of a mighty *datu*. By nightfall, Tarongoy was preparing to rest by the shade of a roadside tree, when the *datu* walked by, followed by his men. He had just come back from a good hunt, and was in a good mood. He spotted Tarongoy, and immediately invited him back to his house for a feast.

The entire village was at the feast. While feasting with the *datu*, Tarongoy recounted to him the tale of his journey, and his need to find Agipo. He told the *datu* of the three questions he needed to ask. The *datu* laughed and clapped Tarongoy's shoulders loudly.

"This is good!" said the *datu*. "If I wasn't so busy with the affairs of my people, I'd like to ask Agipo a question myself! Since you are already headed there, I want you to ask a question for me!"

"But, I already have three questions!" objected Tarongoy.

"Make room for mine," said the *datu*, laughing. "Besides, you won't find Agipo's shrine without my help!"

Tarongoy, seeing that he had no choice, promised to ask the leader's question. On hearing the promise, the *datu* leaned into him.

"This place where we feast, I wanted it to become a beautiful garden," said the *datu*. "But trees and flowers refused to grow, and no birds come to sing to us. I want to know why nothing can grow here."

The next day, Tarongoy was escorted to the shrine by a villager, on orders of the *datu*.

When Tarongoy entered the hut that was Agipo's shrine, his heart was troubled. He now had four questions, and he did not know what to drop. He promised to ask

three of the questions which were not his own, and he didn't like breaking promises. But if he didn't ask his own question, then his journey would have been in vain.

Before he could decide, the old *babaylan* who kept watch over the shrine approached him. She looked him over and led him to the wooden altar. There were many platforms on the altar, and several *anitos* stood on each one. On the highest platform stood a wooden image of a child, dressed in a flowing red robe with shiny gold trimming. On the child's head was a golden crown, and on the child's hand was a small globe. The child stood alone on that highest platform. He seemed to smile upon Tarongoy.

"This is Agipo," said the *babaylan*, referring to the child image. "Agipo the Rain-bringer, greatest of the *anitos*!"

Tarongoy bowed deeply. The *babaylan* approached the altar, then turned to him.

"Do you have questions for the great Agipo?" she asked.

Tarongoy immediately remembered the *datu*, without whom he would not have found the shrine.

"Great Agipo, why doesn't the garden of the great *datu* grow?" he asked.

The *babaylan* looked up at the statue and started dancing. After she had finished, she looked at Tarongoy.

“Agipo says that the reason the garden does not grow is that below the garden’s soil is the grave of a rich man, whose gold gives no room for anything to take root!” said the *babaylan*. “Remove the gold, and the garden will grow.”

Tarongoy nodded and made note of the answer. Then, he remembered the great bird, without whom he would not have crossed the sea to Sugbu.

“Great Agipo, why is the great bird of the shore not yet a *sarimanok*?” he asked.

The *babaylan* looked upon Agipo once more and began her dance. After she had finished, she looked at Tarongoy.

“Agipo says that while the great bird has done great deeds and has waited a long time, he cannot become a *sarimanok* until he loses a part of himself,” said the *babaylan*. “If he removes all but one of his long tail feathers, he will become a *sarimanok*.”

Tarongoy nodded and made note of the answer. Now he was down to one question. He remembered the merchant, who took him in for a night. It did not seem like much, compared to the others. But he had made a promise. He had always been a generous man. If he had stopped being generous then, and broke his promise to the merchant, then his own question would not be worth the answer. So, ignoring that his own journey may be in vain, he asked the merchant’s question.

“Great Agipo, can Amihan, the merchant’s daughter, be cured of her blindness?” he asked.

The *babylan* looked upon Agipo once more and began her dance. After she had finished, she looked at Tarongoy.

“Agipo says that the merchant’s daughter can be cured of her blindness,” said the *babaylan*. “Once she meets the man she is to marry, her sight will be restored.”

After his third question was answered, Tarongoy was led out of the shrine by the old woman. Feeling disappointed that he had failed to ask his own question, but happy that he had kept all his promises, Tarongoy set for home.

First, he visited the *datu*. Tarongoy told the *datu* Agipo’s answer. Upon hearing it, the *datu* ordered his men to dig up the garden. True enough, there were many chests of gold underneath the soil. As soon as the gold was removed and the ground replanted, trees eagerly sprang out of the ground, and the birds came to sing upon the branches. Pleased with the garden, the *datu* gave Tarongoy half of all the gold they found.

Next, Tarongoy visited the great bird on the shore. After the bird had carried Tarongoy and his treasure across the sea and back to Mactan, Tarongoy told him Agipo’s answer. The bird quickly removed nine of his great golden feathers, and gave the priceless relics to Tarongoy. As soon as he had given the feathers, the bird grew even greater in size. His red feathers all turned a bright gold, and his lone golden tail feather burst into a rainbow of colours that trailed the great bird whenever he went. He was now a *sarimanok*.

Finally, just before Tarongoy reached his home town, he stopped by the merchant's home. The merchant welcomed him, and when he told the merchant that Agipo had told him that Amihan can be cured, the merchant insisted that his daughter hear the answer as well. As soon as Amihan was brought before Tarongoy, she looked at him with dancing eyes and smiled.

"Back so soon, Tarongoy?" she asked. "What did the great Agipo say?"

Astounded, the grateful merchant immediately gave Amihan's hand to Tarongoy in marriage. Tarongoy happily accepted, for Amihan was both beautiful and kind-hearted. Together, they returned to Tarongoy's home, with all his treasure in tow. And when the merchant passed away, his trade went to Tarongoy and his wife.

In the end, Tarongoy, the generous man, would never go hungry again.