

Story 700 (1981 Tape 1)

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 Location: Çıkırıkçı village,
 kaza of Sarıkaya,
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Date: June 6, 1981

Mohammed Receives a Message from Heaven

throughout
 (Gabriel) the messenger of Allah, sometimes used to appear to (Mohammed) in front of his close friends. If Gabriel should come in his true form, he would frighten a man--frighten him so much, in fact that he might burst.¹ One day Mohammed asked the angel, "O Gabriel, will you appear to me just once in your true form?"

"O Prophet," said Gabriel, "if I did, you would not be able to stand the sight.

They discussed this matter, Mohammed saying, "Yes, my strength would be sufficient to bear seeing you in your true form!"

And Gabriel replied, "No, it would not be sufficient."

When Gabriel finally did come before Mohammed in his true form, the Prophet almost lost his mind. He just collapsed and fell upon the ground that night.

¹As the folk audience understands, it is not the entire person which bursts from fear but rather his gall bladder. Needless to say, if one's gall bladder should in fact burst, the results would probably be fatal. Peasants fear both the initial shock of fear and the aftereffect. If the gall bladder does not burst at the time of the shock of fear, it may burst any time within forty days. Those who have been frightened are, therefore, advised to rest most of the time during those forty days and take various remedies. One of the most common is lime dust (scraped from a plastered wall) in a glass of water.

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Ahmet Uysal: "How did he appear to him?"

Narrator: "In a very impressive way. He came borne on 600 wings."

Ahmet Uysal: "Really? 600 wings?"

Narrator: "Yes, 600, and just one of his wings, if fully extended, would shade the entire world."

The âşiks² are charged with a difficult task. (Girl sings)³

Their speeches and tongue are sweet.

How many wings does Gabriel have?

I want a reply from you.

Whoever is âşık has many a task. (Boy sings)

'Tis the nightingale's tongue that is sweet.

Is it a question you're asking of me?

Gabriel's wings are six hundred.

Beautiful angels await for their orders. (Girl sings)

Paradise must be intended for us.

What is the size of Gabriel's wings?

I want an answer from you.

²The âşık or lover poet sings of love--physical, intellectual, and spiritual, as Dante did--but he is also believed to have mystic insight into many things unknowable to ordinary mortals.

³Ali Çiftçi set up his discussion of Gabriel here as a dialogue between lovers in the âşık and minstrel traditions. Ali Bey does not play the saz with this song, but he does sing it. We do not know whether he improvised it especially for this tale or whether he inserted here a song that he or some other singer had used previously.

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Sweetheart, avoid all problems so deep. (Boy sings)

Tell me instead of the earth and the sky.

Just one of his wings would cover the world.

Go and discover the rest for yourself.

Speak out and unriddle the riddle, O lover (Girl sings)

Focus upon it the heavenly light.

If you really love anyone, lover,

Give me a clue, the key to the riddle

The holy Koran was written in tables prescribed by Allah,⁴ and this was in the region of Sitre-i Mintaka.⁵ The suras⁶ and verses to be taken to earth were handed to Gabriel, who took them to earth and handed them to Mohammed. One day Mohammed asked Gabriel, "O Gabriel, who gives you these verses in Sitre-i Mintaka?"

"O Mohammed, a hand from behind a great green curtain hands them to me, and my part in this operation is simply to carry them to you."

"Well, next time take a look behind the curtain and see who it is that hands them to you."

⁴The narrator describes these tables as Levha-i Mahfuz.

⁵This is apparently the name of a legendary place.

⁶The chapters of the Koran are called suras

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The next time that Gabriel went to Sitre-i Mintaka to receive more suras, he did look behind the curtain. He discovered, to his amazement, that it was Mohammed himself who was handing them out to him. When Gabriel realized this, he said to himself, "Let me reach earth before he Mohammed does." Saying this, he let himself drop earthward. With one flap of his wings he could cover a distance of 1,000 years.⁷ Even though he returned to earth so swiftly, he found Mohammed sitting in his holy mescit.⁸ Mohammed could sink his feet seven levels below the surface of the earth and still keep his head seven levels above the earth.⁹

⁷Rural Turks are accustomed to thinking of space in terms of time. When asked how far it is from their village to, say, Ankara, they will respond 3 hours or X hours. They mean three hours of walking time to cover the distance between the two points. Thus, Ali Çiftçi here is referring to the distance one could walk in 1,000 years.

⁸A mescit is a small, private mosque. It may be within a palace or courtyard.

⁹This means that Mohammed can be everywhere, ubiquitous. There are, according to Moslem mythology, seven levels of Hell and seven levels of Heaven.