

The Fruit of the Tree

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, imaginings, or 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.

AN ANCIENT tale, among the Sufis, tells how a wise man once related a story about a remarkable tree which was to be found in India. People, who ate of the fruit of this tree, as he told it, would neither grow old nor die. This legend was repeated, by a reliable person, to one of the Central Asian kings of long ago, and this monarch at once conceived a passionate desire for the fruit - the source of the Elixir of Life.

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So the king sent a suitably resourceful representative to find and bring back the fruit of that tree. For many years the emissary visited one city after another, travelled all over India, town and Country and diligently asked about the object of his search from anyone who might know about its nature and where it was to be found.

As you can imagine, some people told this man that such a search must obviously be only a madman's quest; others questioned him closely, to find out how a person of such evident intelligence could actually be involved in such an absurd adventure; and their kindness in this respect, showing their consideration for him as a deluded dupe, hurt him even more than the physical blows which the ignorant had also rained upon him.

Many people, of course, told him false tales, sending him from one destination to another, claiming that they, too, had heard of the miraculous Tree.



Years passed in this way, until the king's representative lost all hope of success and made the decision to return to the royal court and confess his dismal failure.

Now, there was also, luckily, a certain man of real wisdom in India, and the king's man having heard of him late in his search, thought: 'I will at least go to him, desperate as I am, to seek his blessing on my journey homeward...'

He went to the wise man and asked him for a blessing, and he explained how it was that he had got into such a distressed condition, failure without hope.

The sage laughed and explained: 'you simpleton; you don't need a blessing half as much as you need orientation. Wisdom is the fruit of the Tree of knowledge. Because you have taken images and form, secondary names for things, as your aim, you have not been able to find what lies beyond. It has thousands of names: it may be called the water of life, the sun, an ocean and even a cloud... but the emblem is not the thing itself.

Whoever, this Teacher continued, attaches himself to names and clings to concepts without being able to see that these derivative things are only stages, sometime barriers, to understanding, will stay at the stage of secondary things. They create, and remain in, a sub-culture of emotional stimulus, fantasy and quasi-religion.

The Fruit of the Tree - A Perfumed Scorpion - Idries Shah