

Story 2054 (Transcribed by
Ahmet Ali Arslan from his
tape and later used in his
unpublished dissertation.)

Narrator: Hasan Ayas, 65,
farmer

Location: Koç village, Arpaçay
kaza, Kars Province

Date: February 10, 1978

The Snake, the Shepherd, and the Offense
of Ingratitude

Once there was and once there wasn't an old man who had formerly been a shepherd. This is a story which he told about an incident that had occurred in his earlier years.

Once I was walking slowly down a road when I saw a small fire a short way ahead of me. When I reached that fire, I saw a snake writhing in the flames. Reaching into the fire with my shepherd's crook, I pulled the snake out of the flames. Just as soon as the snake had been rescued, it sprang upon me, coiled its body tightly around my neck, and said, "Oh, you son of Adam, I shall now kill you!"

"What kind of behavior is that, Brother Snake? I have treated you kindly. Why, then, should you wish to kill me?"

The snake answered, "Let us go to that village over there and consult with others about this matter

On the edge of that village we saw a dog. I called to it, "Hey, dog, come here!"

"What do you want?" asked the dog. "What is the matter?"

I answered, "While I was walking down the road I saw a

Story

fire in which was trapped this snake now coiled about my neck. I felt sorry for him and pulled him out of the flames. But then he jumped upon me and wrapped himself around my neck. Now, who is guilty? Is it I or is it he?"

The dog said, "Brother Snake, squeeze him as hard as you can, for he is guilty.

I said to the snake, "Wait, brother! Let us go a little farther and ask for the opinion of someone else. We went a short distance farther, where we saw a water buffalo eating hay pulled from a large haystack. I greeted that water buffalo, "Salamünaleyküm, brother!"

"Aleykümselam!"¹ he answered.

I then told him what had happened. "While I was walking down this road, I saw this snake twisting and turning in a fire. I decided to save him, but now he says that he will kill me. Why should I deserve such treatment?"

The water buffalo responded, "Just a minute, brother. Let me tell you something. When I was young, my ağa² used

¹Salamünaleyküm/Aleykümselam--traditional exchange of greetings between Moslems not well acquainted with each other. It means roughly May peace be unto you/And may peace be unto you too. If Salamünaleyküm is not responded to, speaker beware.

²An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are

Story 2054

to treat me very well. He trained me how to work. He had me take a bath every day and then he rubbed my skin with linseed oil. He praised me every day. But now that I am old, his attitude toward me is very different. Yesterday I heard him order one of his servants, 'Take this ox to a distant field. Kill him there and leave his flesh there for the dogs to eat.' This is the cruel way that the sons of Adam treat all of us animals. Snake, squeeze his neck as tightly as you can!"

"Wait!" I said. "Let us ask just one more adviser for his opinion."

We traveled farther, and after awhile we came to a desolate area. There we saw some distance ahead of us a fox. I shouted to it, "Hey, Brother Fox! Hey, Brother Fox!"

The fox shouted back, "Oh, son of Adam, don't you come too close to me!" Then he climbed to the top of a pile of stones in order to be out of our reach.

When we drew close enough to be able to talk with the fox, I said to him, "I saw this snake suffering in the flames

often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

Story 2054

of a fire on the edge of the road. I rescued him from the fire, but now he is trying to strangle me. What is your opinion of this situation?"

The fox said, "Oh, Brother Snake, come down and talk with me." After they had talked briefly, the fox turned to me and asked, "What is that on your waist?"

"That is my lunch bag--the kind that all shepherds wear--but it is empty now."

Speaking then to the snake, he said, "Brother Snake, instead of returning to his neck, come and rest in his comfortable bag." After the snake had followed his directions, the fox said quietly to me, "Now, you squeeze his neck! Crush him to death with your feet and throw his body into this pile of stones. But for the love of Allah, do not reveal that I was the one who told you to do this. In fact, do not tell anyone where I am, for the sons of Adam are capable of committing every kind of cruelty

I crushed the snake's head, and then I continued walking. Before long, I met three hunters. "Selamünaleyküm, brother!" they said.

"Aleykümselam!" I answered

They asked, "Have you seen a fox around here anywhere?" I did not answer that question, but I could not help

Story 2054

glancing back to the place where I had parted with the fox
The hunters observed this and immediately set out in that
direction and pursued the fox.

The fox ran in a circle and then returned to me. It
jumped on my shoulders and said to me, "Oh, son of Adam, I
did something kind to you, but see what you have done to
me! Why did you tell these hunters where I was?"

The hunters then came to me and said, "Brother, give
us the prey which we have pursued and run down!"

I responded, "No! What may have been pursued does
not belong to the pursuers but to the person who
possesses it!"