

Story 2056 (Transcribed by Ahmet Ali Arslan from his tape and later used in his unpublished dissertation.)

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Location: Sosgert village, Arpaçay kaza, Kars Province

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Snake Removed from Woman's Stomach

There was a village named Bezirgan<sup>1</sup> close to our village. In Bezirgan lived a pleasant and helpful man named Hacı<sup>2</sup> Behram. Hacı Behram was an intelligent person who had some knowledge of human health and the medicines which would cure many different illnesses. He decided to leave Bezirgan and move to the city of Kars.

A few years later a wealthy man in Çıldır had his son married to an attractive girl from a good family. The young couple lived happily for six months, and then something happened to the bride. Late in the summer she went one day to the fields to help in the grain harvest. When she grew tired, she lay down alongside a pile of straw and fell asleep. The people in the harvest liked her, and one

<sup>1</sup>The word bezirgan usually refers to a traveling salesman, sometimes just a pack peddler but sometimes a prosperous merchant with a whole caravan of goods for sale.

<sup>2</sup>One who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca may thereafter be called by the honorific hacı, which means "pilgrim." The title is a status symbol in Muslim society.

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of them suggested, "Let us put something over her to protect her."

Another responded, "It is so hot today that a cover is not really necessary." The workers continued cutting grain, but they remained quiet so that they did not disturb her.

While she was sleeping, the bride's mouth fell open. A snake came along and slipped into her body through her open mouth. This happened before any of the other harvesters could prevent it, and they were all dismayed by this unfortunate incident. They all said, "Alas!

The bride's father-in-law said to all the people who knew what had happened, "Don't say anything about this to her. It might drive her mad. Leave the matter to me, and I shall do everything that I can to take care of it." He was a rich man, and he took his daughter-in-law to Kars right away. Kars was not far away, but in those days there were no trucks or cars in which to travel. He took her to Kars in a wagon drawn by horses

There he took the bride to all of the best doctors he could locate, but none of them was able to relieve her condition. By that time she was experiencing strong griping throughout her abdomen. While they were walking down a

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street in Kars, they met a man whom they knew. "O great ağa<sup>3</sup> of Çıldır, what are you doing here in Kars?" he asked

"Brother, come closer so that I can tell you my problem," said the ağa. "One cannot get help from another person unless one explains the nature of his difficulty. May Allah grant that all our trouble will be overcome!"

"What has happened? What is the matter?"

The ağa said to the bride, "Walk along slowly behind us while I go ahead a way to talk with this friend of mine. When the two men had advanced enough to be out of her hearing range, the ağa, speaking very slowly, told his friend all about the bride's problem. "That was the way it happened," he said. "What do you think we should do about

"You have come to the right place to get help," the man said. "Go and find Hacı Behram, who moved here some time ago from the village of Bezirgan. Tell him every detail about your daughter-in-law's illness, and he will cure it if anyone can do so."

<sup>3</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

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Taking his daughter-in-law by the hand, the ağa began searching for the home of Hacı Behram. He asked this person and he asked that person where Hacı Behram lived. After awhile he met a kind young man who said, "Uncle, Hacı Behram lives just a few doors away from here. I shall take you to his house."

When the ağa and the bride knocked on the door, servants went to Hacı Behram and said, "There are two people here who wish to see you. One is a man and the other a woman."

"Let them come in," said Hacı Behram. The pilgrim was a very hospitable man. When the two strangers appeared before him, he had the bride taken to the women's quarter of the house. Then after having the ağa comfortably seated, he asked the stranger, "What can I do for you?"

The ağa explained slowly and carefully what had happened to his daughter-in-law. He then said, "We have visited several well-known doctors here in Kars, but none of them understood her illness, and so none of them could cure it."

To the ağa Hacı Behram said, "Don't worry, my son." To

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.

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one of his servants he said, "Is there some milk in the house--at least two or three liters? If not, go to the market and get that quantity of milk. While you are there buy also for me two long sticks of tobacco." (A stick of tobacco in those days cost only five kuruş.<sup>4</sup>)

When the servant returned with those supplies, Hacı Behram put the tobacco in a pot and covered it with water. Then he lighted a kerosene cookstove, and brought the pot to a boil. After testing the fluid in the pot, he ordered two servants, "Heat the milk, and after it has come to a boil, bring it here."

When the pot of hot milk was brought in, the hacı had it put upon the floor and had a chair placed before it. Then the bride was brought in blindfolded and seated upon the chair. Hacı Behram said, "Do not be afraid, my daughter Drink this glass of hot liquid, and do not say, 'It is too hot. I cannot drink it.' Drink it anyway, and by the time I can slowly count to three, your suffering will have ended."

The bride said, "All right, my hacı," and drank the whole glass of tobacco water.

<sup>4</sup>The para was formerly the smallest monetary unit. There were 40 paras to the kuruş and 100 kuruş to the Turkish lira. By mid-20th century, devaluation of Turkish money had eliminated from use the para, and by the 1970s the kuruş also fell out of circulation. When the lira fell to the value of 1/10 of a U.S. cent (and much lower in the late 1980s), the kuruş became utterly meaningless.

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"Now lean forward in your chair and open your mouth wide, my daughter." As she followed these instructions, the snake inside her smelled the hot milk below and dropped from her body into it. They then quickly covered the milk pot so that the bride would not see the snake.

"Now uncover the young woman's eyes," said Hacı Behram. Then he asked the bride, "How are you feeling now, my daughter?" When she looked up smiling, he said to a servant, "Go and get her some sherbet."<sup>5</sup>

After she had drunk the sherbet, he asked, "How are you now, my daughter?"

"I have been saved!" answered the bride. "May Allah save you from all of your troubles, too."

<sup>5</sup>In Turkey and some other countries sherbet is a cold fruit drink, not the icy confection that it is in the United States.