

Sufi Tales
From Attar to Rumi

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A Wise Donkey

Source: Oral Tradition

By the city of Kashan, a hundred miles east of the holy city of Qom, lived a poor peasant named Ahmed. Ahmed's village was at the edge of a desert, facing barren mountains to the north. High on the mountains, snow fell heavily from December until March. As the snow melted, a river flowed into the valley below until May, and then dried up for the rest of the year. Peasants dug wells at the foot of the mountains, connected them together with underground tunnels, and brought water to the valley below. Ahmed, like every other peasant, had a share of this water for the melons in his plot. Every day, he woke up before sunrise, prayed to God, counted his blessings, and then went to work in the fields, under the blazing sun. He worked gladly, as sweat dripped from his face. He collected melons in gunnysacks, put them on his donkey's back, and then took them to the bazaar.

One day, on his way to the bazaar, Ahmed's donkey fell into an abandoned well. Ahmed sat by the edge of the well and listened to his donkey, as it cried piteously. Listening to the sound of the donkey's cry, Ahmed reasoned that the donkey may have broken its legs, and since the donkey was old, he thought he should put the donkey out of its misery. He went back to the village and called a few of the villagers to help him. Ahmed asked every man to grab a shovel and begin to shovel dirt into the well. Not realizing what was happening, the donkey, at first, cried and wailed horribly. Then a few shovelfuls later, the donkey quieted down completely. The peasants peered down into the well and were astounded by what they saw. With every shovelful of dirt that landed on its back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He was shaking the dirt off and taking a step up on a new layer of dirt. As the

peasants continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Soon, the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off, to the shock and astonishment of all the peasants. Then Ahmed grinned and said, “We all have to learn from my wise donkey. When life throws a shovel of dirt at you, all kinds of dirt, the trick to getting out of such circumstances is to not to let the dirt bury you. Shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a steppingstone. Like the donkey, we can get out of the deepest wells by not stopping and never giving up! Shake off the dirt, take a step up, and then praise God.”

Longing for the Beloved

Source: Rumi

In the city of Yazd, located in the center of Persia, by the great desert of Lut, lived a silk merchant, who was also a hunter with an unbounded thirst for adventure.

On one of his trip to India, he went to a forest to capture canaries, blue jays, and all kinds of parrots. One hot summer, when it hadn't rained for three months, bird hunters set traps all over the forest, and under the traps, they put small pots of water. There were two parrots that sat high on a branch and watched the entourage of hunters passing below. The parrots listened to the hunters and repeated their words. Because they loudly repeated the hunters' words from high up in the branches, all of the other birds flew away. The silk merchant noticed the pair of parrots and set an elaborate net, with water and nuts under it, and he hid in the bushes. Both parrots flew towards the trap. The female parrot was very cautious, hopping slowly along the trap, inspecting its surroundings, but the male parrot moved rapidly towards the water and the nuts. As soon as he was under the trap, the trap door closed with a loud noise. The female parrot flew away and then sat on a high branch and wailed in a melancholy voice.

The silk merchant brought his prize parrot to Yazd. He made an elaborate cage for his parrot and hung the cage in his office. Every morning, while drinking his tea, he talked to his parrot for hours, telling the parrot his problems. A year went by. When he was about to leave for India, he asked his parrot if he wanted anything from India. On the day of his departure,

the parrot said, “Just go to the same spot where you caught me, and tell my beloved how well you are treating me. Tell her that I am in a beautiful cage and have all kinds of nuts, and ask her if she wants to come and spend her life with me in my beautiful home.

The silk merchant was delighted with his parrot’s request and agreed to grant the request. When he was in India, he went to the forest where he had captured his parrot. He sat there until he heard the female parrot calling to him. She asked, “Do you have any news of my beloved?”

“Yes,” the merchant answered, “I have a message for you.”

“Tell me, is my beloved well?”

“Yes, of course. He told me to tell you about his beautiful cage and about all the nuts he has to eat; also, he wants you to come with me to live with him.”

Hearing this, the parrot fell from the branch, right in front of him, her wings separated, as if she died instantly.

The merchant left in bewilderment. When he got to Yazd, his parrot asked him if he visited the forest and why he hadn’t brought his lover with him.

As soon as he told him what had happened, the parrot fell to the floor of his cage and his wings separated, as though he had instantly died. The merchant took his parrot out of cage, put it on the ground, covered his face with his hands, and wept. When he next looked at his parrot, before he had a chance to say anything, the parrot flew away, headed towards India.

A Sufi Wish

Source: Attar

In the year 1215, Attar, a Sufi master, wrote a story about his beloved teacher, Omar Khyam, a poet, a mathematician, and an astronomer, who made tents for his livelihood. The story goes:

I went to visit my teacher, Omar Khyam, in the city of Neishahpoor. It was a mild windy spring day when I entered the city. The bazaar hummed like a beehive with merchants, and customers who were hurriedly coming and going. There were all kinds of merchants: gold smiths, pot makers, tailors, butchers, and others..

Suddenly, the melodic sound of minarets calling worshipers to pray, vibrated in the bazaar. All I could hear were the words, “God is great, God is great.” Then instantly, everything stopped. Silence fell on the bazaar and hung in the air. Everyone left for the mosque, and I followed them. In line after line, the worshipers stood in prayer. Being tired from my long journey, I rested in the yard under a willow tree. When the noon prayer ended, slowly, the vibrating sound of the pot makers and others pulsated again. I had been searching for my master’s shop, and being distressed over not finding it, I stopped the mosque preacher to ask for directions.

He stared at me in bewilderment and said, “I have never seen him praying in the mosque. The heretic tentmaker is at the far end of the bazaar.” By late afternoon, I found my beloved teacher sitting on a stool, making a tent. His long white hair hung around his face, touching his snow-white beard. I bent to kiss his hand; he pulled me towards him and kissed my forehead. We drank tea in the yard under a blooming cherry tree. He was serene and calm. He opened his book of verses and read a poem to me:

“Ah Love! Could thou and I with Fate conspire to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire!

Would not shatter it a bit and remolded nearest to the Heart’s Desire!”

When he was finished reading the poem, I looked at his face. It vibrated with a divine, bottomless joy. The sunset was coming quickly, the earth was wash with a glow, and then a shaft of light was piercing through the trees; an, a moment later, a sudden shadow covered the garden. He was drowned in the sublime beauty of the sunset. He looked at the high wall at the end of the garden, where the top of the wall was covered with sunlight, and the rest was covered by a dark shadow. Then his gaze became fixed on the ground, which was covered with white petals, as he repeated the last verse:

“Would not shatter it a bit and remolded nearest to the Heart’s Desire!”

“What is your heart’s desire?” I asked.

“I wish upon my death, that when the north wind blows in the spring, it covers my tomb with white petals,” said my master.

Years later, I returned to visit him. He was dead; I went into the graveyard to pay my respects. I could not find his grave. I saw a preacher by the mosque. I asked him where I could find his grave.

“The heretic tentmaker could not be buried among the believers.”

He directed me toward the outskirts of town. By late afternoon, I arrived at the edge of town. It was springtime. Row after row of cherry trees with their white flowers danced in the north wind, scattering their petals in the air. When I found his tomb, it was covered with a blanket of white petals. I picked up a stone, knocked on his grave, and wept for my beloved master.

Love of Life

From Rumi

In a village on the southern side of the Alborz Mountain, by the Caspian Sea, lived an old woman with her beautiful daughter. Her name was Moon. She had blue eyes that shined like two unblemished turquoise gems; her long eyelashes curved upward. Her eyebrows hung like quarter moons when she opened her eyes. She had silky white skin like the color of snow and breathtakingly long black hair that hung over her slender shoulders.

Every one loved Moon and Moon loved life. She woke up at dawn, made tea for her mother, and prayed on the terrace, facing the Alborz Mountain, which were pointing in the direction of Mecca. Moon had a beautiful melodic voice and she loved to sing. After her morning prayer, she sat on the terrace, facing the rising sun, as it slowly peeked out from behind the mountain, spreading its rays over the valley below, and then, second by second, slowly spread a shaft of light over the sea. She loved to gaze at the unfolding of a new day from her terrace. She praised God and sang a harmonious tune, first in a soft voice, repeating the words, "Praise to God who created the heaven and earth." Then as the beam of light widened over the valley, her voice continued its enchanting tune, in harmony with cardinals singing in magnolia trees in the yard. She repeated over and over, "Praise to God who created the heaven and earth."

In the evening, after sunset and when the half moon shined in the sky, she prayed on the terrace, facing the moon, as its dim orange color smoldered over the mountains. Again, she sang and praised God for the blessings she had in life.

Moon was a good daughter. She worked with her mother in their small plot of land, from dawn until dusk. Bending all day to plant rice caused unbearable pain in her back. She never whined, even when blood-sucking rice worms pinned themselves to her legs. She would light a match to the worms, almost burning her own flesh, to get the bloodsuckers off from her legs. Moon still did not grumble; a smile never left her face, and she gladly worked and worked. After working until five in the afternoon, she took the family cow and goats to the fields for grazing, sang to them, and then milked them lovingly with sore hands that ached from working in the fields. She did all this and never complained.

Her mother called her a sweet angel of God, her beloved sweeter than her soul, a saint. When Moon brought lunch for her, her mother would kiss her forehead, as tears rolled down her own cheeks. When she prayed, she always put her hands up, loudly asking for a long life for Moon and begged God to take her life before Moon's. She told everyone how much she loved Moon and how she was ready to sacrifice her own life for her. When young men came to her and asked to marry Moon, she sent them directly to Moon. And as always, Moon thought of her mother and rejected them to be with her mother.

One day, it had rained all day. Still, Moon had worked in the fields, soaking wet. When she came home, she fell sick and burned with fever. The old woman took her to the village doctor, but she got sicker and her temperature surged higher. She took her to the city to a famous doctor. He gave her many medicines, but it did not help, and Moon got weaker and weaker. She took her to the village preacher, who gave Moon prayer beads to put around her neck; she remained sick. She went back to the preacher; he told her to sacrifice a goat and give the meat to the villagers to pray for Moon. Still, she

did not get better. Everyday, the old woman went to Moon's room, kissed her forehead, and prayed for her. Nothing worked and she became very weak. Her shining color faded, her eyes sank, her eye protruded, and the shadow of death hung in her room. Every night, after her prayer, the old woman stood where Moon had stood before, with her hands raised to the sky, talking to God. Over and over again, she asked God to take her life before Moon's life. When anyone visited them, she repeated her prayer, over and over again. In tears, she told them that she wanted to die before Moon. She told her friends, where she wanted to be buried, and she even went with her oldest friend to the village graveyard, where a saint was buried, and marked where she wanted to be buried.

One day after sunset, the old woman went to Moon's room; she saw her breathing heavily, her eyes colorless, her forehead covered with sweat, as if she were about to receive the Angel of Death. . She ran back to her room and stood in prayer. She cried and cried, asking God to take her life and give it to Moon. From exhaustion, she lay on the floor, half asleep and half awake, opening her eyes from time to time, gazing into the yard, as though she expected a visitor.

At the far end of the yard , the family cow was eating hay. Next to the hay basket was a large white clay pot full of water for the cow. The cow went to the pot and put her head into it for a drink of water. The cow's head was caught in the pot and it appeared to have a small, round white circle around its head. The cow, in fright, moved around the yard making all kinds of unusual sounds. She moved to the old woman's window. She cried out again: "I cannot bear this life any longer. Ah, I wish Death would only come and take me!" Suddenly, the old woman opened her eyes and saw something moving toward

her room. In fear, she started and her heart beat violently. A sweat covered her face and she shook uncontrollably. She tried to get up and run, but her legs caved under her. In fright with a shaking voice she shouted:

“If you are coming for the sick person, she is next door there, not in my room.”

The Friendship of a Bear

Source: Oral Tradition

In the city of Tabriz, in the northwestern part of Persia, an old man lived with his dancing bear. After sunset, in the city’s main square, the old man played his drum, as his bear danced to the tune. When people poured out of the mosque after evening prayer, they gathered around the old man to watch the bear dance. For every dance that the bear performed, the old man gave a cup of honey to the bear. The bear ate the honey and the crowd roared with laughter. The people threw coins towards the bear. The crowd chanted for more dancing. Then the old man played a marching tune. The bear put his paws forward, one at a time, pulled back his head, and moved to the beat of the drum. Again coins were thrown at the bear. Everyone knew the old man and the bear. Families came every night to watch the same performance and to laugh at the dancing bear.

One hot summer day, the old man was resting under a tree. Soon he fell asleep, and the bear stood guard over his master. A fly came and sat on the bear’s nose. He swiped his paw at the fly. It flew away, returned, and sat on his cheek. He swiped at it again. The fly flew into the air and sat on the bear’s forehead. The bear moved in slow motion to get the fly off his face. The fly flew away and sat on his master’s forehead. The bear went over and swiped at it again. Then the fly flew and sat on his master’s cheek. The bear swiped at it

again. The fly flew a short hop and landed on the master's forehead again. This went on for over a half an hour. The bear became highly agitated. He stopped swiping at the fly and stared at it for a few minutes. Then he went over, circled around his master, and looked around. The bear's gaze became fixed on a large boulder. He went over and picked up the huge boulder, huffing and puffing along the way. He then stood over his master and waited for the fly to land somewhere. Once again the fly landed on his master's forehead. The bear aimed the boulder straight at the fly and threw it, crushing his master with the boulder.

When the people buried the old man, they wrote on his gravestone the story of his friendship with the bear.

The Greedy Peasant

Source: Oral Tradition

In a village near the city of Esfahan lived a peasant named Ahmad, who grew watermelons. When summer came and Ahmad's field was full of watermelons, he loaded his donkey with his crop and took it to the bazaar to sell. Every day, Ahmad would feed his donkey a pound of barley. This made the donkey so happy that he gladly carried the heavy load, looking forward to the feast of barley at the end of a hard day.

One day, Ahmad's wife nagged him that he cared more for his donkey than for her, and she asked him to stop giving the donkey a pound of barley, so that he could buy her a gold necklace. Ahmad wearied of his wife's nagging and went to see Molla, the wise man of the village, for advice. Ahmad described his problem to Molla. Molla thought for a few minutes and said to

him that his problem was very complicated. It needed a creative solution, and he would need to think about it overnight. Molla asked him to come back in the morning. Ahmad gave Molla a large watermelon as advance payment for thoughtfully searching for the right solution to his problem.

When Ahmad came back the next day, Molla was grinning with excitement, and he said, “After contemplating all night, and carefully analyzing the situation, I have found the solution to your problem. Here is my proposed solution. Every day, very carefully, hidden away from your wife and the donkey, you steal away a few grains of barley and add instead a little saw dust. Over time, this will reduce your expenses, and you could save enough money to buy your wife the necklace she wants.” Ahmad gave another watermelon to Molla and went home happy.

A month passed and Ahmad reduced the donkey’s barley to half a pound and added saw dust in its place. The donkey continued to carry the heavy load of watermelons to the bazaar. The next month, Ahmad continued to steal away even more barley from the donkey, giving the donkey only a quarter of a pound of barley and the rest saw dust. The donkey continued to take the heavy load of watermelons to the bazaar.

From the money he saved, Ahmad bought a gold necklace for his wife. He was happy with his cleverness and continued to steal away more and more barley from the donkey and added more saw dust. One day, the donkey collapsed and died from weakness. Ahmad ran to Molla, crying.

Molla roared in laughter and said, “My dear fellow I said steal away a few grains of barley, not all of them! There is no cure for greediness!”

The Idiot

Source: Oral Tradition

In the city of Kerman, in southeastern Persia, , about three hundred miles from the ancient Indain border, lived two old friends. One was tall, with a flowerily large nose. His name was Erslan. He was a simple man, slightly deaf, but honest and happy. As it happens in this part of the world, people admired cleverness. Because of Erslan's absence of cunning, his being somewhat deaf, and, above all, his constant gaiety, he was considered unintelligent. Behind his back, he was called, "The Idiot." But, he was so good-natured that even when someone called him an idiot, he smiled and showed no trace of anger on his face.

Erslan's friend was short and built like an ox, with curly white hair and large, black, fiery eyes. His name was Rostam, which meant "Strong Man." Both friends owned small shops in the bazaar, with a few looms, with which to make exquisite Persian carpets. They were both master artists who designed their carpets in eloquent patterns, using Persian geometrical flowers arranged into mazes of twisted branches. But, when it came to colors, the friends had entirely different tastes. Erslan adorned his carpets with dark blue and black colors, with occasional splashes of yellow in open fields of snowy white. On the other hand, Rostam loved fiery red, burgundy, and green colors in open fields.

Over the years, these two friends argued endlessly over the authentic design of carpets, to the point of getting angry and not talking to each other for a few days. Then, after a several days they would suddenly kiss each other's cheeks, as if nothing had happened. However, as soon they had had a half-day

of tranquility, they would find a new thing to argue about. It appeared as if they were in a constant battle to impress each other. When Erslan read a poem from Rumi, Rostam instantly analyzed it and gave a precise meaning to it, as if there were no other acceptable interpretation. As usual, that would set the stage for a new quarrel. Then they would stop talking. After a few days, they would kiss each other and start all over again. As the years went by, Erslan became deaf. He stopped arguing and just shook his head in agreement. Rostam wanted him to argue, and the absence of quarrelling made him unhappy.

One day, Rostam fell sick and did not go to work. After a few days, Erslan decided to visit him. Since Erslan was deaf, he rehearsed his questions and the expected answers, repeatedly, to memorize them.

He said to himself, "First, I will ask Rostam, 'How are you?'"

When Rostam replies, 'I am getting better,' I will say, 'Thanks to God.'"

After his Friday prayer at the mosque, Erslan bought a bottle of sour cherry jam from the bazaar, and then he went to visit Rostam. With a cheerful smile on his face, Erslan entered Rostam's room. Rostam was lying in bed. Seeing the cheerful smile on Erslan's face, Rostam at once became agitated. When Erslan asked Rostam, "How are you?"

He responded in an angry voice, "I am dying from pain."

Erslan instantly replied, "Thanks to God."

Rostam bit his lips in fury.

Then Erslan asked, "When will you come back to work?"

Rostam responded, "As soon as I see the Angel of Death."

Erslan quickly responded with his memorized response, "I hope it happens soon."

Blood surged into Rostam's face. He burned with anger. Seeing a bottle in Erslan's hand, he stared at it and shouted, "Did you bring me poison?" Noticing Rostam looking at the bottle, Erslan responded, "The best I could find."

Rostam jumped out of the bed, grabbed Erslan like a wild beast, and threw him out of his room, shouting, "Out, out, you idiot."

An Old man and a Snake

Source: Rumi

A long time ago, an old man lived at the foot of the Alborz Mountain. It was a desolate place. It never rained in the valley below, but the top of the mountain was covered by a smooth blanket of snow from November to February. Then, by June, the summer sun scorched the mountain top; the snow slowly melted and foamy white water gushed along the many deep, jagged canyons. Along the mountain side, where the water could be carried by a canal, beautiful gardens had been constructed on terraces where apple, cherry, oak, and many sycamore trees had been planted. Rich villagers lived in these gardens. Farther up on the barren side of the mountain, lived an old man who went up to the mountain before sunrise to cut dried thorny bushes. That was his job; he stacked the bushes and carried them on his back to be sold to people in the village for fuel. Everyday, as he walked along the path, he recited prayers he had memorized in the mosque. When he felt lonely, he talked loudly to God, and when his back hurt from bending all day, he would speak, as if for God, saying, "If your back hurts, I will gently caress it at night, just wait until you get home." When his feet ached with throbbing pain, he would say, "I will wash your feet for you in hot soapy water." All day, he was talking to God, while he was cutting the bushes into a pile.

One day, he was very tired; he lay down under a jagged rock and fell sleep. He had a dream. In his dream, he saw a man in a white robe standing over him. He jumped up and grasped the man's hand to kiss it. The man said, "I have a gift for you for being so loving. In your cellar lives a snake. Every afternoon, when the sun goes down, go to the cellar with a cup of milk and

leave it by the snake's den. The snake will come, drink the milk, and leave you a gold coin."

When he reached his home, he went into the cellar with a cup of milk. A few minutes later, a snake, covered with stripes of black, white and blue, crawled out of its hole. The snake drank the milk and dropped a gold coin. The old man picked up the coin and praised God

One day, the man fell sick. He told his son about the snake and asked him to take a cup of milk to the snake and receive the gold coin with which he could buy food. His son did this for a few days. Then one day, he began to question the stupidity of his father. He decided to kill the snake and take its treasure. He took a shovel down to the cellar and left it by the snake's den. . When he went to the cellar the next day, he stood and carefully watched the snake drink the milk, and then, suddenly, he picked up the shovel and aimed for the snake's head. He missed and cut off the snake's tail instead. The snake attacked and bit him and the son died. When the old man came to the snake's den and asked for forgiveness, the snake came out of his den and said, "For as long as I remember my tail, and you remember your son, our friendship will be gone forever."

A King and an Old Woman

Source: Ganjavi

One day, King Sanjar and his entourage went to hunt deer in the mountains of Khrasun, the land of the sun, in the northeastern part of Persia. After a week in the mountains, they had found no deer. On their way back to the palace, they made a wrong turn and soon they were crossing the open plain of Turkmen country. As far the eye could see, the plain rolled until it met the distant horizon. They walked and walked, hoping to find a village or a shepherd, so that they could find their way back to the palace. The sun baked the plain in daytime, and at night, the plain froze from the cold. Soon, the troop depleted their food and water. On the tenth day of their journey, they saw mountains raising high over the plain all around them. But, when they walked towards the rising sun, the mountains faded away into the horizon, in a mirage. Exhausted, hungry, and thirsty, they began to see more mirages. . When they gazed toward the sunset, the mountains appeared nearer, but as they walked toward them, they kept creeping farther away, like a ghostly image. Soon, the King's entourage looked more like paupers. Their clothes became ragged, their faces were burned from the blazing sun, and their lips were cracked from thirst. Suffering from fatigue, hunger, and thirst, they could no longer walk. They lay on the earth, submitting to God's will.

An old Turkmen woman lived nearby, at the edge of the plain, by a spring. She lived in a tent and had two goats and a small plot of land, where she planted wheat and barley. As she was walking her goats for grazing, she came upon the King's entourage. She brought them back to her tent. She butchered one of her goats and made a feast for the hungry, lost travelers. In a

few days, the King's entourage became healthy again, and they found their way back to the palace.

Upon their return, King Sanjar ordered his Prime Minister to give one thousand goats to the old woman. The Prime Minister said, "Your Majesty, the old woman gave us one goat. Does his Majesty really want to give the old woman one thousand goats?" King Sanjar said, "The old woman gave us half of what she had and saved our lives. I need to give her half of all the goats I have in my kingdom. Even one thousand goats is not enough."

Fate

Source: Oral Tradition

That year it did not snow in the mountains as it did the year before. When spring arrived, it only rained twice. In the valley below, where many villagers lived, they looked to the mountains and its many rivers for water. In the early spring, when peasants saw low water levels in the river, they knew a drought was coming to the valley. By mid spring the land was scorched under the blazing sun. By early summer, cholera plagued the valley. A shower of death spread throughout the valley. The Angel of Death visited many peasants, and the smell of death hung in the air. The peasants were bewildered and went to see the Molla, the learned man, about how to keep the Angel of Death away from their families. The Molla knew that he had no knowledge of medicine, but he decided that he had to find a way to give hope to the villagers. He told the peasants that he needed to study the matter and that he would be ready with an answer by the following Friday, a holy day. He knew well that he had no books to study and that the only thing he knew how to do was to ask the peasants to pray. However, he had told them that before. He needed something more. He sat to pray and opened the Qur'an to read. When he opened the book, he saw a strand of hair on the opened page. His mind suddenly grasped onto a bright idea. He thought he had found a medicine for the bereft people. He went through the Qur'an in the mosque. He opened the pages, one by one, and found that some pages had strands of hair, here and there, between the pages. He then pulled out some of his own hair and placed them between the pages.

At Friday prayer, the mosque was packed with worshipers. Row after row, the young, the old, the poor, and the rich stood in line to pray. The

women's section was also packed. The Molla led the ritual of praying very methodically, reciting the words from the Qur'an, one by one.

“In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, seek assistance thorough patience and prayer. Most assuredly, it is a hard thing for the humble ones, and your God is one God! There is no God but He; and His will be done.”

After he finished his sermon, the Molla said:

“Last night I had a dream. In my dream, the Prophet appeared. He said, ‘To keep the Angel of Death away, open up the Holy Book, the Qur'an, and look for a strand of hair between the pages. Take the strand of hair, put it in a glass filled with water, and then drink the water. If you do this, the Angel of Death won't visit you.’”

A month passed, the Angel of Death kept coming to family after family, and peasants were dying, as before. The Molla kept out of sight. Then the Angel of Death visited the Molla's own family. Death came to his sons and his wife. In fear, the Molla packed his bag with food, took a blanket, and left town for a mountain to be safe. When he reached the mountain, he went into a cave nearby where he had lived and prayed before. In the morning, when he came out of the cave, he shivered in fear.

“What are you doing here? I was coming to see you in your house next year,” the Angel of Death said, staring him in the eye, “But, now that you are here, you can come with me,”

The Story of Tamure

Source: Oral Tradition

In the year 982 A.D., a boy named Tamure was born to a tribe of the Plains of Mongolia. By the age of sixteen, he was called “The Fearless Tamure.” He was known as a daring warrior-swordsman who rode his horse while standing on it, disappearing on either side of the horse, while galloping through the open plain. By the age of twenty, he had fought battles alongside his father and had killed many men. His fearlessness in battle, his piercing eyes, his unpredictably swift changes of positions, while riding on his horse, and above all, his keen intelligence made everyone admire and follow him. Rumor spread that Tamure had been sent by God to bring glory to the Mongolian Herdsmen. Everyone loved Tamure, but the head tribesman feared him and decided to kill him.

One day, in the dead of night, the head tribesman and his guards set out to kill Tamure. The night was calm and a full moon hung in the sky. They came from the four corners of an open field towards the tents, stables that were scattered over the hill. As it happened on that night, Tamure was awake. He saw shadows moving all around the village. He got up and went to his father’s tent; there, his heart sunk as he saw blood flowing from his father’s bed. Outside, with a dagger in his mouth, crouching, he moved quickly to the stable. He heard the head tribesman say, “Did you kill Tamure?” Peering outside, he saw that a group of swordsmen were coming towards the stable. Inside the stable, there was an area used for storing gunnysacks of wheat. Instantly, Tamure hid inside one of the tall gunnysacks that were stacked, side by side. The swordsmen came inside. They looked everywhere for Tamure. Tamure stayed motionless inside the gunnysack. One swordsman told the head tribesman that he saw Tamure’s horse flying out of the stable. The morning was approaching fast. The head tribesman looked around. When

he saw the gunnysacks, he ordered the swordsmen to pierce the gunnysacks. Tamure stayed motionless. A sword pierced his calf below his knee. He gently grabbed the sword with his trouser, cleaning his blood from it, as it was pulled out of the gunnysack. When all became quiet again, he got out of the gunnysack, limping. From then on, Tamure was known as “Tamure Lamé”.

The next day, the news of the head tribesman’s attempt to kill Tamure spread throughout the plain. The swordsmen, fearful for their lives, beheaded their leader and brought his head to Tamure, vowing to fight under his command.

In his first battle against the Afghan warrior, Tamure was defeated and his army destroyed, as he tried to pass through the Khaiber pass in the Hindu mountains of India. He took refuge in an old deserted caravan and sat in the shaded area under its broken roof. When he looked at the wall, he saw an ant carrying a grain of wheat up the wall. Half way up the wall, the ant fell to the ground. The ant started all over again. When it had almost reached the top of the wall, it fell again. Tamure sat there and counted the number of times the ant repeated this action. The ant was on his ninety-ninth attempt when it climbed to within an inch of the top of the wall, only to fall again to the ground. On his one- hundredth try, the ant successfully reached the top of the wall.

Tamure, in amazement, said to himself, “I have lost one battle, and I have ninety-nine more battles to fight.” He jumped onto his horse and went back to the Plains of Mongolia, organized a new army, and became “Tamure Lamé,” who captured the world.

Rush to Judgment

Source: Oral Tradition

Molla lived in the city of Ahwaz in the Persian Gulf, along the Karun River. One day, Molla was walking along the river. The river was muddy and rushing rapidly from a rainstorm that had lasted for many days. Peasants used the river to take their goods, mostly cheese and butter, packed in black sacks, down to sell in the city's main square. A peasant was walking ahead of Molla, and he noticed something that looked like a black sack floating in the river. When Molla reached the peasant, the peasant said to him, "Look over there in the middle of those waves; I think someone has lost a sack of cheese."

Molla looked at the river, and indeed, he saw, a black object floating in the water.

"Since I saw it first," said the peasant, "It is mine, but if you help me, I will share it with you,"

Molla again looked at the rushing water and said: "You'd better think twice before going into that water. You will drown. The river is too choppy."

"Don't worry Molla; just help me when I get the sack out of the water and up the river bank."

Saying these words, the peasant took off his clothes and jumped into the water. For a few short minutes, he kept going under the water and coming up, gasping for air.

Molla, seeing that the peasant was about to drown, took off his turban, threw it into the water, and shouted, "Grab my turban. Let go of the sack, or you will drown."

“I am trying to let it go of it, but it won’t let go of me,” shouted the peasant.

When Molla looked again into the muddy water, he noticed that the poor peasant had grabbed the head of a black bear.

Three Words of Advice for Life

Source: Rumi

A bird hunter set out a trap and captured a duck. The captured duck then said to the hunter, “I am not fully-grown; if you sell me in the market, you won’t get much for me, and if you kill me to eat, I won’t make a meal for you. If you release me, I will give you three words of advice that will make you a rich man for life.” The bird hunter looked at the young duck and thought for a few minutes about its age, and he decided to consider the duck’s offer.

“What are your words of advice?” the hunter asked the duck.

“I will give you my first word of advice while you are holding me in a cage, the second, when you release me, and the third, when I fly away.”

“What, then, is your first word of advice?”

“Never believe the impossible,” said the duck. “Always check out the facts before believing anything. If something is too good to be true, it’s not.”

The bird hunter felt this was very good advice and released the duck. When the duck flew away and sat on a tree branch, the duck said: “Never worry about the past, don’t cry over spilled milk and don’t play the “If Game.” “And what is your third word of advice?”

“Never decide in haste. I have swallowed a large pearl that almost choked me. If you had not released me, you would have had delicious duck soup; then you would have had the large pearl and would have become a rich man.”

The bird hunter, in anger, cursed himself for his own stupidity. Shouting, the duck said, “You already forgot my first word of advice. I told you never to worry about the past.”

Then the duck continued: “You forgot my second word of advice, too. How could you have believed that I had a large pearl in my stomach? I am just a small duck. If something is too good to be true, it is not.”

An Old Man and a King

Source: Attar

One day, King Khosrow and his entourage went to hunt deer on the plains far in the central regions of Persia. The king was astonished when his entourage came upon an old man in his nineties, barely standing up, who was planting fig trees.

“Don’t you know it takes thirty years for fig trees to grow?” asked the king, “It is time for you to give thanks for your blessing of a long life and get ready for the other world.”

The old man replied, “Our fathers planted fig trees and we ate figs from them. I am planting trees for those who will come after me and, by my good deed, I am getting ready for the other world.”

The king ordered his prime minister to give a sack of gold to the old man.