

Story 2095 (1988 Tape 16)

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Aydin ProvinceDate: January 21, 1988

A Yürük¹ and His Dog in the
Friday Noon Prayer Service²

One Friday a Yürük left his pasturelands and visited a nearby city. While walking along one of the main streets of that city, the Yürük came to a mosque. In the courtyard

¹Totally nomadic for centuries, many Yürüks (Yörüks) are now only seminomadic. Beginning in the 18th century, the Ottoman state made efforts to compel Yürüks to adopt a sedentary way of life. These measures were intended to control the wanderers and make them available at some fixed place for taxing purpose. While they were totally nomadic, the Yürüks and their huge flocks of sheep, goats, and other livestock spent summers in rent-free or low-rent pastures high in the Taurus Mountains and wintered along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Some later built make-shift villages along the coast for the three or four months of each year they were there.

Most Yürüks were Türkmen (Turkomans to Westerners), descendants of a major division of Turkic people originally called Oğuz (English Oghuz), who move in large groups into Asia Minor in the 11th and 12th centuries. Numerous Yürüks live outside of Turkey, notably in the Türkmenistan Republic, Iran, Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan.

²The Friday noon prayer service is the religious high point of the Muslim week. Muslim devotions consist in large part in the enactment of rekats--a rekat being a cycle of physical movements, gestures, and religious utterances. In the Friday service there are 16 rekats, 2 of which (known as the farz) are required and are conducted by a prayer leader known as an imam; the remaining 14 are optional and individual performances. Following the farz a sermon or lecture is

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he saw a number of men washing before several water faucets there. They were, of course, performing their ritual ablutions³ before entering the mosque, but the Yürük did not understand this. He did not know what was going on. But seeing as many men there as one might find in a market-place, he realized that it must be some important event. He therefore entered the courtyard and began washing himself. Following the crowd into the mosque, he took a place in the very last row of men. He realized by then that he must be at a prayer service. He thought, "I do not know how to perform at such an organized kind of worship, but I shall imitate what is being done by the men in the row ahead of me."

After the imam had led the rekats of the farz, he recited some prayers. Then he climbed into the mimber to deliver in Turkish some remarks which he had prepared. In the course of his speech, he quoted in Arabic some chapters delivered from the mimber (pulpit) usually by the hoca (preacher and community religious leader) or by the imam.

³ According to Islamic law, worship must be preceded by ritual purification. This is symbolized by physical cleansing. Hands, elbows, face, mouth, nose, ears, and feet are all washed three times; the neck and hair are wiped clean with wet hands. A mosque yard has a number of what are called fountains but which are, in fact, water taps.

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of the Koran, and he prayed for the Prophet and for the five caliphs⁴ who succeeded him plus the person who aspired to be the sixth successor. In other words, he prayed for Mohammed, Ebu Bekir, Ömer, Osman, Ali, Hasan, and Hüseyin. Then he returned to Turkish to discuss some religious issue.

The Yürük was surprised to hear the imam mention the names of seven men in his prayers, but he did not recognize those names. He thought, "Those fellows must have given the imam a large bribe in order to have their names mentioned in such a high and holy place during the Friday noon service. When this worshiping has ended, I shall ask the imam how much he would charge to have my name mentioned in the Friday service next week." When the devotions had concluded and the participants were leaving, the Yürük quickly went outside and waited for the appearance of the imam. When he saw that official coming through the door of the mosque, the Yürük approached him and asked, "May I speak to you for a minute?"

⁴A caliph is a temporal and spiritual successor to Mohammed. He is not a prophet but the supreme Islamic administrator and authority. The men mentioned by the imam were the seven most important figures in the early history of Islam.

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"Yes. What is your question?"

"Well, imam, I heard you mention the names of several people in your speech. Will you please tell me how much such fellows as Ebu Bekir, Ömer, Osman, Ali, Hasan, Hüseyin paid you to mention their names? I should like to have you mention my name next time."

The surprised imam stared in doubt at the face of the stranger, wondering if he could possibly be serious about what he had just said. Noticing that the stranger looked like a shepherd, he asked, "Are you rich enough to have your name mentioned by me next Friday?"

"Yes, I am," answered the Yürük. "I have large herds of cattle, horses, camels, and sheep. I also have a good quantity of money and jewelry. If I pay you well, will you mention my name in your comments next Friday?"

At first the imam considered the Yürük's request foolish, but when he heard the offer of payment for filling the stranger's wish, he reconsidered the matter. "Well, I think that I can manage to do it for you if you would bring me a flock of sixty sheep."

On the following Friday when the imam walked to mosque to conduct the noon prayer service, he noticed at

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once the Yürük with a number of sheep and a sheepdog. The strong, short-haired dog was circling the sheep and keeping them in a small tight flock. When the Yürük saw the imam, he went to him and said, "Well, my hoca,⁵ I have brought the flock of sixty sheep that we had agreed upon. You may count them, if you wish.

"It is unnecessary to count them, for a Yürük bey⁶ would never lie about such a thing."

Then the Yürük said, "My hoca, I have one more request to make. This dog with me is no ordinary dog. It has been very important to my way of life in its protecting both my life and my property. It is obviously the best guardian of both me and my wealth. Thus, it also deserves to have its name mentioned with mine in your comments."

Shocked at first by such an unusual request, the imam

⁵ As indicated in Footnote 2, an imam is not a hoca, but because both are basic clerics whose services are limited to one specific community, it would be easy for one not well acquainted with Islam to confuse them.

⁶ It adds another touch of humor to have the Yürük referred to as bey, a term used to designate a landed aristocrat during the tribal, Seljuk, and Ottoman eras. Beys were often wealthy, and they were sometimes politically powerful. There are no beys of that type in the Republic of Turkey, but the word bey is sometimes placed after a man's first name as an honorific: Ahmet Bey, Hasan Bey.

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said, after some hesitation, "Very well. I shall mention the two of you together in my speech." Then taking out his notebook, in which his speech was written, he asked, "What is your name?"

The Yürük replied, "My name is Kara Veli.

"And what is your dog called?" asked the imam.

"He is called Gündük Vasvas."

Following this brief conversation between the two, the imam entered the mosque and took his place. Shortly afterwards the Yürük walked in and selected for himself a place from which he could hear clearly the imam's words.

After leading the first two rekats, the imam proceeded to the mimber, where he read in Arabic passages from several chapters of the Koran. He addressed the congregation in Turkish. But when it came time to mention the Yürük and his dog, the imam shifted back to Arabic and said, "Kara Veli the Yürük and his dog, Gündük Vasvas, are both descendants of damned creatures. They are both beasts."

Now it just so happened that on that particular Friday the mufti⁷ of that area came to that mosque for the

⁷ The mufti (müfti or müftü in Turkish) is a senior Muslim priest who is an authority on Islamic law.

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noon service. He took a place near the mimber, from which the imam would be speaking. He was the only man in the entire congregation who understood the additional words spoken in Arabic. He stared ahead with a stunned look which clearly revealed what he was thinking: "What is this nonsense? What are you talking about?"

The imam, recognizing the meaning of that look on the mufti's face, quickly added still a few more words in Arabic. He said, "There are 60 sheep in the courtyard. Half of them are yours, and the other half are mine