

Story 1556 (1977 Tape 9)

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Solomon Teaches a Friend Animal Languages¹

Solomon, the son of David, knew eighteen thousand different languages. The grand vizier's knowing two languages--that of human beings and that of birds--was insignificant alongside Solomon's knowledge of eighteen thousand languages. Solomon had a very good friend. (See here! Human beings cannot be without friends of some kind. Some are friendly only with their tongues while within their hearts they are really enemies.) One day this friend of Solomon asked him, "Can you teach me some of the animal and bird languages?"

"Yes, I can do that," answered Solomon, "but you must never reveal to any other human being that you know these languages. If you make such a disclosure, you will die."

well," said his friend. "I promise that I shall not tell a soul

Solomon taught that friend the languages of several domestic animals and fowl--the language of donkeys, oxen, dogs,

¹This interpolated story in ATON No. 1700 is a folktale in its own right. In order to avoid losing its identity entirely in that extremely long tale, we have (for indexing and cataloguing purposes) entered it here under its own ATON number.

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cats, and chickens. After he had finished teaching these languages, he again warned his friend. "Now remember! Do not tell anyone of your knowledge of these languages!"

"No, of course not," said his friend. "I shall not tell anyone."

The man who had just learned these languages enjoyed listening to the animals on his farm talk to each other. Not knowing that his owner now understood their languages, donkey one day said, "Oh, brother ox, if you wish to avoid going to hard labor in the fields again tomorrow morning, don't eat your food tonight. The owner will conclude that you are ill, and as a result of that he will not have you do any plowing tomorrow."

The ox replied, "That is an excellent idea, brother donkey. I am glad that you told me about it."

The owner overheard them. That evening he told his son, "Go and give food and water to all our farm animals."

The boy went to the barn and fed and watered the animals as his father had directed. After a while, however, he noticed that one of the oxen was not eating. When morning came, the boy saw that the ox still had not touched its food or water. He went to the farmer and said, "Father, one of our oxen is sick. He has not eaten any of the food or drunk any of water which I gave him last night."

The farmer knew perfectly well why the ox had not eaten

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food or drunk water, but he could not explain this to his son, for he knew that revealing that information would cost him his life. He therefore simply said to the boy, "Son, get the donkey and harness him to the plow with the other ox."

"All right, Father," said the boy, and he did exactly what his father had ordered him to do

The donkey worked very hard that day from early morning until the time that they returned to the barn at night. As soon as he was back in the barn, the donkey said to the ox who had been there all day, "Alas, brother ox, you had better eat your food tonight or our owner might sell you to the butcher." Of course the donkey was worried about himself and not about the ox. He knew that if the ox again failed to eat its food, he himself would again be harnessed with the other ox to do another day of heavy field work.

The farmer had been listening to the conversation between the donkey and the ox, and when he heard the donkey's remark, he could not keep himself from laughing aloud. His wife, who had just happened to come along, heard the farmer laugh and asked, "O, my husband, why did you laugh just now?"

"It was not for any reason, Wife. I just felt like laughing

But the woman did not believe that, and she insisted on

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having an answer to her question. "But why, Husband? No one is here but you, I, the donkey and the ox. So, why did you laugh?"

"Oh, I laughed for no reason at all," said the farmer.

"Oh, no, no! You laughed at me! I know!" said his wife.

The man found himself in a helpless situation. To gain time he said, "Oh, Wife, I did not laugh at you, but if you insist on knowing what caused me to laugh, I shall tell you tomorrow morning." He was, however, greatly concerned about this matter, and he began at once to think of some excuse that he could give his wife in the morning.

While he was deep in thought about this, he overheard a conversation between the cat and the dog. The cat said, "Our master will die in the morning. Well, I like helva² very much."

The dog answered, "Yes, I know that he is going to die. Well, I like meat very much."³

The rooster then joined the conversation. He said to the dog and cat, "I do not understand this situation. I have forty wives here, and although I am only one rooster, I can make all

²A candy made of sugar, syrup or honey mixed with sesame seed oil. In some parts of Turkey helva is offered to mourners at a wake requiem service.

³This may be a reference to a funeral banquet.

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of those forty hens obey me perfectly. But here is our owner who has only one wife, but he cannot make even that one woman obey him. If I were he, I should get a stick. Then when she demanded to know why he laughed, I should strike her with that stick and say, 'That is the reason I laughed.' If he did that, she would not ask him that question again

Hearing the rooster's comment, the man said to himself, "Ah, yes! Now I know what I shall do tomorrow morning!"

When morning arrived, the woman asked the farmer, "Husband, why did you laugh yesterday? Tell me now!"

Striking his wife with the stick, the man said, "This is what I laughed at. I laughed at the thought of striking you with this stick!" In this way the man saved himself from death