

Story 2098 (1988 Tape 16)

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Breaking Bad News Gently to a Friend

There was once an unmarried man who lived in a village with his aged parents. Besides helping his parents from time to time, this man was also responsible for care of his two animals, a dog and a camel.

One day this villager decided to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. He felt that his parents could probably take care of themselves during his absence, but he was concerned about the welfare of his animals during that time. His father and mother were too feeble to tend the dog and the camel. He therefore asked a friend of his to feed and water these animals while he was away from home. The friend was willing to help in this way, and he assured the owner of the animals that they would be safe until his return from Mecca.

The pilgrim set forth on his journey confident his household would remain safe until he saw it again several months later. But such was not to be the case. A short while after the pilgrim's departure, his dog and

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camel died. Worse yet, his aged parents both grew ill, and there was nothing that could be done to save their lives. After the death of his parents, his old house was unattended, and before long, the weakened structure collapsed.

The village friend grieved for these losses, but he was even more concerned about finding a kind way in which to inform the returning pilgrim about the disasters he had suffered during his absence. He decided to go to a coffeehouse and discuss this matter with a mutual companion who also knew about the pilgrim's bad fortune. He asked this mutual friend, "How am I going to explain to him his great losses when he arrives here from Mecca? Do you have any suggestions?"

While they were pondering this question, a third friend of the pilgrim joined them. He said, "Don't worry so much about this matter. Take me with you to the place you plan to meet him before he actually arrives here in our village, and I shall explain to him very tactfully and gently all that has happened.

The other two accepted his offer. After awhile the friend who had cared for the dog and the camel received

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from the returning pilgrim a request to meet him at a certain crossroad. The recipient of this message informed the other two friends of this news, and the three of them went immediately to the designated crossroad.

When they saw the returning traveler approaching, they rushed to him. Each of them said in turn, "Welcome back, our pilgrim! May your pilgrimage be blessed by Allah, and may He grant that we too may one day see the wonders of Mecca!"

After responding to these greetings, the pilgrim said, "I was hoping to see my faithful dog here also. Did you leave him at home?"

The spokesman for the pilgrim's friends shook his head sadly and said, "We all know how fond you were of that dog, but unfortunately he died shortly after eating some of the meat of your dead camel."

Surprised, the pilgrim asked, "Oh, did my camel die?"

The spokesman answered, "It happened in a sequence of tragic circumstances, which I shall try to explain to you. When we were ready to take a tombstone to your father's grave, we loaded it on the camel. It was a rainy and muddy day as we started toward the cemetery, and as we

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were passing along a cliff, the camel slipped and fell to his death on the rocks below

Shocked and confused by what he was hearing, the pilgrim asked, "Did you say that the camel was carrying my father's tombstone? Do you mean that my father has also died?"

The spokesman answered, "I am very sorry to tell you that your father died exactly fifteen days after mother had died."

Receiving this almost unbelievable news, the pilgrim asked, "Do you mean that I have lost my mother, too?"

The spokesman added, "Her death was caused by the total collapse of your house

Taking a deep breath, the pilgrim exclaimed, "Aaah, Aaah! That means that my door has been shut forever."

"No, not really, my pilgrim. It is neither shut nor open! In fact, it was taken away by the government. Your parents apparently owed some taxes to the government, and upon their death, an official came to your property and found nothing worth confiscating but the door."