

Story 727 (1976 Tape 10)

Narrator: Ismail Aydın, 39

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Söğüt kaza,  
Bilecik Province

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The Man, the Snake, and the Fox

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Once there was and once there was not a day upon which a man set out on a journey. That day was a very hot day, and when the man saw along his way a tree, he decided to rest a while in its shade. After he had been sitting there for a short while, the tree suddenly burst into flame and began to burn. When the man jumped to his feet to flee, he noticed that there was a snake in the top of that tree. He said to himself, "I ought to rescue that snake." He then held up to the snake his sturdy walking stick, and the snake escaped from the tree on it.

As the snake left the tree, however, it wrapped itself around the man's neck and said, "I should bite you!"

Arguing with the snake, the man said, "Come along with me on my journey, and we shall ask the first three things that we meet what their opinions are about this. If they all agree with you that you should bite me, then you should bite me."

The snake answered, "All right. Let us do that

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They went little; they went far, and after a while they saw an (ox) grazing in a field near the road. The man said to the ox, "I was resting beneath a tree along the road when that tree suddenly burst into flames. As I was about to run from that burning tree, I saw this snake in the top of the tree and decided to rescue it. To do this I held up to it my walking stick, and the snake crawled down that stick. As it left the tree, however, it coiled around my neck and said, 'I should bite you!' I disagreed with the snake about this. Which do you think was right? Should this snake bite me or not?"

"I say that he should bite you," said the ox

"Why do you say that?" asked the man

"Because you are a human being. Human beings hitch me to a wagon or harness me to a plow and make me work hard throughout most of my life. Then when I get too old to do such hard work, they will kill me and eat my meat. I say 'Bite!'"

After they left the ox, they continued their journey. They went little; they went far, and after a while they came to a (river). The man said to the river, "O beautiful water, we have a question for you to answer. I was resting beneath a tree along the road when that tree suddenly caught fire and began to burn. As I jumped up to flee, I saw this snake in

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top of the tree and decided to rescue it. To do this I held up to it my walking stick, and this snake crawled down that stick. As it left the tree, however, it coiled around my neck and said, 'I should bite you!' I disagreed with the snake about this, and now we want to ask you your opinion about it. Which of us is right? Should the snake bite me or not?"

The river said at once, "I think it should bite you."

"Why do you say that?" asked the man.

"Because you are a human being, and human beings have mistreated me. They drink my water, they wash their dirty hands and faces in me, and then they spit on me. I think the snake should bite you!"

Leaving the river, the two traveled on. They went little; they went far, and after a while they met a <sup>103-106</sup>fox coming along the path. The man said to the fox, "I was resting beneath a tree when that tree suddenly burst into flames. As I jumped up to flee, I noticed this snake in the top of the tree and decided to rescue it. I did this by holding up to it my walking stick, on which it crawled down away from the fire. As it left the tree, however, it wrapped itself around my neck and said, 'I should bite you!' I disagreed with this. Now we want your opinion of the matter. Should the snake have bitten me or not?"

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"I cannot answer that so quickly," said the fox, "for I first must know all of the details and particulars of this question so that I can understand it clearly."

The man repeated what he had said, but while he was doing this, he secretly asked the fox what price he demanded to favor the man in his judgment. The fox demanded forty hens and roosters, and the man agreed to pay this price. As a result of their arrangement, the fox said, "No, the snake should not bite you." Because only two of the first three things they met said "Bite!" the snake was prevented from biting the man. It therefore left the man and crawled away.

The man then went to get the forty hens and roosters. But instead of hens and roosters, he put forty dogs into the bag and took the bag to the fox. He asked the fox, "Do you want me to take these out of the bag one at a time for you, or do you want me to dump them all out at once?"

"Dump them all out at once, and I can then grab the three or four largest birds to eat now."

So the man emptied the bag in front of the fox. When the dogs poured out, they all started at once to chase the fox. The man thus proved that he was smarter than the fox.

After the fox had outrun all of the dogs, it sat down to rest. As it rested it thought, "Two judges said 'Bite him!' Why did I ever allow myself to be drawn into such an

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affair? Why didn't I too say, 'Bite him!' That would be a good punishment for him for making me as exhausted as I am now!"

That man had a vineyard that was surrounded by a wall, but there was a small hole at one end of that wall. When the grapes were ripe and ready to eat, the fox entered the vineyard at night through this hole. The grapes were so delicious that the fox ate a great quantity of them, and when it was time to leave, it could no longer squeeze through the small hole.

When the man came to the vineyard in the morning, he saw the fox and decided to shoot it. But the fox lay on its back and pretended to be dead, and so the man just picked it up by the tail and threw it over the wall and out of the garden. Having escaped in this way, the fox got to its feet and ran away.

A few days later this fox called together all his kinsmen from the woods and from the nearby mountain. He took them to the vineyard and showed them how to enter through the small hole in the wall. They all began to eat hungrily, and soon they had consumed the whole crop of grapes. The fox which had taken them there ate very few grapes, and he kept measuring himself against the size of the hole. Just before dawn he slipped out through the hole and waited outside

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the vineyard wall. The other foxes had eaten far too much to pass through the hole, and so the one on the outside shouted to them instructions to pretend that they were all dead.

In the morning the man went to the vineyard and saw a great many foxes in it. When he looked at them more closely, he saw that they were all pretending to be dead, but this time he was not deceived by such a trick. He killed all those within the wall, and only the fox on the outside got away.