

Story #192 (Tape #4, Summer 1970)

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The Mysteries of This World and the Next

TEP This is called a tale. If you listen to it, you will enjoy it. I lowered the snake from the top of the minaret, and it coiled about it. Let me tell you the tale, and you listen to the lies.

(An Albanian I knew used to use this tekerleme.)

Once on a time, two young men took to stealing. A man was plowing on the slope of a hill one day. The young men decided to steal this man's oxen right in broad daylight. One went to a place on the slope above where the man was plowing, and the other stood by a tree below. The man was plowing, and they decided to steal ^{the} oxen.

The thief at the upper edge of the field started shouting, "I cannot penetrate the mystery of this world. I cannot penetrate the mystery of this world. I cannot penetrate the mystery of this world."

The plowman stopped and listened to him while he kept repeating, "I cannot penetrate the mystery of this world." The man listened for a while and started plowing again. But again the thief started shouting the same thing. The plowman said to himself, "Let me go and see why this cuckold shouts that. What does he mean by saying, 'I cannot penetrate the mystery of this world'?" While he started walking through the forest toward that man, the thief waiting under the oak tree below the field went, released one ox, and led the animal out of the field. The other ox was left with the yoke hanging from his neck.

The plowman went to where the young man was shouting, "Hey, what do

you mean by saying, 'I cannot penetrate the mystery of this world'? Why do you shout that?"

"Why shouldn't I, uncle? You have been plowing with one ox all morning, whereas I have not been able to plow even with two. How do you manage it? That is why I have been shouting, 'I cannot penetrate the mystery of this world.'"

The plowman said, "I am plowing with two oxen."

"Where are they?"

When the plowman turned and looked, one ox was missing. "Mother! [interjection of surprise] My ox has gone!" When the man started running after the ox being led away by the first thief, the second went to steal the remaining ox. It was about sunset, and the poor tired plowman came back and leaned against the handles of the plow and started thinking about the situation. "Well, what can I do? It came from God. What comes from God we must take with patience."

He was a naive man. Otherwise, would he have gone to talk to the thief? He decided to buy two oxen the next day. He said he would sell a few sheep and get the gold coins from the neck of his wife as well as the few kurus he had saved. He would go to market and buy two oxen and come back. After making this plan, he went home in the evening.

His wife asked, "What happened?"

"What happened? Do you know what God did to me? He sent two clever thieves to me and had my oxen stolen from me."

His wife said, "Well, never mind. What can we do?"

He said, "We shall have to sell the gold necklace from your neck and take the ram from the stable to sell, and the few kurus we have saved. With all this money we shall buy a team of oxen and return."

She said, "All right. Do that."

But the thieves had not finished with this man and they were following him, for they had found he was very naive. Early in the morning the poor farmer took the donkey from the stable, put the gold coins in his pocket, tied the ram to the donkey's tail and put a bell round the ram's neck, mounted his donkey, and started going up a valley like this one here toward the market.

One of the thieves approached him from behind and said, "Good journey, uncle."

"Thank you, son."

"Where are you going?"

"I had my two oxen stolen yesterday. I got the gold from my wife's neck. I had a few kurus saved. I took them, too. I took the ram. I shall sell these and buy a team of oxen with the money."

While he thus talked with the thief, the other thief came and cut the ram's lead, removed the bell from its neck and tied it to the donkey's tail, and disappeared among the trees, while the first thief kept the farmer engaged in conversation. When the second thief had gone some distance, the first thief said to the farmer, "Uncle, this is all very well, but in my country we tie the bell to the donkey's neck, not his tail. Why do they tie it to his tail here?"

"The bell is around the ram's neck," the farmer said, but when he looked, the ram was not there. He started shouting, "Good heavens, where is my ram?" He started running after the sheep, but the first thief took the donkey and started in the opposite direction. When the farmer returned without capturing the thief who had taken the sheep, he found that his donkey was also gone. Both the donkey and the ram had been stolen. He did not know what to do, and so he wandered off in any direction and finally

wandered onto the desert, not knowing where the thieves had gone.

The thief who stole the ram hid the animal somewhere and went down a well to hide himself from the farmer. When the farmer was walking in that area, he hoped he would find a well to get a drink. He found a well. He lowered a bucket and saw the man down there. "Who are you?" said the thief.

"It is I. Who are you?" the farmer said.

"I am a traveler," the man in the well said.

"What are you doing down there?"

The thief said, "I lowered the bucket, but it did not reach the bottom, and when I was trying to make it go down to the bottom, bending over, my purse with my money in it fell down. I came down searching for it, but I could not find it. Now I cannot climb out, either."

The farmer said, "Dive into the water. Pick up your purse and out."

"I cannot do it, but if you think you can, come down and do it and we shall share the money."

The poor farmer removed his clothes and went down into the well.

he was down there, the thief climbed out of the well, grabbed his clothes, and ran away. The poor man dived into the ice-cold water for the purse and came out empty-handed. When he climbed to the top of the well, he saw that neither the man nor his clothes were there. He waited by the well for a long time, completely naked. He put one hand before him and one behind him to cover his nakedness, and he started walking. On the way, he came to a village. He was going through the village where a woman had lost a son by the name of Ali. He had been ill and had died not long ago. When she saw the farmer, all naked, holding one hand before and one hand behind, she said, "Oh, young man."

"What is the matter?"

"Where do you come from?"

The farmer was so angry, he said, "From Hell."

"Did you see my Ali there?" she asked.

"Yes, I did."

"What is he doing there?" she asked.

"What could he do? He is wandering about down there as I am here."

"Please come back," she said.

The farmer went to her.

"How did you come here."

"If I gave you a suit, would you take it to my son Ali?"

"Of course I would."

"I shall also give you one of his old suits to wear yourself."

"All right, but hurry. My leave is almost over."

She gave him some old clothes, which he put on, and she packed a new suit for her Ali. "Take these to him," she said.

He set out. Ali's wife, who had gone to fetch water from the fountain, shortly after this returned. Her mother-in-law said, "Oh, my bride, someone came from where Ali is today."

"From where?"

"From the other world, of course."

"What happened, then?"

"Well, he was coming holding one hand before him and one behind. When I asked him where he was from, he said he came from Hell. When I asked him if he had seen Ali, he said yes."

"Well, then?"

"Well, I called him in and gave him a suit for Ali and one for himself. Taking these, he went."

When the young woman heard this, she said, "You big witch of a woman! Is it possible that a man can come from the other world to this? Haven't I had enough of your senility?" She dealt a few blows on her mother-in-law and then said, "Bring that animal from the stable. I shall mount it and catch him."

She was a bright woman. She put on a pair of boots in order to look like a man. Putting on her husband's fur coat, she buttoned the front, and started galloping after the man. When the farmer looked back, he saw a horseman coming toward him. As he ran, so the horseman ran. Finally the farmer entered a mill nearby. The miller was a bald man who was scratching his head at the moment. The farmer said to him, "Why do you stand so?"

"What should I do?" the miller asked.

"Do you see that horseman coming? The padişah ordered that a palace be built of bald heads, and they are getting all bald heads, and I came to warn you for the sake of Allah."

"Where shall I go?" the miller cried.

"Wherever you like," replied the farmer

The miller first hid in the big wheel of the water mill, but then he got out and started climbing a poplar tree. While the miller was in the poplar tree, the farmer spread some flour on himself to look like a miller.

The woman entered the mill, lingirt, on horseback. "Miller, a man entered here," she said. "Where is he now?"

"I do not know."

"You should know. Tell me." While she spoke in harsh tones to what she thought was the miller, the real miller had climbed up the poplar tree. The woman started hitting the "miller." "Tell me where he has gone."

He pointed up the tree. "He has gone up there."

When she looked at the poplar, she saw that the miller was climbing up and up. As she shouted, the man kept climbing. The "miller" [farmer]

said, "No, I do not think he will come down."

"What shall I do?"

"Go up and bring him down yourself."

The woman tried to climb the tree, but she could not climb with the boots on. She took off the boots and the fur coat and started climbing up. When the bald miller saw that someone was coming to catch him there, he started knocking his bald head against the trunk of the poplar tree so that it would be of no use. "Now it will serve neither you nor me," he said.

The man down below took the woman's boots and fur coat and mounted her horse and ran away. When the woman reached the man up the poplar tree, she saw he was but a bald miller. "You cursed miller!" she exclaimed.

Well, they ate and drank and had their wish fulfilled.