

Story 1427 (1976 Tapes 32, 33) Narrator: Arif Sevgin

Location: Hıdırlar village,
Beypazarı kaza,
Ankara Province

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Some Episodes in the Life of Yunus Emre¹

Taptuk Emre was a saint from Horasan² who taught many students about the love of Allah. At one time he had as many as thirty students at the same time, and among those students there were two named Yunus. These two young men with the same name got along well together, but it was the Yunus from Sivrihisar³ who was the more faithful of the two

¹ Medieval Turkish folk poet who lived between the years 1230? to 1307?. He is now considered one of the most important of all Turkish poets. There is a Yunus Emre Society in Turkey which holds annual Yunus Emre symposia; there are also often Yunus Emre sections in literary and folklore conferences.

² Now known as Khurasan, a province of Iran. A center of mysticism during the Seljuk and early Ottoman periods, many of its Moslem mystics were backtrackers who migrated back west in the direction from which İslam had originated. Many a Turkish site claims to have had a "Horasan Dede" settle there at an early date and reinvigorate the religious fervor of the area. He is usually considered a saint, and numerous local legends about him flourish. Literally Dede means grandfather or old man, but by extension it may also suggest saint or dervish.

³ Little is known about Yunus Emre's early life, and no source that we have used even mentions Sivrihisar as his birthplace or hometown.

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One day those thirty students did something which angered their teacher, and as a result Taptuk Emre dismissed all of them. Soon after that a famine fell upon the whole land, and people went to work in places where there was still a supply. Yunus Emre, who had returned to Sivrihisar after leaving Taptuk Emre's school, moved to Kayseri in order to get enough to eat.

At that time, Yunus Emre did not know that Taptuk was a saint, and he did not know that he himself had become ermiş.⁴ One day in Kayseri, however, he had an experience that made him wonder about his teacher's religious state. He met a sheik⁵ there who said to him, "Why did you come here when Taptuk Emre is your teacher?" This surprised Yunus Emre, and he wondered how the sheik knew about him and Taptuk Emre. He wished to question the sheik about this, but the sheik would say nothing further. Thus, although Yunus Emre found wheat in Kayseri, he felt compelled to return to Taptuk Emre, for he sensed that there was some special meaning in what the sheik had said

⁴The word refers to a state of religious maturity or perfection.

⁵In Arabian lands, sheik (seyh) may refer to a tribal leader. In Turkey, it usually refers to the leader of a dervish order, a saintly man.

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Every day after that, Yunus Emre went to the forest to get wood for Taptuk Emre, and he always returned home with good straight pieces of wood. One day when he went to the forest, Yunus forgot to take the rope with which he used to tie his wood into a bundle. As I said before, he had not yet discovered that he was ermiş, but he suddenly realized that he had attained that status when two snakes approached him and spoke to him. They said, "Yunus, we shall serve as the rope to hold together your bundle of wood, but you must not allow anyone else to know that we have done this." Yunus agreed to this, he used the snakes' bodies as ropes to tie his bundle of wood together. As they approached Taptuk Emre's home, however, the snakes sensed that Taptuk Emre would answer the knock on his door, and even though he was blind, he would know that they were serving as a rope around the bundle of firewood. They therefore unwound themselves from the wood and disappeared in some bushes.

After he had completed his forty years of labor by cutting and carrying firewood for Taptuk Emre, Yunus Emre wished to return to Sivrihisar, his own home territory. As he left, however, he told Taptuk that he would return to visit him.

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/Tape 32 ends here and Tape 33 begins/

Yunus Emre returned to his teacher, who was now blind. He first spoke with his teacher's wife, Bacun Sultan. Both Taptuk Emre and Bacun Sultan had liked Yunus Emre. Now Bacun Sultan said to Yunus Emre, "You lie here on the threshold. Your teacher will soon wish to go outside to perform his ablutions.⁶ You will be in his way, and he will ask who you are. I shall answer, 'Yunus has come. If he then asks, 'Our Yunus?' kiss the hem of his skirt. But if he asks, 'Which Yunus?' then you had better run away."

Yunus did as he had been instructed. In the conversation with Bacun Sultan, Taptuk Emre asked, "Our Yunus?"

Yunus Emre then kissed the hem of his teacher's skirt. Then he held Taptuk Emre's hands and said, "My teacher, forgive me! I have returned to apologize to you."

Yunus, I am very hurt. In order to earn my forgiveness, you will have to cut and carry firewood for me for forty years."

"I promise to do that, my teacher."

⁶Before performing each of their five daily prayer services, devout Moslems take ritual ablutions which are both physically and spiritually cleansing.

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After he had been back in Sivrihisar for some time, Yunus Emre decided to make the return visit to his teacher that he had promised. Taptuk Emre sensed that he was coming, and while he was still some distance from their house, Taptuk Emre called to his wife, Bacun Sultan, to watch for Yunus. When she went outside and looked down the road, she saw that the sky and the ground had almost united. As Yunus Emre walked along, a high avalanche of rocks was rolling up behind him

A few minutes later, Taptuk Emre asked, "Is he getting quite close now?"

"Yes, he is very near!" she replied.

Taptuk Emre then called out, "Yunus, my son, stop! Look behind you and you will see rocks as big as houses piling up toward the sky!"

Looking around behind him, Yunus Emre said to the rocks, "Stop, O Blessed Ones!" These rocks immediately stopped rolling along and remained still, all piled upon each other in a great mound. They have never moved since and even now they all remain just as they were when he halted them. Not a single one of them has ever rolled

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down into the stream below.⁷

In this way Yunus Emre and his teacher met for the time. After they had been together for a few days, Yunus Emre said, "My teacher, I have not been feeling well lately, and it may be that I shall not return again to visit you. I therefore request that you forgive all of my offenses and make helal⁸ all that you have done for me."

"My son, I like you very much, and I give up all claims of obligations to me. I have only one last request

⁷The meaning of the rocks' rolling up behind Yunus Emre is not clear. Inasmuch as there is no indication that he was singing or reciting poetry at the time, this can hardly be an Orpheus motif. Was he trying to impress his teacher with a display of his command over Nature?

⁸Helal/Haram--Moslem religious concepts. That which is helal is that which is permissible according to canonical law. That which is haram is forbidden. There is no obligation or restriction or penalty for doing or taking whatever is helal, but there will be a penalty on Judgment Day for doing or taking what is forbidden. To accept something from a donor is helal; to take it or to steal it is haram. To do anything morally or religiously improper is haram. Dying or endangered people often declare helal anything they have given to or done for another person, so that No. 2 will not go to Judgment Day indebted to another (which is haram unless declared helal by the benefactor.)

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to make of you. As you know, we âşiks⁹ are all buried in special places. I am going to throw my staff¹⁰ some distance. I want you to go, find where it lands, and on very spot have a tomb built for yourself."

When Taptuk Emre threw his staff, it landed near Sakarya River at Sarıköy.¹¹ That is the place where you have to go to see the grave of Yunus Emre.

⁹An âşık is a lover or lover poet--one who sings his poems and usually accompanies himself on a stringed instrument (nowadays a saz). Yunus Emre could reasonably be called an âşık, but is there any evidence that Taptuk Emre could be?

¹⁰The narrator uses the word hasa for staff--apparently a dialectal form of asa.

¹¹The staff here was thrown not a great distance, but farther than an ordinary human being could throw it. Throwing objects great distances seems to be a motif associated with the "Horasan Dede." Before the patron saint of Çamlıdere actually arrived there, he threw a heavy metal triangle (about 16 inches to each side) there all the way from Horasan--a distance of close to 1,000 miles!