

Story #601 (1968, Tape #2)

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Hızır Aids and Teaches the Charitable

Once there was a shepherd who had only ten sheep in his flock. One day he prayed, "O Allah, if you will only turn my ten sheep into a thousand, I shall be very charitable."¹ Allah accepted the shepherd's prayer, and his ten sheep became a thousand.

One day a man came to him and asked, "Fellow citizen, are any of these sheep for sale?"

"Yes, they are for sale."

The man selected a sheep for sacrifice² and reached into his pocket for money to pay for it. But the shepherd did not wish any money and he refused to accept any from the man. The man left, pleased at receiving a free sheep, and everywhere he went he told people about the shepherd who gave away sheep. Those who heard this went and, one by one, took away every sheep in the shepherd's flock. The shepherd was finally left with nothing but his clothes and his staff, for he had given away his entire fortune.

He took his staff and set out to find some worthy woman to be his

¹Charity is one of the five pillars of Islam. Every good Moslem gives to the poor during his lifetime and leaves a portion of his estate to some charitable cause.

²Forty days after the end of Ramazan, the holy month of fasting, comes Kurban [sacrifice] Bayram [festival]. On that day every family able to do so sacrifices a sheep and gives away half the meat to the needy.

Kurban Bayram -- [sacrifice holiday or fest]

wife. Along the way he met a man on horseback who was crossing a stream. The man asked, "Hey, shepherd, where are you going?"

Not knowing that the man on the horse was Hizir,³ the shepherd answered, "I am going to try to find a place where there is a decent girl whom I can marry. If I can find such a girl, I shall marry her."

"There are only two girls left of the kind you are looking for. One of these was married some time ago, and the other is to start her wedding festivities today. We must go and get her right away before she is married to another."

The shepherd accepted the man's offer of assistance, and the two of them proceeded together at once to the place where the wedding was beginning. When they arrived, they were invited to join the wedding celebration. Before the entire company sat down to dine, the man on horseback whom the shepherd had met addressed the host and the important guests: "Friends, this young man who came here with me is a close companion of mine. With the will of Allah,⁴ I have come here to ask for the hand of the girl whose wedding has begun for my friend."

The guests were startled by this proposal. Hizir was holding in his hand a stick of cherry wood which he had used as a whip while he rode. He drove this stick into the ground, and then he said, "I

³ Hizir is a saint not entirely accepted by the Moslem establishment. He is a last-minute rescuer of those in desperate situation, a granter of wishes properly requested, and, in rural areas, a water god, fertility god, and vegetation god.

⁴ Hizir is here acting as a Turkish dünür (matchmaker). The initial remark of a dünür to the parents of a prospective bride is, "I have come with the will of Allah and the consent of the Prophet to ask for the hand of X for Y, the son of Z." ---The narrator has shortened this for his own convenience.

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Tree miraculously grows from planted stick, 125 becomes tree, and bears fruit -- all within a few minutes am leaving now to go and perform two rekats⁵ of prayer. When I return, I shall expect you to be ready to give me an answer to my proposal."

Cherry stick — planted by Hizir — sprouts leaves, becomes tree, and bears fruit — all within a few minutes After Hizir had left to pray, the cherry stick which he had driven into the ground began to sprout, put forth leaves, and then become a fully grown tree. After producing leaves and blossoms, it became covered with cherries which ripened and then fell to the ground. All of this happened within just a few minutes, the time it took Hizir to go apart and perform two rekats of prayer. When he returned, he asked, "Well, what is your answer?"

"We have accepted your proposal," they said. "We shall give our bride to your friend." Actually, they were all amazed and bewildered by what they had seen happen to the cherry stick. During the time required for two rekats, the stick had grown into a mature tree, produced fruit, and finally shed its leaves.

The shepherd took the girl, and he also took from her trousseau some of the items that were light in weight but heavy in value. All of small but three of them said goodbye to the people assembled for the wedding and set forth on a new journey. They went along until they reached a narrow valley between two mountains, and there Hizir said to the shepherd, "You will settle here between these two mountains."
Valley -- narrow

⁵ A rekat is one complete series of the gestures, positions, and words used in Moslem prayer. It may take a minute or two to perform. Prayer services in mosques each have a set number of rekats (depending upon which of the five daily prayer services it is and upon the season in the Moslem calendar). The number may run to more than 30 rekats on special occasions.

"Why?" asked the shepherd.

"Because the earth in this valley is filled with jewels of all kinds."

"But I do not wish to remain here. I do not care about the jewels. If I can just return to my hut, there would be nothing else that I should want."

They traveled some distance farther and at last came to the shepherd's hut. Hizir had wandered off somewhere by himself. The shepherd and his wife were very hungry, for they had earlier eaten all of their small supply of food. The shepherd said, "My dear wife."

"Yes, my dear husband?"

"Let me take your crown⁶ to the city and sell it so that we can buy some food."

"All right," she answered.

The shepherd took the crown and went to the nearest town, where he traded the crown for a horse. (He was still not aware that the man with whom he had traveled was Hizir.) Then he traded the horse for a saddle. After a while, he traded the saddle for a riding whip. Finally, he traded the whip for two loaves of bread, and with these he returned to his wife.

Now while the shepherd had been doing all of this trading, he had been observed by a shopkeeper. "Hey, fellow, what have you been doing?" the shopkeeper asked.

⁶ Occasionally at village weddings the bride is given a tiara or simple crown. This is not of any great value usually, though it may be set with one or more precious or semi-precious stones.

"I gave a crown for a horse. I gave the horse for a saddle. I gave the saddle for a whip. And not I have traded the whip for two loaves of bread."

"What do you think your wife will say about all of this?" asked the shopkeeper.

"She will not say anything."

"I shall send with you two of my men to observe what her reaction is. If it is true that she will not say anything, I shall give you half of this store."

"Very well," replied the shepherd.

The two men followed the shepherd home to his hut. There the shepherd reported to his wife: "I gave the crown for a horse. Then I traded the horse for a saddle. For the saddle I got a riding whip. And for the whip I got these two loaves of bread. Let us eat them, for I am hungry."

"My dear husband, you did well. Let us eat, because I am very hungry too."

Later the shopkeeper's two men asked the shepherd, "Well, what happened?"

The shepherd told these men what had happened. It became quite clear that the wife had not grown angry at her husband for trading her precious crown, as he had, for two loaves of bread. They all went back to town to tell the shopkeeper just what had happened. But the shopkeeper did not wish to give away half of his shop, as he had promised to do. As they were arguing about this, however, the sign over

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the door of the shop fell to the ground. When the shopkeeper saw the sign falling, he interpreted this as an omen, and so he changed his mind and agreed to give half of his shop to the shepherd. As soon as he came into possession of half the shop, the shepherd started giving away the merchandise free to all those who passed by.

One day while he was thus being too generous in giving away his goods, the shepherd was spoken to sternly by a man. Actually this was Hizir, who now appeared in the form of a young man. "My son," he said, "I am Hizir Aleykumselam. You cannot carry on in this way all of your life, so thriftless and naively generous. You will have to change this attitude and be more humble."