

Story 999 (1975 Tape 1) Narrator: İbrahim Aydın, 78

Location: Aksu village,
Bozüyük kaza,
Bilecik Province

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A Villager Takes Vengeance Against İncili Çavuş¹

One day the padişah asked İncili Çavuş three questions and demanded that he answer these questions

23/08 The first question that he asked was, "Why does the hair of a man's head become white earlier than the hair of his beard does?" The second question was "Why is it that some men have little or no beard?"

And his last question was this: "Which are more numerous in this world, the good people or the bad?"

İncili Çavuş answered, "Sir,² I cannot answer

¹İncili Çavuş [Pearl Sergeant] was supposedly a member of the Corps of Janissaries, the best-trained but eventually the most notorious body of troops in the Ottoman Empire. An elite palace guard, they were so indulged and privileged that they came to tyrannize all İstanbul, the Sultan included. While others are obsequious before the sultan, İncili Çavuş is often daring and bold.

²The Turkish word used here is Efendi, once a word applied only to men of great distinction but today so devalued that it is used only for children and servants.

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questions immediately, but if you will give me a
I shall return tomorrow with the answers."

"Very well," said the padişah, "but be sure to
bring me the answers tomorrow."

Mounting his horse, İncili Çavuş rode toward a
village which was known for the shrewdness of its
people.³ As he came to the outskirts of the village,
he came upon some boys playing in the road. "What
are you little heaps of dung doing here?" he asked
them

One of the boys answered, "We could smell you
coming from a long way off, and so we came here to
meet you!" The boys were all offended by İncili Çavuş
remark

"Do you have a father?" he asked the boys

"Yes."

"Will you take me to him?"

"Yes."

Leading the way to their home, the boys told
their father privately how İncili Çavuş had insulted

³There are towns, like Kayseri, known for their
shrewd people. No name is given to the village of
this tale.

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them. While they were tying the guest's horse to a post, the boys rolled up its upper lip, turning it inside out. They then cut a piece out of the horse's tail and shoved one end of it into the animal's anus.

When their father saw this, he began to laugh. "What are you laughing about?" demanded İncili Çavuş.

"Because I have never before seen a horse's tail grow the way your horse's tail grows."

İncili Çavuş looked at his horse and saw what had been done to it. He thought to himself, "These may very well be the kind of ingenious people who can help me." He then repeated the padişah's questions to this man and asked if he could answer them.

"Of course I can

Taking the villager to the presence of the padişah next day, İncili Çavuş said, "Your Majesty, I have brought a man who will answer your three questions."

"All right," said the padişah. Then, turning to villager, he asked, "Why does the hair of a man's head become white before the hair of his beard does?"

The villager answered, "The hair of your beard

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does not start growing until you are about twenty years old. When your beard starts growing, your head's hair is already twenty years old. The older hair naturally becomes white sooner than the younger hair."

"That is correct," said the padişah. "Now tell me why it is that some men have little or no beard."

The villager said, "Your Majesty, when a man and a woman mate, the man prays for a son who will look after him in his old age, and the woman prays for a daughter who will take care of her when she grows old. In some cases God may answer both their prayers. When the child is born and grows up, the father will say, 'What a fine son I have! He will look after me in my old age.' But the woman will say, 'My son has so many soft and feminine qualities that he looks almost like a daughter. He will surely take care of me in my old age!'"

The padişah accepted this answer and then asked, "Which are more numerous in this world, the good people or the bad?"

To this question the villager responded, "Count

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the hairs on my horse's back and then tell me whether there are more white hairs or more black hairs there."

"How can anyone count all of the hairs on a horse?" the padişah exclaimed.

"One cannot do that any more than one can count all of the good people and all of the bad people," said the villager.

Pleased with the answers that the villager had given, the padişah asked, "What would you like as a gift from me?"

"All I would like, Your Majesty, is the honor of being lashed 100 times with a rope in your presence."⁴

One of the attendants started beating the man with a rope. After he had received fifty lashes however, the villager said, "Stop! I want to share this great honor with İncili Çavuş. You may give him the last fifty lashes."

⁴When a ruler says to anyone, "You may ask of me anything that you wish," the traditional courteous response is this: "All I ask for, Your Majesty, is your good health." Only after he has made this demurrer three times can the person properly name the reward he really wishes.