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REMARKS ON THE *1001 NIGHTS*

MUHSIN MAHDI

The *1001 Nights* is made up of stories placed within a general frame story, which relates the adverse circumstances in the history of the ancient Indo-Persian royal house of the Sassanids, whose rule is said to have extended from Samarkand to India and China. The terrible misfortune that befell the royal house and its principal city is related in a humble, careless, and occasionally vulgar language, which, together with the happy termination, gives the whole work the unmistakable stamp of comedy. All the stories were written or rewritten in Islamic times. Their fictional time is the past, a past that covers the history of the revealed religions, at least from the time of Solomon. Yet they are enclosed in a frame story that places their narrator outside the times and lands of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. They are narrated by a wise heathen girl to a heathen king in a heathen land in heathen times. Shehrezade claims to be narrating past events. In fact, she is foretelling future events. She speaks of fears and hopes, of coming catastrophes, and of a happy ending and joyful resolution. Tentatively, one may say that the overall subject of the *1001 Nights* is the history of the relation between heathen royalty and the revealed religions, a history that begins in ancient times with circumstances that appear to be leading this royalty to a catastrophic end, but that terminates with a festival in which this royalty and its city celebrate their triumph and well-being.

I

The first intimation that religion plays a certain role in the misfortunes of the royal house is found in the famous garden scene in the palace of the older brother, King Shahriyar. An earlier scene of infidelity in the bedchamber of the younger brother, King Shahzeman, in Samarkand indicates a breakdown in the conventional laws of matrimony and points to the political implications of the rebelliousness of women, especially if they happen to be queens. But the garden scene is more spectacular. It takes place in the open air. Not 2, but 42 persons participate in the act. The queen appears in the garden with 40 slave ladies. When they take their clothes off, 20 of them turn out to be black men who had been disguised as ladies and lodged in the palace. The queen's lover is no longer the shadowy kitchen hand in Shahzeman's bedchamber, but a black man whom she calls by name, who descends to her from the top of a tree,

and who at the end of the scene (which lasts all day) jumps over the wall of the garden and into the road. This scene is repeated twice in the frame story. It is first observed by the younger brother and has a healing effect on him because it shows him that his own misfortune was by no means unique or even as grave as he had thought: He now thinks that, by comparison, he is in fact quite well off. The older brother notices the change in the younger brother's color and appetite and, upon questioning him, learns about both incidents. He is willing to believe the misfortune of his younger brother, but not his own. So the younger brother invites him to see for himself, and both observe a repeat performance of the scene. There is this difference, however: In the first performance the queen calls on her lover, whose name is Mas'ūd (Lucky or Fortunate), but he does not speak to her. In the second performance he descends from the top of the tree and, reaching the surface of the earth, says to her: "I am Lucky, the Luck of Religion" (or "I am Fortunate, the Fortune of Religion"). The declining fortunes of the royal house seem to be coordinated with the rising fortunes of a new religion, whose lucky star appears to signal a rise in the fortune of the unfortunate, the kitchen hand and the black man. In fact, the transformation of the 20 slave ladies into men in this scene indicates that the new conjunction of the stars is favoring the unfortunate in general, both women and black men, who are joining in a common rebellion against the conventions that had established their inferior position.

The effect of the spectacle on the older brother is to turn him away from worldly things in general and royal power in particular. He proposes to his younger brother that they abandon their kingdoms and wander aimlessly "for the love of God," not returning until they find someone with yet a greater affliction. It takes them only two days to reach the seashore and find such a creature. A black demon, it seems, who had reflected on the difficulty of controlling women, had devised the following scheme. He snatched away a beautiful bride on her wedding night, placed her in a large glass box with four steel locks, deposited her at the bottom of the sea, and freed her only when he could be with her on the shore. When the two kings see this terrifying creature approaching, they climb a big tree in the meadow and hide among its leaves. But as soon as the demon rests his head on his lady's lap and goes to sleep, she sees them, removes the demon's head from her lap, and forces them to come down from the top of the tree to satisfy her desire, threatening to wake up the demon, who would drown them in the sea, if they refused. Out of fear of death—which from this point on replaces the fear of God and the covenant—the jealous kings deceive the jealous demon, only to learn that the lady has been in the habit of successfully deceiving the demon, almost in his presence, for quite some time. She has collected the rings of her lovers and, according to one version, produces 98, and according to another, 570. Treating the demon with the utmost contempt, she explains that the flaw in his scheme is his ignorance of the fact that when a woman

desires something nothing can stand in her way, and that her will has the same force as fate and divine decree.

The two brothers are amazed and elated by the dimensions of the demon's problem and the utter impossibility of protecting women against their fateful ways. The institution of marriage, that "covenant" between man and woman that assumes the inferiority of the wife and the husband's ability to assert his exclusive right, has now been wholly refuted. Not even a mighty and supernatural being, the terrifying demon, can assert such rights. Returning to his kingdom, the older brother takes up his duties as king, disposes of his wife and her lady slaves, and institutes the well-known regime whereby he "marries" a woman every evening and disposes of her the next morning—until Shehrezade arrives to show him that this resolution of the problem is not tenable and, eventually, not necessary.

Shehrezade is presented as learned, intelligent, wise, and possessed of literary skill. She had read many books, but especially two kinds, those dealing with philosophy and medicine on the one hand and with history and the sayings of wise men and kings on the other. She also appears to have thought long and hard about the king's predicament and the predicament of the city, in which it was hard to find a marriageable woman any more, and has decided to take matters into her own hands. She asks that her father, the vizier, present her to the king as a wife. The quality of her wisdom appears first in her conversation with her father, who tries to dissuade her by telling the story about the donkey and the ox, a story that deals with certain curious kinds of secret knowledge that have to do, not with angels, but with animals. There is a merchant who owns a farm and some animals. His secret is that he knows the language of those brutes but cannot reveal the fact except at the danger of death. He hears the donkey, who is leading a comfortable life, instructing the hard-working ox in how the latter can live comfortably by feigning sickness. When the ox tries this scheme, the merchant makes the donkey do the ox's work. Unhappy about the turn of events, the donkey tells the ox a lie: that he heard the merchant say to his farmhand that should the ox still be sick the next day he should be taken to the slaughterhouse. The merchant laughs at this. His wife insists on finding out why he has laughed, and he is about to reveal his secret and die. Then he hears a rooster, who knows the secret of managing 50 hens without the slightest difficulty, tell a dog that all their master need do is to take his wife into a closet and beat her until she repents. The merchant follows the rooster's suggestion and saves himself.

This story does not succeed in dissuading Shehrezade. Since the success of Shehrezade's scheme will depend exclusively on the success of her stories, it is perhaps useful to figure out the reason for the failure of this story, a reason Shehrezade must have understood, for she must be assured that she will not be murdered the next day because of an unsuccessful story. Now a story may be unsuccessful for many reasons: It may not address itself to the question at hand, it may be badly told and not convey the point to the listener, and so on. In this case, the trouble is that the

vizier who tells the story does not himself know the real point. According to him, there are two points in the story relevant to the situation in which he and Shehrezade find themselves. Shehrezade, he says, is like the meddlesome donkey who ends by having to do the ox's work. And he himself is like the merchant who will punish Shehrezade as the merchant punished his wife until she changed her mind. Yet the donkey got into trouble because of the merchant's secret knowledge of the language of animals, and the merchant's wife got into trouble for the same reason. But the vizier has no such secret knowledge; in fact, it is Shehrezade who is in possession of it. That secret knowledge enables her to see that the real point of the story is in the lie invented by the donkey to make the ox get back to work. This, we recall, was the incident at which the merchant laughed and got himself into trouble with his wife. Yet he too did not see the real point, because he allowed himself to be threatened with death by his wife instead of shutting her up by threatening to send her to the slaughterhouse. This, rather than the inconvenience of hard work or the pain of being beaten with a stick, is the secret point of the secret knowledge of the language of animals.

Unlike the merchant and her father, Shehrezade immediately puts her secret knowledge to work by threatening to send her father to the slaughterhouse, so to speak, unless he presents her to the king. Otherwise, she says, she will go directly to the king and tell him that her father, his vizier, thinks she is too good for him and that he has been hiding her, disobeying the king's order. (She was supposed to be among the very first to be taken to the king, who had started with the daughters of noblemen, then generals, and finally merchants.) Her story is successful. She applies her secret knowledge without revealing it. She plans to tell the king a story that will take possession of him and make him change his ways, and thereby save herself and deliver her nation. In this design she needs an instrument, or a helper, her younger sister Dinazad, whom she instructs beforehand on what to say when brought to the king's bedchamber. Once she is brought to the king, Shehrezade sheds false tears to convince him that she would like to see her sister and take leave of her. Dinazad's function is to let the king know that Shehrezade knows many delightful stories, urge Shehrezade to tell a "little" story, and then extol her as a wonderful storyteller. Shehrezade's name means "of noble race," while Dinazad's name means "of noble religion." Thus religion appears for the second time as the "name" of an instrument used by a queen in her design against the king. But this time the name is not the "luck of religion" but "noble religion," and it designates, not a black lover, but a young lady who loves or pretends to love stories, and whose contagious enthusiasm arouses the king's desire to hear Shehrezade's stories and enables "noble race" to practice her healing art. The dark and sinister aspect of religion represented by Mas'ud is replaced by the mindless and endearing aspect of Dinazad, who is an instrument, not of a dark passion, but of a secret wisdom.

II

The first story told by Shehrezade is the story of the merchant and the demon. The merchant possesses great wealth, has a large household with many servants, wives, and children, and travels abroad to attend to his financial affairs. But, above all, he is pious, performs his religious duties, and keeps scrupulously to his obligations toward his dependents and clients. He has just finished performing his ritual prayer in a garden on a hot day somewhere in a foreign land when, without his knowledge, he becomes involved in a perplexing and dangerous situation. After eating a few dates with his lunch, he throws away their pits. Suddenly, a terrifying demon appears, sword in hand, claiming that one of these pits had hit his invisible son and killed him on the spot, demanding his legal right under the religious law to avenge the blood of his son by murdering the merchant, and refusing to listen to the merchant's plea that the alleged act of murder on his part was unintentional. You see the merchant's dilemma. He believes in and has always obeyed the religious law. And now he is faced with this visible-invisible being who claims that he had murdered his invisible son and is intent on avenging him according to a divine law meant for the protection of visible beings. The demon claims that a law meant to regulate relations between visible beings applies to the relation between visible and invisible beings and refuses to acknowledge the legal distinction between unintentional and intentional murder. He makes his own law. The merchant, who cannot understand his predicament in terms of the religious law, attributes it to inexorable blind fate. The demon and the powers he represents seem to be intent on the destruction of a pious man and the subversion of religion and the divine law.

It is at this point, in the earliest extant version of the *1001 Nights*, that day breaks. Dinazad ("of noble religion") finds this cruel story pleasing and wonderful! But it is the king who must spare Shehrezade's life. He does not find the story either pleasing or wonderful, but gripping and thought-provoking. It prevents him from disposing of Shehrezade as he had disposed of countless women before. The king has personally experienced the fear of death at the hand of a terrifying demon married, so to speak, to a woman. Now he learns that demons can have offspring too, invisible boys and girls who can assume visible shapes. It is no secret that the supply of eligible girls in his own city has been exhausted and that the last batch had consisted of commoners' daughters with unknown pedigrees. What if the vizier should some night unknowingly bring him the daughter of a demon and the king should unknowingly murder her the next morning? Like kings, demons interpret the law harshly and in their favor, and are quick to take vengeance. Shehrezade proves to him that what he had thought was a resolution of his original difficulty, at least a resolution with which he could live for a while as both husband and king, is untenable. For all he knows, Shehrezade's real father is a demon; or he has already murdered the daughters of a number of demons,

who are on their way to kill him. Since the poor merchant in the story has not as yet been murdered, and there is more to the story, the king must find out whether there is a way out of this new predicament. He saves her life, not out of mercy, but out of his own fear of death. Shehrezade establishes a balance of terror that immobilizes the king.

When the story continues, the merchant appeals to the demon for mercy and fails, but succeeds in obtaining a year's delay to take leave of his family, divide his property, pay his debts, and come back. He binds himself by a vow and a covenant, taking a formal oath in God's name. The demon, who is at first skeptical about the merchant's intention to return at the end of the year, is now convinced that he will. The demon's faith in the merchant's faith in the religious law and faithfulness to his covenant with God proves well-founded. The merchant returns at the end of the year. Either the pious merchant's fear of God is stronger than his fear of death, or else the habit of keeping his promise has become a second nature with him. In any case, while he is waiting for the demon, three old men happen to come by, leading a gazelle, two black hounds, and a she-mule (whatever that is), and he tells them his story. They sit with him, waiting to see what will happen. When the demon arrives, each of the three old men offers to tell him his own story as a ransom for a third of the merchant's blood. The three stories are meant to cure the demon's passion for vengeance, counteract the higher law to which he had appealed, and serve as a substitute for the religious law, which has been rendered inoperable by the demon.

In the first story the old man's jealous, childless wife, in his absence, transforms his concubine and her son into a cow and a calf. When the old man returns, the jealous wife makes him sacrifice his concubine and almost sacrifice his son during the Great Feast, which celebrates the occasion of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac. A cowherd's daughter, who is also a magician, saves the boy on condition that she be allowed to marry him and to disarm the jealous wife by transforming her into an animal. The compassionate husband objects to the idea of transforming his wife into a cow, a horse, or a buffalo cow; in order to please him, his daughter-in-law transforms the wife into a shapely gazelle.

In the second story, the second old man, a merchant, while on a business trip to India, shows kindness to a stranded poor girl and agrees to marry her. She turns out to be a religious she-demon who had fallen in love with him, and she saves him from his two jealous brothers who attempt to drown him and his bride on the journey back. She insists on killing them. He intercedes on their behalf, implores her to forgive their madness, and persists until she relents. She transforms them into black hounds and insists that they remain in this condition for ten years.

In the third story, the man returns from a journey to find his wife with a black man. She transforms her husband into a dog and drives him out of the house. A butcher's daughter recognizes him, delivers him, and

provides him with the means to transform his wife into a she-mule. Nothing is done to the black man.

The overall point of these stories is that stories can be used to ransom someone's life. This point, however, is more relevant to Shehrezade's circumstances. As for the king, they seem to make his position even less tenable than before. First, there are these magical arts that seem to be relatively easy to learn and that many young women seem to practice. How can he be sure that the next woman in his bedroom will not turn him into a dog or a mule rather than permit her own destruction? How can he be sure that he will meet a woman who will deliver him? And why should any woman deliver him after what he had said about women and done to them so far? The discovery that not all demons are harsh and satanic is of little comfort to him. He cannot tell stories; and he is not the type of man to be loved by a religious she-demon. He feels threatened by the human powers of magic and the superhuman powers of demons. Shehrezade seems to know about their workings. She talks about them with such ease and expertise that it is difficult to be sure that the learned lady does not practice them. What is she really after? Her vengeful demon is disarmed by three stories about human beings in which the only one who is killed is the concubine sacrificed at an occasion commemorating a situation in which a friend of God is commanded by God to sacrifice his son. The one responsible for the murder in this instance is a wife who is jealous because she never had a son of her own. She makes the father murder the mother of his only son and wishes him to murder the son as well. For the rest, even vengeful women are relatively merciful and transform their enemies into good-looking animals. The men never kill their wives intentionally, not even when they find them in adultery, though they suffer tragedy and humiliation at their hands. The only instance of adultery, by a wife with a black man, seems to go unpunished. The husband repays his wife for transforming him into a dog by transforming her into a she-mule; he does not punish her for adultery and does nothing to the black man. The kind human husband of the religious she-demon is willing to forgive his jealous brothers who attempt to murder him and his wife. Shehrezade's representation of religion in the story is ambiguous to say the least. Yet the only male religious human being in the story is presented as a solid, law-abiding, and dependable citizen. And while it is true that the religious she-demon takes the law into her hands and is harsher than her human husband toward his brothers, she does not go beyond the punishment prescribed by the law and can be prevailed upon to mitigate the legal punishment to term imprisonment, so to speak. Shehrezade is clearly not in sympathy with the king's harsh ways, even though it is not as yet clear what she wants him to do. Her first story is principally about merchants who are private men. It does not touch the city or kings who are in charge of cities.

III

The story of the fisherman and the demon, which comes next, is principally about kings. The fisherman nets a bottle of brass, which has a lead stopper bearing the impression of God's Most Great Name. Intending to sell the bottle, he opens it and is confronted with a terrifying demon. The demon immediately addresses Solomon, the prophet of God, and declares that he will never again disagree with his word or disobey his order. He then turns to the fisherman and asks him to choose how he wishes to die. The fisherman informs the demon that this is the end of time, that Solomon has been dead for a thousand and eight hundred years, and that he had better explain his mad behavior. This demon, it turns out, was one of the rebellious, heretical demons who had disobeyed Solomon; they were caught and brought before Solomon, exhorted to submit to his authority, refused, and were placed in bottles sealed with God's Most Great Name. A thousand and eight hundred years of confinement seem to have taught this demon that the cause of rebellion and heresy has definitely been lost and that he must buy his freedom by joining the mighty Solomon's party. Yet during his confinement the demon would periodically decide, depending on his mood, how to reward or punish whoever would liberate him. The fisherman happened to liberate him during a period in which the demon had decided to murder his liberator. Now, unlike the pious merchant of the preceding story, the fisherman is poor and clever. He makes use of God's Most Great Name to make the demon swear that he will tell the truth; then asks him, again using God's Most Great Name, whether he really has been confined in that small bottle; then accuses him of lying; and finally persuades him to prove his truthfulness by re-entering the bottle, which he quickly reseals. The demon's confinement has broken his spirit and made him gullible. He is so frightened of the Most Great Name that the fisherman is able to deceive him by making use of his fear of it to save himself. Now the demon offers to make him rich in exchange for his freedom, but the fisherman refuses and likens their relationship to that between the king Yūnān and the sage Dūbān.

King Yūnān, whose name means "the Greek," is a heathen king ruling over heathen Greeks in Northwest Persia. He is afflicted with an apparently incurable leprosy. The sage Dūbān is a philosopher who is learned in the natural sciences of all nations. He is said to be a Greek too and to have just arrived from the Byzantine Empire. He cures the king of his leprosy and is greatly honored and amply rewarded by the king, who makes him one of his counselors. So far, there is no analogy between the two situations. Then the jealous vizier, who is afraid that the sage will take his place, insinuates to the king that the sage is in fact a spy sent by the (Christian) Byzantine king to destroy the heathen Greek king and that the very art by which he cured the king can be used to murder the king. The king accuses the vizier of jealousy and tells a story that had been

told by a good vizier to another king, who was about to kill his son because of the insinuations of a jealous person, a story that prevented the king from committing this foolish act.

This is the story of the husband and the parrot. The parrot informs the jealous husband about his beautiful wife and her lover. In revenge, the wife fools the parrot one clear summer night and, using a grinder, a mirror, and some water spray, makes it imagine that there is thunder, lightning, and rain. When the parrot tells the husband that these imagined natural phenomena had occurred the clear night before, the husband thinks it had lied to him all along and kills it, only to hear subsequently from the neighbors that his wife was in fact unfaithful to him. The analogy between the sage Dūbān, the other king's son, and the parrot, indicates that the king saw in the sage a possible heir to the throne and yet understood the limits of his natural wisdom: He does not know how to distinguish between genuine natural phenomena and their imitations; he does not know how to fake, how to lie in speech or in deed. And the analogy between the beautiful wife and the vizier emphasizes their competence in the art of deception. The king is attracted to the innocent and guileless sage, whom he wants to protect against the machinations of his clever vizier.

The vizier, in turn, tells the king a story in which he tries to show that the sage is neither innocent nor guileless. Kill him, he says in effect, and if what I am saying does not turn out to be true, then kill me as a certain scheming vizier was killed by his king. The vizier in the story is out hunting with the king's son and encourages him to follow a wild beast. The wild beast transforms itself into a girl, and the girl transforms herself into a fabulous cannibal being. Instead of eating him, however, she encourages him to pray to God and then sets him free. He returns to his father, who kills the vizier. The vizier's ally was a double agent, so to speak. The vizier was employing her to eat the prince, while some other master (a "king" who looks for the well-being of man's soul) was employing her to convert him to religion, and the fabulous female being betrayed the vizier. The present vizier is in a better position. He knows that the sage Dūbān, whom he is accusing of being a spy of the (Christian) Byzantine king, is a heathen and will not pray to God; nor will his heathen king. And he does not have any ally who might betray him: His only ally is his lying and his storytelling. The vizier's story, strangely enough, convinces the king. There is nothing in the story to have this effect except the ally who is a double agent and who can eat the prince as well as save his soul. Since the sage has already benefited the king and become his ally through the use of his natural art, the only danger he presents is that of being the agent of the (Christian) Byzantine king, who plans to kill the king or convert him and the city to divine worship. The vizier makes use of the king's fear of religion to make him kill the heathen sage, and the heathen sage makes use of a natural secret, a poisoned book, to kill the king

after he had himself been beheaded. The king and the sage kill one another, clearing the way for the vizier to inherit the kingdom.

In the fisherman's story, a new relation emerges between religion and politics. It begins by depicting a happy relation between the heathen king and the heathen natural philosopher who cures the king's leprosy and enables him to enjoy his power as king. The king, who is childless, is about to adopt the sage as his heir apparent, the future philosopher-king. But the sage is accused of being a foreign spy who plans to preach a new religion and destroy the king. The accusation is false. The fear of the unknown God, however, is enough to blind the king, make him act foolishly, and destroy himself and the cause of his happiness. And the natural philosopher's ignorance of, or unwillingness to talk about, divine and political things and artfully contrived things, his inability or unwillingness to counter the accusation that he is a spy who may in some way betray the king, and his unwillingness to go out of his way to do anything to save his own life or help the foolish and ungrateful king avoid having to murder him, lead, not only to self-destruction, but to the destruction of the king with whom he took refuge after having departed, or having been forced to depart, from Byzantium. The king and the natural philosopher are made to destroy each other by the vizier, who is not religious himself but who understands the power and efficacy of religion and makes use of it for his own political end. Religion—that is, other people's religion or their fear of God—is now recognized as a new and potent instrument of political power, which must be properly understood and employed by the new kings. The fisherman who tells this story has no intention of acting the role of the unfortunate sage or letting the demon act the role of the unfortunate king. He acts the role of the successful vizier. The demon's madness is brought under control by the fisherman's superior power of reason. The fisherman makes use of the demon's fear of God's Most Great Name to lock him up and subject him to his power. The fisherman is the new Solomon. The demon, too, learns the new game and is now willing to buy his freedom in return for rendering service to his new master.

The fisherman and the demon then proceed to perform their roles in real life, so to speak. The demon takes the fisherman to an enchanted lake and tells him that he should take his catch of enchanted fish to the king of his city. The fish are of four colors: white, red, blue, and yellow. The king of the fisherman's city is, again, childless and a heathen; but he is on friendly terms with the Byzantine king, who had presented him with a cookmaid. Now as four of these enchanted fish are being fried, there appears a fairy queen with a rod in her hand and then a huge black man with a branch of green tree, who ask the fish whether they are still faithful to their covenants and, on being answered they are, overturn the frying pan; the fish are burned and become like charcoal, and cannot be eaten. The king sets out in search of the secret of the colored fish and reaches a palace built of black stones and overlaid with iron plates, where he finds

an enchanted, beautiful youth whose lower half (from the waist down) is of black stone.

The youth's story is this. He was the king of the four Black Islands. His wife practiced magic and used to drug him and leave the city to spend the night with her lover, a poor black leper who sits in filthy and torn clothes on cane stalks inside a shrinelike structure situated among mounds of trash outside the city. Apprised of her doings by two black maids, the young king follows her one night, attacks the black man, and wounds him. She brings her lover, wounded and unable to speak any more, to the palace and builds a shrine over him, a house of mourning where for more than three years she spends most of her time weeping and wailing. Losing his patience, the young king finally lets her know that he was the cause of her sorrow. Just as he is about to murder her, she uses her magic to enchant him, transform the citizens into fish, and the four islands into four mountains surrounding the enchanted lake. "The inhabitants of my city," says the young king, "were made up of four sects: Moslems, Magians, Christians, and Jews. She transformed them into fish: the white are the Moslems, the red are the Magians, the blue are the Christians, and the yellow are the Jews." Since then, the enchanted young king has been punished by his wife with a hundred lashes every morning, just before she goes into the shrine where her incapacitated lover lies to feed him and wail for his misfortune. The older king enters the shrine, kills the black man, wears his clothes, and feigning the manner of the wounded black man, makes her disenchant the young king, the city, and its inhabitants, and finally murders her. He then asks the young king whether he wishes to stay in his own city. The young king declares that he will never part from the company of his savior. The savior king is overjoyed, adopts the young king as his son, and takes him back to his own city, where they are met by the faithful vizier. The vizier is appointed king over the young man's city and sent away in great pomp and ceremony to rule over the four religious communities. The fisherman and his family are sent for. The two kings marry his two daughters, his son is appointed treasurer, and he is richly rewarded.

The frame story distinguishes between the noble religion of the story-loving Dinazad, who helps her sister Shehrezade cure King Shahriyar's madness, and the ignoble religion of Mas'ud, whose luck is due to the conjunction of the stars. The story of the merchant and the demon distinguishes between the faith of the pious, law-abiding merchant, who thinks of his obligations to his fellow men even under the most adverse circumstances, and the religion of the mad demon, who can be appeased only by stories about wicked men and women. The story of the fisherman and the demon distinguishes between the four religious communities whose representatives remain faithful to their covenants even when they are in the frying pan and the new antisocial and antipolitical religion whose priestess is the magician-queen. A distinction is thus made between old

and established religions, whose followers have been transformed by kings into law-abiding citizens with the passage of time, and the new religions, whose prophets are the unfortunate, whose priestesses are women, and which can unlock passions so powerful that they sweep before them all the forces of justice and order symbolized by the king.

The demon helps the fisherman help the old king deliver the young king, his city, and his subjects (the four religious communities) from an adulterous queen in love with a black leper, whom she deifies and for whose sake she is ready to destroy everything else. As the demon brings the fisherman to the enchanted lake, his parting words are: "You must excuse me, for this is all I can do for you." The demon cannot deliver the young king or disenchant the fish; only the old king can do this. The young king failed to save himself and his city, first, because of his indecisiveness (prompted, perhaps, by fear) in punishing his wife and her lover and, second, because he attempted to murder them openly by the sword rather than by the proper application of his political art as king. Giving direct expression to one's passions, such as jealousy and anger, and drawing one's sword to murder others are not the distinguishing marks of royalty. The older king, in contrast, sizes up the situation immediately and shows no hesitation or fear regarding the queen's magic or the inexplicable powers of the wounded black lover. He knows enough about the art of the queen not to confront her directly and endanger himself or his city merely to make a show of courage. He is in full control of his passions, so much so that he can perform two extremely cowardly and unroyal acts: murdering a sick, incapacitated man and murdering a trusting, unarmed woman. The core of his art is imitation in speech and deed: He takes the place of the queen's lover, wears his clothes, moans like him, makes the queen imagine that he is about to recover, and arouses in her the hope of a reunion with him, which heightens her excitement to the point that she loses her mind and will do anything he bids her. His, then, is the supreme royal art, the art with which adulterous wives and their lovers are destroyed, demons are appeased and put into service, the effects of magic and all other natural arts are neutralized and their practitioners brought under control, and royal houses, cities, and religious communities in distress are delivered and enabled to live happily thereafter.