

Porky Wanted to be a Muslim

Feby Indirani

When *Kyai* Fikri told the assembly that a pig named Porky had declared her desire to convert to Islam, commotion broke out in the prayer hall. People exclaimed '*Astaghfirullah!*' almost in unison, before raising their hands to ask for permission to speak. Some didn't even bother and just started talking. Overwhelmed, the chair of the assembly adjourned the meeting for 30 minutes.

Afterward, the assembly decided to hold a hearing for *Kyai* Fikri, the bearer of the controversial news.

However, with his reputation as a respected cleric, confronting *Kyai* Fikri was not an easy matter. Not a tall man, he was thin, even deceptively frail, though his eyes were clear and his gaze sharp. He exuded a powerful aura that commanded respect. It was hard to tell his age just by his looks. His short, tidy beard gave the impression of advanced age that was belied by his youthful bearing and agility.

He addressed the assembly in a deep voice, and the room immediately fell silent.

"Porky has been communicating her sincere desire to convert to Islam to me. Personally, I believe that *hidayah*, or guidance, can change and touch every creature. If we believe that Islam honors the principles of justice, I think we must give Porky a chance."

"Pardon me, *Kyai*," said a member of assembly. "Does that mean that Porky will change her strange behavior?"

"She's only strange by our standards because she is different. Porky will still be a pig as ordained by *sunatullah*, the laws of Allah."

Whispers filled the room. A young member of the assembly raised his hand. "*Kyai*, I want to know what made you such a staunch advocate for Porky. But before that, relieve me of this curiosity: how did you come to have a relationship with a swine? Isn't it a forbidden creature?"

"I keep livestock, including pigs," said *Kyai* Fikri calmly. "They're forbidden for us to eat, but we're not forbidden to keep them, are we?"

Once again, the room was in uproar. What a corrupt cleric, they whispered.

"I beg your pardon, *Kyai*, but what did you do that for?"

"I feed the destitutes in the village. Other livestock are too expensive. On the other hand, a pig can produce a litter of twenty at each farrowing. Pigs are among the most fertile of animals. That was why I decided to raise pigs in the first place."

"You feed the poor villagers pork? How could you?"

“They are too poor, and they are not Muslims. Religion is a luxury for them. To them, food and clean water are religion enough.” Kyai Fikri’s gaze swept through the room, met by the unblinking stare of the assembly members.

“I often spend the night in the village, staying at a villager’s house, or at a small prayer hall not far from the pig sty. I perform my prayers and read the Quran there the same way I do it everywhere else. Once, when I stepped outside the hall, I noticed a female pig staring at me. She seemed to be waiting for me, as if wishing to say something. She’s an old pig, 15 years old, long past reproductive age. Since I often saw her like that, waiting and looking as if she wanted to tell me something, I named her Porky. She seemed to understand that it was a name I gave her.”

He paused and inhaled deeply. “With Allah’s permission, she was able to express her desire, and I could understand her. She spoke of her wish to become a Muslim in the last days of her life. She knew that the time for her to be slaughtered was coming, and she asked that her request be fulfilled.”

The room was in uproar as people started exclaiming all at once, arguing and protesting.

“How could such an honorable cleric befriend a pig?”

“We won’t allow it! Everything about a pig is forbidden, every single atom of it. Period.”

“Who are we to prevent any living being from becoming a Muslim? Isn’t Islam supposed to be a blessing for the entire universe?”

“What exactly was Porky’s religion before? Why does she want to convert now?”

“If you forbid Porky from converting to Islam, then you’re being unjust. And injustice is despised by Allah and His Prophet.”

“But do we want to share Porky’s religion? It’ll undermine our dignity as human beings.”

“Our bodies and Porky’s are very similar. Our DNA is only 3 percent different from that of pigs, so actually we are much closer to them than we could ever imagine.”

“So, does that mean she can be a Muslim? We already know of her peculiar behavior. She is lazy and filthy. And what about the uncertain nature of her kind? They resemble carnivores since they have fangs and eat meat, and yet they also behave like cattle, foraging and eating plants...”

“They sound more and more like us, don’t they?”

Another wave of ‘*Astagfirullah*’ echoed in the room. No one was listening anymore; everyone was busy endorsing their own opinion. The head of the assembly ordered a two-hour recess to discuss the issue. Naturally, assembly members were quick to form cliques of like-minded people. More arguments broke out among them about how they must address the problem of Porky.

When the hearing resumed, assembly members were asked to cast a vote. The first and largest group, accounting for about 40 percent of the assembly, was those who flatly rejected Porky without further consideration or compromise. About 35 percent of the members did not agree on principle, but believed that they needed to call Porky and hear her side of the story. This group was sure that the assembly must act in a politically correct manner and continue to uphold the principles of justice. The third largest group, about 23 percent, was made up of those who supported Kyai Fikri. While small, the group had the ear of the majority since they were socially esteemed and respected. This group was also made up of those who approved of the proposition solely on the grounds that they admired Kyai Fikri and his unique qualities. The rest abstained, and these were members who were not interested in any conflict whatsoever.

The groups continued to pit their argument against each other, and a decision could not be reached as there was no majority vote. Finally, as the day grew late, the hearing had to be adjourned, to be continued the next day.

During this break in the trial, it was clear that the votes of the 35 percent group were being contested by the other two. The 40 percent group of course thought that they only needed a few more votes to win, and it would have been to pass the decision on Porky if only the 35 percent wasn't too ethical. What good did it do to abide by ethics, if the final result was obvious, that they would disapprove of Porky's conversion? And yet, the 35 percent group insisted on due process and wanted very much for the assembly to look good in the eyes of the public.

Meanwhile, the group comprising 23 percent of assembly members clearly had a different idea. They too resented the 35 percent group who they thought was too concerned with public image, hungry for praise, not to mention inconsistent. But the 35 percent group was greater in number, and at least still expected the trial to proceed justly, even if it was only for show. In the 23 percent group opinion, if the second largest group managed to at least bring Porky to the hearing, it would have made a big difference in the proceeding. There might be a chance, however small, that the assembly would grant her her wish.

Tough debate and negotiations dragged on, even on the issue of having Porky present at the hearing. For many assembly members, it would have been their first ever interaction with a pig. The trial was suspended for two days without resolution.

After three days of protracted debate, the assembly members cast their vote at last. The final verdict officially denied Porky the right to become a Muslim.

A grey cloud hung over Kyai Fikri's face. He asked for permission to give a final word before the hearing was dismissed.

"Regardless of the outcome, I appreciate the process and the hard work of each and every assembly member involved in the making of this decision. I hate to disappoint Porky, so I will go back to the village and tell her: *Porky, every living being can become a Muslim by testifying that 'There's no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.'*" Kyai Fikri's eyes glistened. "No

one can stop any living creature from believing in Islam, even when the Muslims deny them. That is what I will say to Porky.”

The room was silent. Some assembly members were moved by Kyai Fikri’s statement and found themselves thinking of Porky, whose final days in this world would be marked with rejection and disappointment. Nevertheless, the decision had been made. They shook each other’s hands and made their farewell, expressing apologies and saying thanks to each other for the three-day hearing.

On their way out, an assembly member took Kyai Fikri by his arm and whispered.

“Kyai, can I come with you to the village?” he asked sheepishly. “Because Porky will have converted to Islam, I want to have a taste of her meat.”

Note: This short story was inspired by, among others, an indie comic from Yogyakarta, titled *Abdul Mutholib, A Pig Converted to Islam*, by Bambang Toko.

‘*Kyai*’ is an honorific for respected Islamic scholar in Indonesia.

Feby Indirani, "Porky Wanted to be a Muslim" from *Not Virgin Mary* (2017)

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