

Story 795 (1970 Tape 21)

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56, farrier

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Province

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His Reverence Ibrahim Haki¹ and Sultan Mahmut I

There was once a wealthy merchant in this area by the name of Sarı Gümrükçi. He was so very wealthy that his money would almost equal that in the state treasury. Some people informed Sultan Mahmut (Mahmut I, ruled 1730-1754) of this man and warned him that he was so wealthy that he would soon displace him and declare himself to be a second padişah. When Sultan Mahmut heard this, he ordered that Sarı Gümrükçi be called to Istanbul and there put to death. He also sent orders to the governor of Erzurum for his arrest and for his conveyance to Istanbul.

Sarı Gümrükçi was a man much liked at Erzurum because he had done good things for many people. Local authorities came to him one day and said, "Efendi^{9/13}, you are wanted by the

¹Ibrahim Haki (1703-1780) is the best-known saint of the Erzurum area.

²Sarı Gümrükçi means Yellow Customs Agent. Inasmuch as that name does not seem to have any point in this tale, we have left the name in Turkish.

³Efendi is now equivalent to Sir. In earlier times it was a prestigious honorific, usually following the person's name: Ahmet Efendi. Now it is used that way only when addressing servants or children.

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padişah. You will have to go to Istanbul."

The man guessed that there must be some serious charge filed against him, and he requested a few days' delay. His request was granted. He then mounted his horse and went to Hasankale⁴ where Ibrahim Hakı lived at that time. Sarı Gümrükçi wanted to see him.

Ibrahim Hakı saw Sarı Gümrükçi, he said, "What is the matter?"

"Efendi, the padişah wants to see me. I feel that my life is in danger, and I should like to have you go to Istanbul with me. I hope that you will be able to save my life."

"All right. Now you go back to Erzurum and prepare to make the trip, and I shall join you."

Sarı Gümrükçi rode back to Erzurum, where he waited for one day, two days, three days. Then because the authorities were becoming impatient, he mounted his horse, rode to Trabzon,⁵ and there took ship for Istanbul. He thought that His Reverence Ibrahim Hakı must have changed his mind about going with him. But when he disembarked at Istanbul, he saw His Reverence Ibrahim Hakı Efendi walking up and down the pier waiting for him. He asked Sarı Gümrükçi, "Have you

⁴Hasankale is thirty kilometers east of Erzurum.

⁵Trabzon (ancient Trebizond) is a major Turkish seaport on the Black Sea.

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come?"

"Yes, I have." Sarı Gümrükçi was so greatly relieved to see him that he felt as if the weight of the whole world had been lifted from his shoulders.

Ibrahim Hakı took him to a hotel and said to the hotel keeper, "This friend of mine is a stranger here. If he goes anywhere by himself, he may get lost. Don't let him go out of his room without me." Having delivered Sarı Gümrükçi into the care of the hotel keeper, Ibrahim Hakı Efendi went out and started walking about the streets of Istanbul. He decided to visit the Şeyhül Islam⁶ and see how he was. When he reached the Şeyhül Islam's office, he found that official praying. His Reverence Ibrahim Hakı Efendi greeted him while he was still praying.

This made the Şeyhül Islam angry, and he thought, "These Kurdish⁷ mullahs⁸ of Anatolia⁹ are really savages. What a

⁶During the Ottoman period, the chief religious officer in the government.

⁷Kurds are a nomadic people who live in an area around the point where Iran, Iraq, and Turkey come together.

⁸Mullah is the Persian word for a Moslem priest. It is equivalent to hoca in Turkish.

⁹Anatolia is a term that refers to that 97% of Turkey which lies east of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles in Asia Minor.

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thing to do: greeting me while I am praying!¹⁰ When he had finished praying, he turned angrily to Ibrahim Hakı and asked, "Hey, Kurdish mullah, is one saluted while he is praying?"

"No."

"Well, then, why did you greet me while I was praying?"

"Because I did not see you praying. Having had your office built here, you were thinking about the painting to be done, and wondering about the appropriate colors to make the office look attractive. That was what you were thinking about."¹¹

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When the Şeyhül Islam heard that, he arose, went to Ibrahim Hakı, and took him by the hand. He then said, "Oh, Efendi, you are right!" In fact, that was exactly what the Şeyhül Islam was thinking about. While they sat talking afterwards, the Şeyhül Islam realized that there were invisible gleams of wisdom passing out of His Reverence. The Şeyhül Islam was greatly impressed with his wisdom. He asked His Reverence where he was staying and took down his hotel

¹⁰ Interrupting one at prayer is a serious breach of propriety. Like passing in front of one who is praying, it nullifies the worshiper's prayers. To end prayers abruptly for an emergency situation, one must turn to the right, turn to the left, and say, "Selâmünaleyküm" (Peace be unto you).

¹¹ The ability to read the minds of others is a common motif in saints' legends. Behlül Dane, the divinely inspired fool of Baghdad in the time of the Caliph Harun Reşit (Haroun al-Raschid), supposedly had that ability.

address.

After a short while, Ibrahim Hakı left the Şeyhül Islam and returned to the hotel where had left his friend. At the same time, the Şeyhül Islam went into the presence of Sultan Mahmut. "Good health to you, Your Majesty! Your Majesty, a mullah has come to Istanbul from Erzurum, and it is beyond the capability of my tongue to describe the behavior of this mullah to you. In order to understand what a great scholar he is, you must come face to face with him."

When Sultan Mahmut heard this, he asked, "Did you get his address here in Istanbul? If you did, then tell him to come to the palace for lunch tomorrow. We shall eat together and benefit from his conversation. Will that be good?"

"Yes, that will be good, Your Majesty."

After leaving the palace, the Şeyhül Islam went to Ibrahim Hakı's hotel and said to him, "Your Reverence Efendi is to eat lunch at the palace with the padişah tomorrow, for His Majesty wishes to see you

"Very well, sir.

The following morning just before noon the Şeyhül Islam came to take His Reverence Ibrahim Hakı Efendi to the palace, leaving Sarı Gümrükçi at the hotel. His Reverence started to the palace behind the Şeyhül Islam. Along the way His Reverence stopped before a bakery shop and bought a loaf of

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bread for ten paras.¹² He put the loaf under his gown. The Şeyhül Islam, observing what he had done, said, "Hakı Efendi, we are going to the padişah's palace. There is no need to take bread there!

I may need it," said Ibrahim Hakı.

Meanwhile, at the palace Sultan Mahmut was trying to solve a dilemma. He said to himself, "I am the deputy of the Prophet here on earth."¹³ If I stand up when he [Ibrahim Hakı] enters the room, it will be disgraceful and a sin. On the other hand, if I do not stand up for such a great scholar as has been described to me by the Şeyhül Islam, that also would be a sin.

of prayer while all of the viziers

In that way,

when he entered, I would be at prayer and could neither commit a sin against Allah nor commit an offense against my guest

¹²The para was 1/40 of a kuruş, and the kuruş was 1/100 of a lira. These monetary denominations were functional a century ago. Now in 1986, however, the lira is worth only 1/700 of a U.S. dollar. When the lira is worth only 1/7 of a cent, neither the kuruş nor the para has any meaning.

¹³In 1517 the Sultan Selim I assumed the caliphate, and the Ottoman sultans retained that title into the 1920s, at which time the caliphate was abolished.

¹⁴A rekat is one complete cycle of physical movement and liturgy in Moslem prayer.

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Sultan Mahmut arose and led two rekats of prayer while his viziers were all gathered and awaiting the guests. Finally, the Şeyhül Islam and His Reverence Ibrahim Hakı Efendi entered the palace. As he entered, Ibrahim Hakı said, "Şelâmünaleyküm, my Padişah."

When he heard this, Sultan Mahmut said to himself, "By God, this Şeyhül Islam is a wise man, for although twelve viziers are also here, he [Ibrahim Hakı] spoke only to me while we were at prayer."

When the padişah had finished his prayers, he said to Ibrahim Hakı, "Welcome, my hoca,^{162,163,165}" in a gentle manner. Then he asked, "Is it proper to greet one while he is at his prayers?"

"No," answered His Reverence

"Then why did you greet me, saying 'Şelâmünaleyküm, my Padişah' to the exclusion of the twelve viziers?"

"I beg your pardon, my Padişah, but you had earlier bought pearls for the Valide Sultana,¹⁵ and you were wondering how many coils you should have these pearls made into in order to have them look most attractive round your mother's neck. That is what you were doing. You were not praying at all."

As a matter of fact, that was exactly what the padişah

¹⁵Mother of the Sultan

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was doing. While he was at prayer, his mind was preoccupied with other thoughts. The padişah realized that now it was no longer necessary to make any pretensions about his piety as Caliph. He embraced His Reverence, and they sat down to talk.

When the food was brought in for lunch, Sultan Mahmut said, "My hoca, help yourself." When Ibrahim Hakı Efendi, the sultan, and the viziers were all seated, the sultan indicated that Ibrahim Hakı Efendi should start eating first. His Reverence Ibrahim Hakı Efendi broke a piece off the loaf which he had under his gown, put it into his mouth and said, "My Padişah, you first."

When he responded the same way after the padişah's third invitation, the padişah was offended at his behavior and said to himself, "So, he is not eating my food because he thinks it haram." ¹⁰³⁻¹⁰⁴16 Turning to His Reverence, he said, "My hoca, you may perhaps think that the food on this table is public property of the Moslem community. No, it is neither property of the Moslem community nor was it provided by my salary." ¹⁷ All of these things came to me directly from my

¹⁶ Everything in Moslem life is either helâl (lawfully gained and therefore acceptable in the eyes of God) or haram (improper, unlawful, unlawfully gained and therefore forbidden and unacceptable in the eyes of God). The helâl/haram principle functions in many Turkish folktales.

¹⁷ As an absolute monarch, the sultan did not have to depend upon a salary. The state treasury was at his disposal.

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father's estate. No one has any claim on these things. Why, then, don't you eat my food?"

"Is that so, my Padişah? I didn't know that. I beg your pardon." Saying this, Ibrahim Hakı broke off another piece of bread, picked up some pilav¹⁸ with it, and squeezed it in his hand. As he squeezed it, black drops of blood dripped down.¹⁹ He then said, "My Padişah, if this is what your helâl food is, I wonder what your haram food would be like."

When His Reverence said this, Sultan Mahmut, his twelve viziers, and the Şeyhül Islam all started trembling. The padişah whispered into the ear of the Şeyhül Islam, "Let us give him whatever he wants and get rid of this man right away. If he were to stay here for five or ten days, I am afraid that he would reveal, like a mirror, all of the black things in our hearts." Turning then to Ibrahim Hakı, he said, "Make known your wish for anything that you might want.

From the "My only wish is for your good health

affair "No, no! Of what use is my good health to you? Make a

¹⁸A rice dish containing very small particles of meat. It may also contain a few pine nuts and small currants.

¹⁹Animals slaughtered for food in Moslem countries must be very, very well bled--much more thoroughly than in Christian countries. It must also be very thoroughly cooked. Any trace of blood, whether the red blood of rare meat or the black blood of well-cooked meat, is haram.

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wish for whatever you want."

After being urged three times to make known any wish that he had, His Reverence said, "All right, then, these are my wishes: You will pardon Sarı Gümrükçi for whatever offences he may be charged with, and you will visit your library with me."

When he heard these requests, Sultan Mahmut said, "My hoca, if you were to ask me to pardon all of the criminals in all of the jails of this country, it would not be as difficult for me as pardoning Sarı Gümrükçi. It would mean I would have to interfere with the affairs of the state court." But he had committed himself three times to giving His Reverence whatever he named, and so at last he agreed to pardon Sarı Gümrükçi.

Now it was time to visit the library. Sultan Mahmut, his valet, the Şeyhül İslam, and His Reverence İbrahim Haki Efendi went to the library. The doors were opened for them, and they entered. His Reverence reached down several books from the shelves, examined them, and then returned them to their places. Finally he found a book two handspans long and one handspan wide, a small book. He studied this book quite a while, at times smiling quietly as he read it. This was noticed by the sultan. Finally His Reverence lifted his head from the book and said, "Your Majesty, won't you

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give this book to me?"

"My hoca, take as many of these books as you wish."

Your Majesty, I want only this one

"Of course, my hoca, it is yours. But tell me something, my hoca. You looked at several books and then returned them to their places. But you looked long at this book, at times smiling as you read it. Why did you do that?"

"Your Majesty, this book was written by Muhiddin Arabi²⁰ in Damascus a long while ago. At that time he wrote that one day Ibrahim Hakı of Erzurum would be the Pole of his time.²¹ But I look at myself and cannot see myself worthy of that position, and I ask myself, 'How could he have written such a thing?' This was why I smiled, for I am not worthy of such a title."

(I don't know how much longer they stayed at Istanbul, but Sarı Gümlükçi was pardoned. His Reverence Ibrahim Hakı Efendi took his book and returned to Erzurum. It was then

²⁰Born in Spain in 1165, he later became a famous Sufi mystic at Damascus. He died there in 1240. See ATON 391 and 457.

²¹Sufi mystics envision a universe guided by spiritual beings and by special human beings sufficiently holy to mingle with them. Some of these special human beings work in groups: The Forty, The Twelve, The Seven, and The Three. The smaller the group, the more powerful and responsible are its members. There is always one human being who serves as the Pole of his time. As the pole of a tent supports the whole fabric, so the Pole of the universe supports the whole spiritual order.

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that he began his own book, The Book of Miracles.²²⁾

²²The Turkish title is Marifet Name.