

# KING MAXIMO AND THE NUMBER KNIGHTS

## THE KING'S QUESTION

There never was a braver king, a wiser king, a kinder king, than King Maximo. So it is little wonder that twelve of the world's best knights, in one way or another, had found their way to King Maximo's court. One evening he summoned them to the throne room. The knights leaned forward anxiously. "My question for you is," he said excitedly, "WHICH IS THE GREATEST, THE KING OF ALL THE NUMBERS?"

Before they had fully understood the meaning of the king's words, a burly, red-bearded knight, almost as wide as he was tall, jumped up, nearly knocking over the two knights beside him.

"We'll find the answer, won't we men," he bellowed.

"Yes, we will," eleven voices chorused.

"Good then, it is decided. Each of you shall go out in quest of the greatest of all the numbers. In exactly one year we shall meet again here, and we shall see what each of you has to say. Good speed! The question awaits its answer!"

"Hurrah," the twelve chorused.

The knights set out, with each choosing a different direction to go. They traveled far and wide, far beyond the borders of the kingdom. Yet, true to their word, at year's end they had all found their way back to King Maximo's castle.

The kingdom was buzzing with excitement from the narrow, winding streets around the castle to the furthest peasant's cottage, for even there they knew that the knights were due back, and they knew the question that was awaiting its answer.

So, after the sun had set and darkness hung over the kingdom, the knights made their way to the long table. The king and queen entered. Finally, the king and queen took their places at the head of the table. King Maximo raised his cup. The hall became quiet. "I wish to propose a toast. To my Number Knights. Now then," he said, "which is the king of all the numbers?"

## SIR OWEN SPEAKS

All eyes were on a tall, young, clean-shaven knight with long blond hair and keen, blue eyes. "Your Majesty, I, Sir Owen, traveled over mountains and down valleys, through forests and across broad plains, even to the edge of the sea. Never did I notice that the earth had beginning or end. Above me, always, was the sky. And there, though clouds sometimes tried to hide it, shone the sun, the source of life. Nor can I forget, the moon, queen of the nighttime, waxing and waning in her mysterious ways. I came to see, dear king, that whatever is greatest is one.

"One day I saw a boy peeking out from behind a stone wall. 'Come here, boy. What do you think is the greatest number?' 'A thousand,' he replied hesitantly. 'A thousand and one,' I said. 'There always seems to be one more, doesn't there.' Just then the sun appeared from behind a cloud. 'Look!' said the boy, 'when I blink the sun sends down a ray just for me. Does it send one down to you, too? Does everyone have their own ray of light, Sir Knight?' 'Yes, I believe we do. And, even though each of us may be different in some ways, together we are all One. And look at you, my lad, you stand straight and tall just like the number 1.'

"So you see, dear King Maximo, we may think that one is the smallest number; yet it is truly the greatest of all!"

"How grand!" cried the king.

"Bravo, Sir Owen," the knights chorused.

Joccomo the Jester jumped up and tossed his golden ball high into the air and caught it again. "How's this?" he said:

ONE IS THE SUN  
ONE IS THE SKY  
ONE IS THE WORLD  
AND ONE AM I

The next day Sir Owen ordered a coat of arms that looked like this:



## SIR TWAIN SPEAKS

"Yes, yes, this is all very nice, but with all due respect to Sir Owen, I cannot deny what I saw with my two eyes." It was Sir Twain speaking, a dark, handsome knight. Sir Owen spoke truly, but there are two sides to everything. Look at his nose!" A hush fell over the room. Was Sir Twain mocking Sir Owen? Sir Twain laughed, "No, no, look at my nose; look at any nose. It's really two noses in one. Same in each of us- two ears to hear, two eyes to see, two feet to walk on, two hands to work with. We breathe in and we breathe out. There's left and right, back and front, up and down. Every door opens and closes. Every beginning has its end. Every hill has its valley. Need I go on?"

"No, no, that's enough," cried some.

"Yes, yes, do go on," others insisted. They looked at each other and laughed.

"But, you know," he said, his voice softening, "there were two special times each day when I saw the dark divide the light, or was it the light dividing the darkness? At sunrise and sunset the dark and the light touched. Yes, that was a special time indeed."

Suddenly it became very quiet in the hall. All were picturing sunrises and sunsets they had seen. After a moment the king said softly, "Thank you Sir Twain, you have indeed performed a service to us all. Joccomo, have you something to say about this?"

Joccomo stood & bowed. "How's this, Your Majesty?"

TWO ARE MY EYES  
EARS, HANDS AND FEET  
DARK AND LIGHT  
AT SUNSET MEET

The next day Sir Twain ordered a new coat of arms that looked like this:



## SIR THRICE SPEAKS

"One and two are nice, but now take heed of Sir Thrice." A knight with a neatly trimmed beard approached the king. He was holding two sticks in one hand, and another in the other hand. "Here we have something, a triangle. Each stick touches the other two. And see," he said, putting them into different position, "there is no end of possibilities. "May I see the sticks?" requested the king.

"Of course, Your Majesty," replied Sir Thrice, handing him the sticks, bowing. Everything grew quiet as his subjects watched as the king fiddled with the sticks. Suddenly he became aware of the silence.

"Please continue, Sir Thrice," said the king, laying the sticks on the table.

"Three is strong and simple," Sir Thrice went on. "This milking stool with three legs is a perfect example".

"Well, you all know the tale of The Three Bears, don't you?"

"Of course we do," said Sir Twain. "Everyone does."

"Then, I'll remind you of the bowls, the chairs, and the beds. They were small, medium and large, for there was the father bear, the mother bear and the baby bear. Hot and cold porridge called for one that was just right in between. Finally, what would the story be with just beginning and end, but no middle?" Several of the knights chuckled at the thought.

" I am three as well," continued Sir Thrice. "For, you see, I can think, I can feel and I can work," he said, motioning to his head, his heart, and, finally, holding out his hands.

'In nature, also, I see three, for there is the solid earth on which I stand. There are all the marvelous plants which grow out of the earth up towards the sun. And finally, there are the animals which live and move about on the land, in the air and in the sea. That's another three, see. So perhaps you'll agree with me that the greatest of all the numbers, indeed,

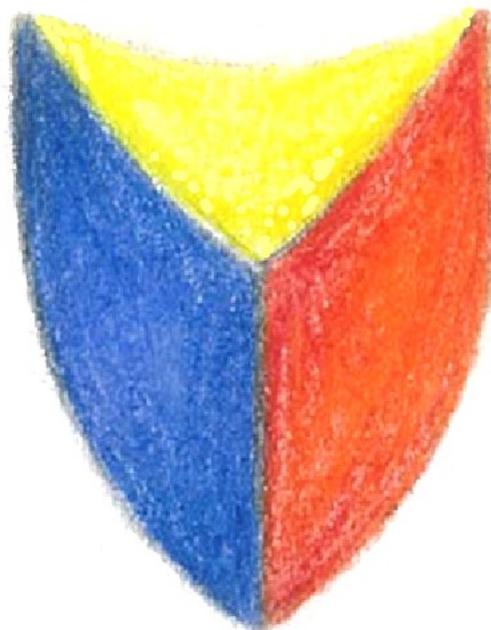
is THREE. A one, and a two and a three," said Sir Thrice, and with a great flourish, he bowed low and sat down.

"Wonderful," called King Maximo. "Joccomo?"

"Let's see," said Joccomo:

STONES PLANTS AND BEASTS  
EARTH AIR AND SEA  
WITH MY HEAD HEART AND HANDS  
THE WORLD DO I MEET

The next day Sir Thrice ordered a new coat of arms, and it looked like this:



## SIR FOURSQUARE SPEAKS

"Tables and chairs," blurted out a stout, red-bearded knight, nearly knocking over his wine goblet as he stood up. All the other knights, and King Maximo, too, burst out laughing, which made him want to explode. They knew Sir Foursquare for what he was, a brawling, blustering bull of a man who would never turn his back on a fight or leave any task unchallenged. When his temper had cooled Sir Foursquare recounted his adventures.

"Wherever I went, north, south, east or west, I saw people at work. There were carpenters building houses, farmers plowing their fields, women weaving on looms or tending their gardens, joiners making furniture. Four legs make tables and chairs strong, farmers' fields have four sides. Walls, ceilings and floors have four sides. Four makes things strong, don't you agree?" All were nodding their heads in agreement.

"Bricks and bread, too," Foursquare suddenly bellowed, startling everyone in the hall. "It takes earth, water, air and fire, four elements, both to make bricks for the oven and for the bread to bake in it. I watched one day as men scooped clay out of the earth and mixed in some water. Then they put it into wooden molds and left the bricks in the sun to dry. Where did the water go? Why into the air."

Same with the bread. The flour is ground from earth grain. Next water is added. The yeast pulls in the air which makes the dough rise. Then, in the heat of the oven, this soggy mass of dough becomes the sweet, delicious bread I love to eat."

"And the cows that give us our milk. Their four legs give them the strength to withstand the summer sun, the autumn winds, the winter snows and the springtime showers, in other words the four seasons. Need I say more? Four is indeed king."

Joccomo jumped to his feet, clicked his heels four times and bowed.  
Then in a deep voice he said:

TABLES AND CHAIRS  
SHOUTS STOUT FOURSQUARE  
FLOORS AND CEILINGS AND WALLS  
FOURS LIMBS TO LABOR ON THE EARTH  
WINTER SPRING SUMMER AND FALL

The next day Sir Foursquare went out and ordered a new coat of arms,  
and it looked like this:

