

The Sack

A Sufi Story from the Middle East

Mula came upon a frowning man walking along the road to town. "What's wrong?" he asked.

The man held up a tattered bag and moaned, "All that I own in this wide world barely fills this miserable, wretched sack."

"Too bad," said Mula, and with that, he snatched the bag from the man's hands and ran down the road with it.

Having lost everything, the man burst into tears and, more miserable than before, continued walking. Meanwhile, Mula quickly ran around the bend and placed the man's sack in the middle of the road where he would have to come upon it.

When the man saw his bag sitting in the road before him, he laughed with joy, and shouted, "My sack! I thought I'd lost you!"

Watching through the bushes, Mula chuckled. "Well, that's one way to make someone happy!"

What is the Morale of the story:

The Boatman

A Sufi Story from the Middle East

A scholar asked a boatman to row him across the river. The journey was long and slow. The scholar was bored.

"Boatman," he called out, "Let's have a conversation." Suggesting a topic of special interest to himself, he asked, "Have you ever studied phonetics or grammar?"

"No," said the boatman, "I've no use for those tools."

"Too bad," said the scholar, "You've wasted half your life. It's useful to know the rules."

Later, as the rickety boat crashed into a rock in the middle of the river, the boatman turned to the scholar and said, "Pardon my humble mind that to you must seem dim, but, wise man, tell me, have you ever learned to swim?"

"No," said the scholar, "I've never learned. I've immersed myself in thinking."

"In that case," said the boatman, "you've wasted all your life. Alas, the boat is sinking."

What is the Morale of the story:

Visits of Kings

A Tale from the Middle East

The Imperial Majesty visited a small teahouse one morning. He called for an omelet. With great ceremony he was flattered and served the omelet on the crude tableware of the teahouse. The owner apologized over and over for the common cloth on the table and the simple furniture. "Not at all up to the standards of a king!" he said.

"It's fine," the king reassured him. "How much do I owe for the omelet?"

"For you, Sire, the omelet will be 1,000 pieces of gold."

"Whoa!" The king raised an eyebrow. "Eggs must be expensive around here. Is that because they are scarce?"

"It's not the eggs which are scarce around here, Your Majesty," said the shopkeeper, "It is the visits of kings!"

What is the Morale of the story:

Cooking by Candle

A Sufi Tale from the Middle East

Mula bet some friends he could survive a night on an icy mountain with nothing to warm him. Taking only a book and a candle for some light, he sat through the frigid night. When he came down to claim his winnings, his friends asked, "Did you take anything up there with you to keep warm?"

"No," said Mula, "just a small candle to read by."

"Aha!" they exclaimed, "Then you lose!"

A week later he invited these same friends to a feast. They waited and waited for food. "Dinner's not ready," said Mula, "Come and see why!"

In the kitchen they saw a huge pot of water under which a small candle was burning. Mula said, "Does this remind you of our bet? I've been trying to heat this pot of water over this candle since yesterday and it's not warm yet!"

What is the Morale of the story: