

The Sentry and the Vault

**A Storyteller's Advice to his audience
(Extracted from Kalila Wa Dimna Vol.1 – Ramsay Wood)**

I must emphasize this point: my stories require, at this stage, no extra commentary, wretched imaginings, or vapid guesswork by you, me, or anyone else. The very worst would be that of moralizing away the effective substance. Thus the urge to tag tidy little rationalizations, persuasive formulas, intellectual summaries, symbolical labels, or any other convenient pigeon-holing device, must be steadfastly resisted. Mental encapsulation perverts the medicine, rendering it impotent. It amounts to a bypass around the story's true destination; to explain away is to forget. Thus, let the stories which you can remember do their own work by their very diversity. Familiarize yourself with them.



“First of all a man needs a friend, like the Dervish who made the beginning of my new life possible, and saved me from death. Second, money can be used, as it was useful to the goldsmith but it is useless without friends. Thirdly, these things are useless without skills; skills are useless without their application, application without recreation, recreation without freedom. But everything, if my experiences are any guide, is useless without the intervention of someone who knows what can be done, and who does it - who 'digs the hole in the wall of the vault.'”

From 'The Sentry and the Vault' story from Evening with Idries Shah.

A powerful king was entering his palace amid a concourse of soldiers, his personal guard, whose accoutrements gleamed with silver, gold and precious gems.

As he was passing a sentry, who believed that such manifestations of wealth and power were vain and foolish, was overcome by these reflections and shouted: "If you have wealth, you can do anything! Wealth is all you need! There is nothing but appearance and show, and those things are bought with treasure!"

The soldier was seized and taken to where the King sat on his throne.

"Are you convinced that all that anyone needs is to be surrounded by wealth, and that wealth is power?" asked the King.

"Yes, I am!" said the sentry, who had given up all hope for his life.

"In that case", said the King, "I am prepared to try an experiment. You shall have all the wealth you can imagine."

He ordered that the soldier be placed in a vault and that he be surrounded with bricks of gold and silver and have sacks of jewels piled around him. Then the vault was to be bricked up.

Now it so happened that a certain dervish was present at Court on that day, and he heard the verdict and the orders being given for the soldier's immurement. When the man had been sealed in his prison, the dervish approached it by night and carefully quietly made a small hole in the wall of the vault, so that he could speak to the soldier. He whispered: "I have started the process. Now it is for you to see what will happen, and how your destiny may go from here."

The soldier was surprised, but he was somewhat grateful for having some sort of communication with the real world outside. After a day or two, when he was getting very hungry, he began to shout down the hole in the wall, and his voice happened to come to the ears of a goldsmith who was passing.

The goldsmith went to the hole and heard the soldier's story. He went home, brought back a forked stick, and withdrew some of the jewels which the soldier offered him. In this way he supplied the prisoner with food and water day after day, getting paid in jewels.

After some weeks the soldier found that time was hanging very heavily on his hands, and he asked the goldsmith for some metal-working tools. With these he made a flute for himself out of the gold in the vault, and practised melodies which he played, to provide some recreation.

As he played, however, the prisoner began to think, "I have gold and silver, and jewels, I have food and water and amusement, but I have no freedom".

His tunes became more and more plaintive, and he became more and more wrapped up in them, as his thoughts sought to understand his condition and to probe as to whether he could ever escape

One day the dervish came past the hole in the wall of the vault to see what was happening.

The soldier said: "I have everything except freedom. Can you not help me to escape? After all, I have a king's ransom in treasure here, for anyone who will let me out. "

The dervish answered: "Such are the conditions of this world that I cannot directly help you to escape. If the king were to find out then, I would lose my position at Court, and would not be able to help people as I have. To some extent helped you. If you want to escape intensely enough, however, you will achieve it."

And he went away.

The soldier concentrated his mind upon his desire to escape and on his former superficiality in believing that wealth was enough to attain anything, and this had an effect on his music. So powerful and haunting did the flute-playing become that the king, walking nearby one day, was enchanted by it.

He asked what it could be. A search was made, and, in the vault, instead of a withered skeleton, the soldier was found, alive and well, playing on his golden flute

When the man was brought before him, the king said:

"And who might you be?"

The soldier said:

'Your Majesty!

You will remember that I am the man whom you immured in the vault, with gold and silver, for saying that wealth was everything!"

The king asked: "And what do you think about things now?"

"I have learnt", said the soldier, "that first of all a man needs a friend, like the Dervish who made the beginning of my new life possible, and saved me from death. Second, money can be used, as it was useful to the goldsmith but it is useless without friends. Thirdly, these things are useless without skills; skills are useless without their application, application without recreation, recreation without freedom. But everything, if my experiences are any guide, is useless without the intervention of someone who knows what can be done, and who does it - who 'digs the hole in the wall of the vault.'"

And so the king released the soldier, and he went on to other adventures, but those are part of another story.....

Story from – Evenings with Idries Shah