

Story 1267 (1972 Tape 10)

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Location: Alamaslı village,  
Alaca kaza, Çorum  
Province

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Hızır<sup>1</sup> Grants Three Wishes

There were once three men who became acquainted with each other as they were traveling along together on the same road. They talked among themselves about their interests in life and the things that they wished to do. One of them said, "I should like to be a large landholder."

A second one said, "I should like to become very rich."

The third man then said, "Most of all I should like to be able to marry a good and mature woman."

Their remarks were partly overheard by an old man standing by the side of the road. He asked them, "Friends what was that that you were talking about?" After they had repeated their wishes, the old man said, "What the first two of you wish can be easily arranged." He was Hızır, and he provided the first two men with the means of having their

<sup>1</sup>Once a water deity and fertility god--and still both those figures to most farmers in Southern Turkey--Hızır is more widely known as a granter of wishes, a last-minute rescuer from disaster, and a special messenger and agent of God. In these latter three functions he appears quite frequently in Turkish folktales. Not mentioned by name in the Koran, a chapter of that work was later named after him. He is assumed to be the person instructing Moses in Chapter XVIII of the Koran, where he is referred to by God simply as "our servant."

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wishes fulfilled. Then he said to the third man, "Your wish is much more difficult to fulfill. Let us travel along together and see if we can find a way to get what you want."

After a while they arrived at a village where a wedding celebration was in progress. Hızır and the young man went to the wedding reception at the home of the bride. At the entrance of that house they were stopped and told, "There is a custom in this village that requires that one must show some kind of skill before being admitted to such a social gathering. Show us your particular kind of skill."

Hızır objected to this, saying, "But I am an old man. I do not have any skills."

"You cannot excuse yourself in that way, for everyone must have a skill of some kind.

When he found that he could not escape this requirement, Hızır said, "Very well, then. Bring me a pickax and a wooden stake.

People present there asked each other, "What will he possibly do with a pickax and a wooden stake?" But they brought those objects to the old man anyway.

Hızır took the pickax and with it dug a hole in the floor of the waiting room by the front door of the house. The owners of the house shouted, "Hey, what are you doing? You have cut

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through our rug! Stop that!"

Other villagers intervened, however, saying, "Let him do whatever he wishes to do in order to display his skill."

Hızır continued digging until he had made a hole into the beneath the house. Then he drove the wooden stake down that hole. No sooner had the stake been set in place than it started growing into a tree, which in a few minutes put forth leaves and then bore fruit. The villagers gathered there were fascinated by what they saw happening, and they quickly realized that the old man was a very special person. No ordinary person could have done such a thing. Hızır then said to them, "I shall leave now, but before I do so I want to request that the bride in this wedding celebration be married to my son, who is here with me."

When the father of the bride was informed of this request, he objected. "How can I give my daughter to his son? She is already engaged to someone else. Furthermore, I have already paid a great amount of money for all of these arrangements. No, I cannot consent to this request.

When Hızır was told of this response by the father of the bride, he said to the young man, "Come, son, let us leave this village."

Almost as soon as the two started to leave, people

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throughout the village began to feel severe pains in their stomachs. Because this illness struck them immediately after the old man's request had been refused, they concluded that it came as a result of the stranger's having been offended. Several of the villagers ran after Hızır and his young companion and brought them back to the home of the bride. There they said to the bride's father, "Look here, ağa!"<sup>2</sup> As a result of your refusal to comply with this old man's request, he has stricken all of the residents of this village with severe stomach pains. Give your daughter to his son. We have witnessed the unnatural and superior skill of this old man, and the marriage he requests must be the will of Allah."<sup>3</sup>

With such arguments, the villagers persuaded the ağa to give his daughter to the old man's son. They also built a house

<sup>2</sup>An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

<sup>3</sup>There is more to this expression than a suggestion of Divine Will at work. Almost all wedding agreements in Turkey are said (in what might be called the optative subjunctive mode) to

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for the young couple, and then he left that village. By time all of the people of the village felt certain that old man must have been Hızır himself.

When Hızır returned to that village a year later, he found that the couple had a son as beautiful and healthy as a ball of heavenly light.<sup>4</sup> But when Hızır went to the couple's house, he changed his appearance so that he looked like a beggar clad in rags and suffering from many cuts and bruises. When he knocked on the door, the young wife opened it and looked out. She did not recognize Hızır but thought he was simply some poor unfortunate old man.

Hızır asked, "Can you accept me as a guest of Allah?"<sup>5</sup>

The woman answered, "Yes, you are a guest of Allah you have a most preferred place in this house."<sup>6</sup>

Hızır responded, "But you should know that I have many open sores in my skin throughout my body."

"That does not matter, for you will be our most preferred

be made "with the will of Allah and the consent of the Prophet

<sup>4</sup>The Turkish expression used here is nur topu.

<sup>5</sup>In Turkey any stranger requesting a night's lodging is likely to do so in precisely these words. They virtually preempt refusal, for who would wish to reveal himself as being so craven that he would not accept a guest of the Deity?

<sup>6</sup>Literally, the woman says, "You will be on the top of my head" (Başımın üstünde yerin var).



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guest," and she then permitted him to enter the house. When

husband returned, she said to him, "Oh, Husband, thanks be to Allah, we have a guest who has brought cheer to our house." Her husband was also pleased to have a guest in their home. Then the woman told him, "This poor man has many open sores on his body. Let us ask him what has caused these sores and then find some cure for them.

The husband went to Hızır and spoke to him. "Oh, special guest, have you gone to a doctor to have your sores treated? Can you afford to do that? Do you know what it was that caused those sores?"

Hızır answered, "Oh, Brother, I have gone to many doctors, they all told me of the same cure that would be required."

"What is that cure?"

"It is the blood of a year-old boy. If I rub such blood on my skin, the sores will disappear. Otherwise there will be no cure. But how can one find a year-old boy whose parents would be willing to sacrifice him for my welfare?"

When the woman heard this, she went aside and said to her husband, "Allah will give us another child. Let us give our to this poor man who is very ill.

"Oh, Wife, how could we do such a thing? How could we slaughter our son?"

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But after talking for some time, the couple agreed to do just that. They cut the throat of their little son and gave child's blood to the old man. When they did so, the guest said "Give me the child's body too." This they did. Then they all went to bed for the night. Despite their great loss, the husband wife had the satisfaction of knowing that they had done a good deed in behalf of a guest of Allah.

In the middle of the night the wife was awakened by a noise in the house. She woke up her husband and said to him, "Oh, Husband, do you hear the same noise that I do? It seems to be coming from the room next to ours, and it sounds like the crying of a child. Getting up, they went to the next room and very quietly opened the door. When they looked into that room, they were astonished to discover there their child, who was alive and crying. Their son was there, but there was not trace of the old man to be found.

There is a proverb which says, "A bride may ride a horse to be married, but there is no way of knowing to what door it will carry her." Nobody knows what destiny awaits him or her.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The last half of this tale is a typical saint's legend. Whether Jewish (Elijah, for example), Christian (St. Peter), or Moslem (here Hızır), saints walk the earth to test the virtues (especially hospitality and kindness) of mortals. They almost always come in the guise of beggars, sometimes ailing beggars. To those who extend kindness and help, these saints confer various blessings and good fortune. To those who are rude and unfeeling, these same saints inflict punishment or misfortune of some sort. Days sacred to these saints are the times they are most likely to test human beings. Hidrellez (May 6) is the day sacred to Hızır, and for a week on either side of that date, any beggar knocking on any rural door in Turkey is likely to be very well received!