

SIMORGH
AN ANCIENT PERSIAN FAIRY TALE

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Abstract: *There are several different versions of this tale in Persian and as they have been orally transmitted from one generation to another, the originality of any of them cannot be proven. A few years ago an Iranian writer collected them from people of different provinces in Iran. What follows is a compilation from six versions.*



"You didn't need faith to fly, you needed to understand flying. This is just the same. Now try again..." Then one day Jonathan, standing on the shore, closing his eyes, concentrating, all in a flash knew what Chiang had been telling him. "Why, that's true! I AM a perfect, unlimited gull!" He felt a great shock of joy.

-Jonathan Livingstone Seagull

"Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced-even a proverb is no proverb to you till your life has illustrated it."

-Keats

There was being and nonbeing, there was none but God [1], who had three sons: Prince Jamshid (*King of the golden age of Iranian epics*), Prince Q-mars, and the youngest, Prince Khorshid (*Sun, light, divine wisdom., who was self-born – an initiate*), who had no mother. He was the king's favorite because he was the bravest of all.

In the garden of the palace there grew a pomegranate tree [2] with only three pomegranates; their seeds were fabulous gems that shone like lamps by night. When ripe, the pomegranates would turn into three beautiful girls who were to become the wives of the three princes. Every night, by the king's order, one of his sons guarded the tree lest anyone should steal the pomegranates.

One night when Prince Jamshid was guarding the tree he fell asleep and, in the morning, one pomegranate was missing. The next night Prince Q-mars was on guard, but he also fell asleep and the next morning another pomegranate was missing. When it came Prince Khorshid's turn, he cut one of his fingers and rubbed salt on it so the burning would keep him awake. Shortly after midnight a cloud appeared above the tree and a hand, coming out of it, picked the last pomegranate. Prince Khorshid drew his sword and cut off one of the fingers. The hand and the cloud hurriedly disappeared.

In the morning when the king saw drops of blood on the ground he ordered his sons to track them, find the thief, and bring back the stolen pomegranates. The three princes followed the blood drops over mountains and deserts

until they reached a deep well where the trail ended. Prince Jamshid offered to be lowered down the well with a rope to investigate. Less than halfway down he screamed: "Pull me up, pull me up, I am burning." His brothers pulled him up. Next, Prince Q-mars went down and soon he also cried out that he was burning. When Prince Khorshid decided to go down he told his brothers that no matter how loudly he shouted, they should not pull him up but let the rope down farther; and they were then to wait for him only until dark. If there was no sign of him, they could go home.

Prince Khorshid entered the well and, in spite of unbearable heat, went all the way down to the bottom where he found a young girl, beautiful as a full moon. On her lap lay the head of a sleeping deav/div [3], whose thunderous snores filled the air with heat and smoke. "Prince Khorshid," she whispered, "what are you doing here? If this deav wakes up, he will surely kill you as he has killed many others. Go back while there is still time."

Prince Khorshid, who loved her at first glance, refused. He asked her who she was and what she was doing there.

"My two sisters and I are captives of this deav and his two brothers. My sisters are imprisoned in two separate wells where the deavs have hidden the stolen wealth of almost all the world."

Prince Khorshid said: "I am going to kill the deav and free you and your sisters. But I will wake him first; I do not wish to kill him in his sleep." The prince scratched the soles of the deav's feet until he opened his eyes and stood up. Roaring, the deav picked up a millstone and threw it at the prince, who quickly stepped aside, drew his sword, and in the name of God cut the deav in half. Thereafter he went to the other two wells, finished off the deavs and rescued the sisters of his beloved. He also collected the treasure.

As it was not yet dark, his brothers were still waiting for him and when he called them they started to pull up the rope. The girl whom Prince Khorshid loved wanted him to go up before her, because she knew that when his brothers saw the jewels they would be jealous and would not pull him up. But the prince insisted she go up first. When she saw that she could not change his mind she said: "If your brothers do not pull you up and leave you here, there are two things you should know: first, there are in this land a golden cock [4] and a golden lantern [5] that can lead you to me. The cock is in a chest and when you open it, he will sing for you. And when he sings, all kinds of gems will pour from his beak. The golden lantern is self-illuminated, and it burns forever. The second thing you should know is this: later in the night there will come two oxen that will fight with each other. One is black, [6] the other white. [7] If you jump on the white ox it will take you out of the well, but if, by mistake, you jump on the black one, it will take you seven floors farther down."

As she had predicted, when the princes Jamshid and Q-mars saw the girls and the boxes of gold and silver, they became jealous of their brother's achievements. Knowing that their father would surely give him the kingdom, they cut the rope and let him fall to the bottom of the well. Then they went home and told their father that they were the ones who had rescued the girls, killed the deavs, and brought all the treasure, and that Prince Khorshid had not come back.

Prince Khorshid was heartbroken. He saw two oxen approaching and stood up as they started to fight. In his excitement he jumped on the back of the black ox and dropped with it seven floors down. When he opened his eyes, he found himself in a green pasture with a view of a city in the distance. He started walking toward it when he saw a peasant plowing. Being hungry and thirsty he asked him for bread and water. The man told him to be very careful and not to talk out loud because there were two lions nearby; if they heard him they would come out and eat the oxen. Then he said: "You take over the plowing and I will get you something to eat."

Prince Khorshid started to plow, commanding the oxen in a loud voice. Two roaring lions came charging toward him, but the prince captured the lions, turned the oxen loose and hitched the lions to the plow. When the peasant returned, he was very much taken aback. Prince Khorshid said: "Don't be afraid. The lions are harmless now and will not hurt you or your oxen. But if you are not comfortable with them, I will let them go." When he saw

that the farmer was still reluctant to approach the lions, he unfastened them and they went back where they had come from.

The man had brought food but no water. He explained: "There is no water in the city because a dragon is sleeping in front of the spring. Every Saturday a girl is taken to the spring so that, when the dragon moves to devour her, some water runs through the city's streams and people can collect enough for the following week. This Saturday the king's daughter is to be offered to the dragon."

Prince Khorshid had the peasant take him to the king: "What will be my reward if I kill the dragon and save your daughters life?" The king replied: "Whatever you wish within my power."

Saturday came and the prince went with the girl to the spring. The moment the dragon moved aside to devour her, Prince Khorshid called the name of God and slew the monster. There was joy and celebration in the city. When Prince Khorshid, asked to name his reward, announced that his one wish was to return to his homeland, the king said: "The only one who could take you up seven floors is Simorgh (*In New Persian literature Simorgh and in Pahlavi or Middle-Persian: Sen-Murv*), who has many manifestations; besides divine wisdom, it may symbolize the perfected human being. According to some Pahlavi texts, Simorgh is a bird whose abode is in the middle of a sea in a tree which contains all the seeds of the vegetable world. Whenever Simorgh flies up from the tree one thousand branches grow, and whenever she sits on it, one thousand branches break and the seeds fall into the water.

In Ferdowsi's *Shah Nameh (Book of Kings)* -- originally called *Khoday Nameh (Book of God)* -- Simorghs abode is on top of the mountain Ghaph, by which is meant Alborz mountain.). She lives nearby in a jungle. Every year she lays three eggs and each year her chicks are eaten by a serpent. If you could kill the serpent, she surely would take you home."

Prince Khorshid went to the jungle and found the tree in which Simorgh had her nest. While he was watching, he saw a serpent climbing up the tree to eat the frightened chicks. In the name of God he cut the serpent into small pieces and fed some to the hungry chicks who were waiting for their mother to bring them food. He saved the rest for later and went to sleep under the tree. When Simorgh flew over the nest and saw Prince Khorshid, she thought he was the one who each year ate up all her chicks. She was ready to kill him, when her chicks shouted that he was the one who had saved them from the enemy. Realizing that he had killed the serpent, she stretched her wings over Prince Khorshid's head to make shade for him while he slept.

When he awoke, the prince told Simorgh his story and asked whether she could help him. Simorgh urged him to go back to the king and ask him for the meat of seven bulls. "Make seven leather bags out of their hides and fill them with water. These will be my provisions for the journey; I need them to be able to take you home. Whenever I say I am hungry you must give me a bag of water, and when I say I am thirsty you must give me the carcass of a bull." On their way up to the ground Prince Khorshid did exactly as Simorgh had instructed him until only one bag of water was left. When, instead of saying she was hungry Simorgh said she was thirsty, Prince Khorshid cut off some flesh from his thigh and put it in Simorgh's beak. Simorgh immediately realized it was human flesh. She held it gently until they reached their destination. As soon as he dismounted, the prince urged Simorgh to fly back at once but, knowing he could not walk without limping, she refused and with her saliva restored the piece of his flesh to his thigh. Having learned how brave and unselfish the prince was, she gave him three of her feathers, saying that if he were ever in need of her he should burn one of them, and she would instantly come to his aid. With that she flew away.

Entering the town, Prince Khorshid learned that three royal weddings were about to take place: for Prince Jamshid, and Prince Q-mars, and the third for the Vizier's son, because the youngest son of the king, Prince Khorshid, had never returned. One day some men came to the shop where Prince Khorshid was apprenticed, saying they had been to all the jewelry stores in town but no one would undertake to make what the king had

ordered. Prince Khorshid asked them what it was and was told: "The girl who is to marry the Viziers son has put forward one condition to the marriage! She will only marry one who can bring her a golden cock from whose bill gems will pour when it sings; she also wants a golden lantern which is self-illuminated and burns for ever. But so far no jeweler can build such things."

Prince Khorshid, recognizing the signs, spoke up: "With my master's permission I can build you a chest with such a golden cock and also the golden lantern by tomorrow. The men gave him the jewels needed to build those items and left. Prince Khorshid gave them all to his master for, he said, he did not need them.

That night Prince Khorshid left the town and burned one of the feathers. When Simorgh came, he asked her to bring him what the girl had demanded, and she did so. In the morning, the astounded men took the precious items to the king, who at once summoned the young man to the court and was overjoyed to discover it was none other than his favorite son. Prince Khorshid told his story but he begged the king not to punish his brothers for the wrong they had done him.

The whole town celebrated his return and there were three weddings indeed. The king made Prince Khorshid his successor to the throne and all lived happily every after.

Notes:

[1] The duality of light and darkness has always existed in the fundamental belief of Iranians; light representing the essence of life which is consciousness, and darkness representing non life which is form. All Persian fairy tales begin with the sentence "There was being and nonbeing, there was none but God."). In the old, old times there was a king (The guardian of the throne of wisdom

[2] The treasure of secret knowledge

[3] Giant: tyranny of human ignorance and weakness

[4] This represents Saroush (Sarousha in Pahlavi). Sarousha is a godlike bird who is the most powerful of the gods, since he is the manifestation of righteousness, honesty, and striving. He fights the devil of frailty and weakness. In some versions of this story, the golden cock in a chest is a golden nightingale in a golden cage.

[5] The light of wisdom. In some versions, Prince Khorshid must bring back a golden lantern, in others a golden hand-mill which represents the wheel of destiny (or civilization and culture).

[6] Terrestrial life leading to darkness.

[7] Terrestrial life leading to light.

source:

http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Mythology/simorgh_story.htm