

Story 2058 (Transcribed by Ahmet Ali Arslan from his tape and later used in his unpublished dissertation.) Narrator: İsmail Ene, farmer  
Location: Alican village, Iğdır, capital of Iğdır Province

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The Poor Boy and A-a-a Vay Molla<sup>1</sup>

There was once a poor man who lived in a village with his wife and son. He was unable to find any work to support himself and his family. One day he went to the village council and said, "Feel some compassion for us! Give my son the job of tending the livestock of the people of this village."

"All right," said the members of the council. "He can take our animals to the pasture each morning and bring them back each evening."

But the boy had no idea how difficult it was to gather all the animals at the different homes each morning then keep them safe all day in the village pasture. Furthermore, he could not stand being out in the bright sunshine

<sup>1</sup>In most variants of this tale the villain is not called A-a-a Vay Molla but Of-f-f Jinn. When a person out of fatigue or disgust exclaims, "Of-f-f!" the O-f-f Jinn suddenly appears out of nowhere and asks, "Why did you call me? What do you want?" A-a-a vay means alas, and that expression is here responded to by a molla of that name. The O-f-f Jinn is a sinister magician and trickster, but a molla (theological student or religious judge) does not, logically, fit that role at all.

### Story

all day. After he had worked for five or six days, he came home and told his parents, "I can no longer do this work. I shall no longer take the animals out to the pasture. Their owners will have to do that from now on."

The parents went to all the owners of animals and said "Our son can no longer tend your livestock." When they returned home, they discussed the matter. They said to each other, "Our son must learn some trade in order to be able to earn his livelihood. Otherwise, what will he do after we die?"

The mother said, "Take him to some school. If he gets an education, he will be able to get a job and earn a living."

The father and son set out in search of some suitable school. After they had walked some distance, they came to a lake. The man washed his hands and face in the lake and then sighed, "A-a-a vay! I have been a poor man much of my life. Allah has assigned much grief to me."

"Selamünaleyküm," said someone.

"Aleykümselam,"<sup>2</sup> answered the poor man. "Who are you?"

<sup>2</sup>Selamünaleyküm/Aleykümselam--traditional exchange of greetings between Moslems not well acquainted with each other. It means roughly May peace be unto you/And may peace be unto you too. If Selamünaleyküm is not responded to, the speaker should be wary of the one so addressed.

Story 2058

"I am the A-a-a Vay Molla. Why did you call  
What is your difficulty?"

"I am trying to find a school for my son.

"Well, I am a molla. Give this boy to me and I shall  
teach him."

"What do you know? What will you teach him?" asked  
the man.

"If you let him come with me, he will have other  
teachers, too."

"All right," said the poor man, and he turned his son  
over to the A-a-a Vay Molla and returned home.

A month passed, and then another month passed. At the  
end of the second month, the boy's mother said to her hus-  
band, "I cannot stand this any longer."

"What is the matter?"

"I cannot accept the absence of our son.

"My wife, we agreed to send him somewhere to be edu-  
cated." But no matter what he said, the woman insisted  
that he bring back their son.

The poor man set out and walked until he reached the  
place where he had parted with his son. There he again  
sighed and said, "A-a-a vay!"

Story 2058

As before, a voice said, "Selamünaleyküm."

Again he answered, "Aleykümselam."

"Why have you come here again so soon? What is the matter?" asked the A-a-a Vay Molla.

"I came to get my son. His mother misses him badly. She can no longer get along without him."

"Don't do this to him," said the A-a-a Vay Molla  
"During the two months he has been with me he has not learned a single thing! He has not had time enough to learn anything."

The poor man said, "I cannot help it. I must take him with me."

The molla went and got the boy. When he delivered him to the poor man, the molla said, "Damn him anyway! He was incapable of learning anything I tried to teach him."

But in fact the boy had learned much more than the molla realized. Soon after the boy had arrived at the molla's home, he earned the sympathy of the molla's daughter. "For your own safety, pretend that you do not understand a thing that my father tries to teach you. If he says, 'Elif,' you say, 'Tey.' If he says, 'Çin,' you say, 'Dal. Act as if you are not understanding anything

Story 2058

or learning anything." So the boy pretended to be ignorant of all that the molla had taught him.

As they started to go home, the boy said to his father, "Keep walking while I stop long enough to tie my shoelace." Then when the poor man was not looking, the boy turned himself into a cow. The man tried to catch that cow, but it ran away too fast for him to do so

When the boy returned in his normal shape, his father asked him, "Where have you been? There was a cow here a few minutes ago, but I was unable to catch it by myself. If you had been here, we could have caught it together, had some fresh milk, and then sold the animal for a good price."

The boy answered, "Don't worry about it, Father; don't worry about it. That doesn't matter."

After they had walked a little farther, the boy dropped behind again and turned himself into a pig. When the pig approached the man, he tried to catch that animal, too, but again failed to do so

After the boy had become a human being again, his father said to him, "A pig just passed by, and I tried to catch it, but I failed. Together we could have caught it and sold it for a good price. Where were you?"



Story 2058

"Don't be concerned about it, Father. It is all right.

They went a little, they went far,<sup>3</sup> and they continued onward toward home. This time when the father was not observing him, the boy transformed himself into a camel. When the man tried to catch this large animal, it turned on him and forced the man to climb a tree in order to avoid injury. When the son returned to his original form, he called out, "Father! Father! Where are you?"

"You might as well go to hell as to leave me here alone. A camel chased me up this tree, though together we might have captured him and sold him for a good price

"Since nothing happened to you, Father, do not worry about it.

When they finally reached home, the boy was kissed and hugged by his mother. "Mother, why didn't you let me continue my education?"

"Because I missed you too much. I could no longer endure your absence."

Three or five<sup>4</sup> days later the family found itself

<sup>3</sup>This is a formulaic expression used to suggest a long journey.

<sup>4</sup>Neither three nor five is meant literally. This is an idiomatic expression meaning a few.

Story 2058

hungrier than ever. There was by then absolutely nothing left in the house to eat. The boy said, "Father!"

"What is it, Son?"

"I shall turn myself into an ox. Take that ox to the marketplace and sell it for two thousand liras. But do not sell me to a gat-toothed man, no matter how much he may offer you."

The father took the ox to the marketplace and offered it for sale. The A-a-a Vay Molla came along and said, "Uncle, how much do you want for that ox?"

"I have no ox to sell to you." The man then found another buyer who paid him three thousand liras for the ox.

When the father reached home, he found his son seated by the hearth waiting for him. He said to the boy, "Am I playing the part of a fool? What kind of strange business is this?"

"Don't worry about this. The money you received is real. Take it and be satisfied with it. Tomorrow morning I shall become a fine Arabian horse. Take me to the marketplace and sell me for five thousand liras, but be careful not to sell me to that gat-toothed man under any circumstances."

## Story 2058

The father did as he had been instructed, but he was growing more and more confused about what was happening.

"Alas, my son," he said. "What is going on here? What kind of game are we playing?"

"Don't interfere, my father. Just take good care of the money you are getting."

On the following morning the boy said, "Mother, Father, today I shall become a camel. Take me to the marketplace and ask for five to ten thousand liras for me. But whatever price you may get, do not under any circumstances sell the halter that will be around my neck."<sup>5</sup>

After he had turned into a camel, he was led away by his father to the marketplace. There A-a-a Vay Molla greeted them: "Selamünaleyküm."

"Aleykümselam."

"Is this camel for sale?"

"Yes

"How much do you want for it?"

"Ten thousand liras."

<sup>5</sup>In this tale and its variants in ATON, the halter is a kind of talisman which would enable the boy to transform himself immediately to his original form. In every case the boy eventually shifts to other forms, but before that happens, his life is endangered by the loss of the halter.



## Story 2058

A-a-a Vay Molla agreed to pay that amount, and he at once handed over the money. The old man took the money but as he did so, he slipped the halter from the camel's neck

A-a-a Vay Molla protested and demanded the halter back. He cried out to the people standing nearby, "O Muslims, come and observe this! Don't you think that I should have whatever was on the camel when I bought it?" When he even offered to pay another five thousand liras for the halter, the witnesses agreed that he should have it.

But those who saw this transaction then noticed that the camel was crying. Its tears were falling to the ground like rain. Those who observed this were amazed. They asked each other, "How is it that a camel can cry? And why is it crying?"

Finally the molla led the camel away and took it to his own home. His daughter saw that A-a-a Vay Molla was leading a camel home, and she understood the whole situation right away. She thought, "This camel used to be Mehemmet." She put many wooden sticks in the fireplace and added some dung to them to create as much smoke as possible in the house. She then took her father's sword and placed it in

Story 2058

the fireplace. When her father arrived, his first words were, "Daughter, where is my sword?"

"I shall look for it," she said. But several minutes later she returned and said, "I cannot find it."

Her father said, "Come here and hold this camel. I shall go and get it

When he had entered the house, his daughter said to the camel, "Run away! Go very quickly!" The camel followed her instructions

The molla looked and looked in vain for his sword. When he came back out of the house, he asked, "Where is the camel?"

"He broke away, and I could not stop him."

"In what direction did he go?"

After his daughter had pointed out the opposite direction from the one the camel had taken, A-a-a Vay Molla turned himself into a bird and flew off in the wrong direction. He searched here and he searched there, but he could not see the camel. Finally he saw the animal heading in the direction of Russia. As the bird caught up with him, the camel was crossing a dry riverbed, to escape the bird, he turned himself into a needle and

Story 2058

buried himself in a sandy beach. As the bird was scratching in the sand in search of the needle, the boy turned himself into a pigeon and flew away. The molla immediately turned into a larger bird, a hawk, and pursued the pigeon.

In those days, the padishahs of most lands had rose gardens. In that land the padishah was giving a party in his rose garden for all of his beys<sup>6</sup> and ağas<sup>7</sup>. The boy flew to that party, and when he arrived there, he turned into a crown and settled lightly on the head of the padishah. The molla turned into a dervish and knocked on the

<sup>6</sup>In Republican Turkey there are no beys. The term refers to a Turkish aristocrat of Ottoman, Seljuk, and pre-Seljuk times, and goes back to the 8th- or 9th-century--and perhaps earlier. The bey was a landed nobleman, sometimes wealthy and often politically powerful. In the 10th-century Book of Dede Korkut he was a tribal chief or one of his close associates. The Turkish bey was roughly equivalent to a British lord or baron.

<sup>7</sup>An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

Story 2058

gate of the rose garden. He was offered food, but he refused to accept it. He was offered some money, but he refused to accept that, too. Nothing that they offered him would induce him to leave.<sup>8</sup> The attendants at the party asked him, "What is it that you want?"

"Give me the crown sent to the padishah by Allah!"

Everyone at the party was annoyed, and people asked each other, "What kind of dervish is this?" The padishah himself became angry, removed the crown from his head, and threw it upon the ground, where it became a kilo of scattered wheat. A-a-a Vay Molla quickly became a hen with seven chicks, and all eight of them began pecking the grains of wheat. After the wheat had all been picked up from the ground, the hen and her chicks stood still and stared at the padishah. There was one remaining grain of wheat, and that was on the padishah's shoe. It quickly became a fox gobbled up both the hen and its chicks. Then turning to the ruler, the fox asked, "My padishah, have you ever before in your life seen anything as strange as this?" Before the

<sup>8</sup>Traditionally dervishes have been impoverished, wandering members of the Muslim clergy. When one knocked on the front door of a house, it was assumed that he was seeking alms--money, food, or something else. The people at the padishah's party cannot understand why the dervish does not leave after he has been offered money and food.

Story 2058

padishah could answer, the fox became a boy again.

The ruler was so pleased with the poor boy that he made him one of his viziers. Using his new authority, the boy took a group of soldiers to the house of A-a-a Vay Molla and destroyed it completely.

The boy ate and drank. He enjoyed a long and comfortable life after that, but in time he passed away and entered the soil. I am the one who brought the news about him, gentlemen.