

Story 1862 (1984 Tape 6)

Narrator: Ali Çiftçi, farmer; by this time he must have been in his late 60s or early 70s

Location: Çıkırıkçı village,
Sarıkaya kaza,
Yozgat Province

Date: February , 1984

The Incompetent İmam¹ and the Corrupt Kadı²

In the old days, a judge, then called a kadı, not only tried legal cases that were brought to him but also took the responsibility for having qualified religious leaders in his area of the country. He would ride out to the villages to discover what kinds of hocas³ they had and what kinds of men worked in the mosques.

One Friday⁴ a kadı visited a certain village and found that it did not have any imam. He said to the village leader and elders, "If

¹An imam conducts the five daily prayer services in a mosque.

²Before the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, there were judges of canonical law who were called kadıs. Actually, they tried any cases that came to their courts, whether or not they concerned strictly canonical matters. In folktales the kadı is often vulnerable to bribery.

³Today the hoca is a preacher and religious leader. In pre-Republican Turkey he was also a teacher, for education then was the responsibility of the clergy.

⁴Although Sunday is a day when businesses and government offices are closed in Turkey, the Muslim sabbath is Friday. The

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you cannot employ an imam by the time I visit you a week from today, I shall fine your village very heavily.

People of that village looked for an available imam but could not find one. As Friday again drew near, they began to worry about their situation. Finally the elders posted two men along roads that passed through their village. The two were told, "If you see any traveler whose head is wrapped in turban cloth,⁵ bring him to us at once.

A traveler passing along one of the village roads felt chilled by the cold winter weather. To keep his head warm, he wrapped it in a strip of turban cloth. Both the roadside sentinels saw him at the same time. Rushing upon the traveler, they said to him, "We have not had an imam in our village, but from now on, you are to be our imam."

But the traveler protested. He said, "I do not know how to perform the duties of an imam. I cannot possibly accept such a position."

They replied, "Never mind that. You have sufficient knowledge for our purposes."

religious high point of the Muslim week is the Friday noon prayer service.

⁵In earlier times learned men (including the hoca) wore turbans. So too did high-ranking government officials, from the sultan on down, but there was no mistaking a member of the one profession for a member of the other.

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That evening the village elders discussed the job with the newly selected imam. They asked him, “Imam Efendi,⁶ what do you want us to give you for performing your duties?”

Because the man didn’t know anything about the job, he said, “I don’t know.”

After talking among themselves for a few minutes, the villagers made a decision about his pay. They gave him fifty sheep.

Now that the stranger actually held the position of imam, he made an announcement to the villagers. “Since the pre-dawn prayer service is so early that you would have difficulty in awakening in time for it, I shall pardon all of you from attending that service. I shall also excuse you from coming to the mid-morning service. By noon you will all be hard at work, and so I shall excuse you from coming to that service. By the time of the evening prayer service at the sunset hour, you will be too exhausted from the day’s work to pray effectively, and so I shall pardon you from even trying. But you should be rested enough two hours later to attend the yatsı⁷ service.”

⁶Efendi was once an honorific or term of respect attached to the first name of a man of distinction. In the 20th century its status had so eroded that now it is used after the names only of children and of servants.

⁷Yatsı is the last of the five daily prayer services.

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But the oldest man in the village complained about this. He said, “Oh, İmam Efendi, the yatsı comes close to the middle of the night! For my sake, will you not pardon us from attending that service?” The imam granted his request.

Time passed, and Friday came around again. The kadı visited the village a second time, as he had said he would. He asked the village elders, “Well, have you yet hired an imam?”

“Yes, we have, Kadı Efendi,” they answered.

The imam was brought into the presence of the kadı, who said, “Oh, İmam Efendi, give us a salâ!”⁸

The imam explained to the kadı how he had been hired. “I have no training to be an imam, but they forced me to take this job and gave me fifty sheep as pay. Twenty-five of those sheep are mine and the other twenty-five go to the kadı of this area.”

When the kadı heard this, he was very pleased. Turning to the village elders, he said, “You have found an excellent imam for your mosque. Don’t you ever let him go!”

Of course, the judge received twenty-five sheep. Some people have no fear of Allah at all. They do whatever they wish without giving Him a thought.

⁸The salâ is a special prayer sometimes recited immediately before the chant announcing the Friday noon prayer service.