

Story 1953 (1977 Tape 15)

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Testing Mohammed's Compassion¹

Allah Himself once wished to test Mohammed's compassion. He called the angels Michael and Israfil² to Him. Then He said, "Michael, want you to become a pigeon. Then fly to Mohammed's

¹This is an interpolated story in the very long tale about Hamzai Sahip Kiran (Hamza, the uncle of Mohammed). This 9-hour-and-42-minute tale is ATON 1700, and it is also the subject of the book A Turkish Folktale: The Art of Behçet Mahir (Garland, 1996). In order to avoid losing track of this separate narrative in the marathon account of Hamza, we have here given it individual identity.

²Israfil (or Israfil) is a Muslim archangel so huge that his head can enter heaven while his feet stand on the seventh level below the earth. He serves as an announcer, relaying the decrees of Allah to the appropriate other angels while remaining in constant readiness to blow his trumpet to announce the arrival of Judgment Day. In the latter capacity he assumes a responsibility assigned to Gabriel in Judeo-Christian angelology. His entire body is covered with mouths and tongues, which symbolize his communicative activities. He it was who tutored Mohammed for three years to prepare him to receive the message of the Koran from Allah, a message borne to the Prophet by the archangel Gabriel. Israfil was thrice daily overcome with grief and tears at the prospect of human beings in hell. It may have been his compassion which led the Deity to select him for participation in this episode.

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window and place yourself under his arm.³ Israfel, you are to become a hunter who will go there and demand your prey from Mohammed.”

The pigeon flew to Mohammed’s window and began speaking to the Prophet. It said, “O Mohammed, light of my life, please protect me!”

After a short while the hunter arrived and said, “O light of my life, give me back my prey.”

Mohammed answered, “Please relinquish your prey this time and give it to me.”

But the hunter replied, “O Mohammed, this is my family’s livelihood. I cannot give up my family’s daily food.”

Mohammed said, “Get a sheep for your family’s food. The pigeon requested my protection.”

The hunter responded, “No, I cannot do that. But if you will give me a piece of your own flesh, shall accept that in exchange for the pigeon.”

Mohammed said, “Very well! I shall give you some flesh from my own body in exchange for this pigeon.” Saying that, he picked up a knife and was just about to slice off a piece of his body when he was stopped by Israfel.

³This is a figurative expression for being protected or supported by someone with superior wealth or power.

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Israfel said, "O light of my life, do not cut yourself! Do not! Allah was simply testing your compassion, and He sent us to do that testing."