

Story 2116 (1988 Tape 16)

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Selective Hearing

One day a goatherd fell asleep. When he woke he discovered that his flock of goats had wandered away. While searching for his flock, the goatherd came upon a farmer working in his field. That farmer happened to be partially deaf. Thinking that the farmer might have seen his flock, the goatherd said, "My friend, I have lost my goats.¹ Have you seen them?"

Not being able to hear very well, the farmer not understand what he had been asked. He thought the stranger had inquired how much of his field he plowed that morning. He therefore answered, "I entered this field from that direction. I plowed part of it this morning, and I shall probably finish it before the day ends.

The goatherd interpreted this comment to mean that his flock had entered the field from a certain side

¹"To lose one's goats" is sometimes an idiomatic expression for "to lose one's wits." This gives an additional touch of humor to the tale.

Story 2116

and had proceeded in the direction the farmer had pointed. He thanked the farmer and went off in that same direction himself. After he had gone just a short distance, he observed some hoofprints of goats. Following the trail of prints, he soon found his flock grazing in a bushy area. Pleased by the recovery of his animals, the goatherd felt grateful to the farmer for his help. Had it not been for the advice of the plowman, the goats might have been devoured by wolves before they could be recovered. The goatherd therefore decided to give the farmer some small gift.

Among his animals was a small goat with a broken horn. The goatherd thought, "This small goat would make a tasty meal for the farmer and his family." He therefore headed back to the plowed field to deliver this gift. When he arrived there, he pointed to the little goat and said to the farmer, "My friend, I found my goats by following the directions you gave me. If you had not told me the direction my animals had taken, I might have lost all of them. Thank you! In appreciation for your help, I should like to give you this little goat with a broken horn. Take it home, slaughter it, and enjoy a good meal on its meat. I am giving it to you."

Story 2116

Again the partially deaf plowman completely misunderstood what had been said to him. As a result, he responded, "I swear in the name of Allah that I did not break its horn. Just take your animals and go away

Confused, the goatherd repeated, "Brother, just take it. I am giving it to you."

"I told you that I did not break its horn. I don't want your animal. Just go away." The farmer then continued plowing until sunset. At that time he returned home and tried to tell his wife about his experience with the passing goatherd. "My wife, I was plowing today when a man came along and blamed me for breaking the horn of one of his goats. He kept repeating his accusation, and he wanted me to pay him for the value of the goat, but I refused to make any payment."

His wife answered, "Oh, my husband, what difference would it make whether it was a piece of fine fabric or just ordinary cloth? Why didn't you buy it? I have never insisted on wearing only a certain kind of material." She thought that because her husband could not afford to buy her very expensive cloth, he had refused to buy any other kind.

Story 2116

Aware that his wife was not understanding what he was telling her, he went to his older daughter to explain his experience. He said, "My daughter, such and such a thing occurred today while I was plowing in one of our fields." He explained what had happened

Unfortunately, the farmer's children also shared the family's deafness, and what the farmer said was not exactly what the older daughter heard. She answered, "It matters not to me whether he is young or old. Why didn't you bring him here? I have never said that I would not marry this or that kind of man." She was of marriageable age, and she supposed that someone might on that day have asked for her hand

Disappointed that his older daughter was not understanding his account, he turned next to his younger daughter. He said, "My daughter, while I was working in our field today, a goatherd came along and blamed me for having somehow broken a horn of one of his animals. I did not do any such thing, but I had a difficult time getting rid of that fellow."

The younger daughter answered, "Father, it would not have mattered to me whether they were white onions

Story 2116

or red onions. I should have eaten either if you had just brought them to me." This response convinced the farmer to abandon all effort to tell his story.

All people have problems of their own. Sometimes they think so much about their own experience that they are deaf to those of others.