

Story 1639 (1974 Tape 36)

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Lokman¹ Understands a Remedy Which He Cannot Administer

Once in the very distant past there was a young man suffering from a very grave illness. The skin all over his body was covered with sores and deep scars. He finally went to Lokman and said, "Oh, Dr. Lokman, find a cure for my illness!

Lokman examined the young man and then said, "My child, neither I nor any other physician has a cure for your illness. Do not come any nearer, for I cannot touch you again.

Upon hearing this, the young man lost all hope. "Even the great Dr. Lokman cannot cure me! Where can I go? Everyone loathes me, and no one will even come near me. best thing that I can do is to go into the mountains. There the wolves and birds will devour me, and as a result, I shall not cause anyone any further difficulty."

¹Legendary figure sometimes said to be a contemporary of Plato. Although he is pictured in most folktales as a gifted physician, he (or someone of the same name) also at times plays the role of wise man, judge, and creator of proverbs.

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This young man who was unable to do anything to sustain his life any longer withdrew to an isolated spot on the edge of the mountains and sat down beside a rock. After some time had passed, a shepherd, playing upon a kaval,² passed along that way as he was returning from the pasture to the village with his flock. He looked at the young man seated by the rock and felt very sorry for him. "Poor young man," said the shepherd. "Allah has given him this illness." He took from his pack a bowl and filled it with the milk of a black sheep that had stepped forth from his flock. Leaving the bowl of milk with the sick young man, the shepherd proceeded on his way with his flock.

The young man was very touched by the compassion of the shepherd. "He gave me that milk so that I would drink it and perhaps not die," he thought. "But now that I have already given up all hope of life, what should I do with this milk?" He simply sat there staring at the milk.

²A shepherd's pipe, similar to a recorder but having the type of a mouthpiece found on a fipple flute. Turkish shepherds often direct the movement and action of their sheep by means of set tunes on the kaval, tunes that are somewhat analogous to bugle calls.

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After five minutes had passed, a black snake descended from a higher point and hissed as it came alongside the rock where the man with the bowl of milk was sitting. The snake put its head into the bowl and drank the milk. It then vomited into the bowl and went away. The young man said, "It must have been Allah who sent this creature. Instead of waiting for wolves and birds to kill me, here is poison that may end my pain more quickly. Why don't I drink this poison and end it at once?"

He drank the poison and then set the bowl down on the ground. Feeling very weak, he lay down on the ground and fell asleep. Forty-eight hours of his life passed, and when he awakened after that time, his condition had changed greatly. All of his sores and scars had been reduced to the size of grains of sand. He was amazed to see that new skin had begun to cover his entire body. Going to a lower level where a river flowed by, he look at his reflection in the water and saw that his skin looked fresh and his body seemed to be functioning perfectly. His blood again began to circulate freely through his body. Removing his clothes, the young man then bathed in the river. He felt as pure as a newly born child. He then said to himself, "Dr. Lokman said that there was no cure

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for my illness. This would seem to indicate that he is not such a great physician. I shall go, confront and remind him what he had said about my condition."

By the time that this young man reached Dr. Lokman's pharmacy, he had fully recovered. Looking at him, would think that he had never been ill. He went to the pharmacy door and stepped inside. After greeting Lokman, he asked, "Dr. Lokman, do you recognize me?"

"Yes, young man, I think I do. Are you not the young man who had such and such a disease at a certain time?"

"Yes, I had come to you and asked you to cure me, but you told me that my illness was incurable. If there was no remedy for my illness, how can I now be so strong and healthy? If there was no cure, then how have I been cured?"

"Sit down, young man; sit down!" said Lokman. "Everyone eats the fruit appropriate for his own preservation. There clearly was a cure for your illness, but what good would it do to say so if that cure were not attainable? How could I have found a sheep so perfect that there was not a single spot on its body? Well, perhaps I could have found such a spotless black sheep if I had been able

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to examine all of the flocks in the world. But even if I had been able to find and milk such a spotless black sheep, where could I have found a black snake to drink that milk while it was still warm? And then how could I have made it vomit? That was the only way you could have been cured. Although it might have been relatively easy to find a perfect black sheep, the rest would have been all but impossible. Allah showed His kindness to you. You could not have found those two things together no matter how hard you searched for them, and so He made them come to you.

Realizing now the wisdom of the Blessed Lokman, the young man grasped his hand and clung to it. "Yes, father, you are right. That was the way in which I was cured."