

Story 1686 (1994 Tape 1

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Struck by Lightning

I want to tell you about something extraordinary that I experienced when I was a small child. We went to Karaağaç, where both my grandparents had farmlands. We used to go there during the summers to work on that land. I do not remember the exact day when this incident occurred, but it was sometime during the month of August. On the morning of that day my mother, my grandmother, and my cousins went out to work in their fields. Around noon I was sent to them with some food for their lunch

I remember very clearly that my unusual experience took place during the afternoon. My mother and my grandmother had decided to continue working after lunch, but my cousins and I started to go back toward the village. I recall that I was carrying a bread basket and some containers, but beyond that I cannot remember anything. The containers had metal handles, and some people thought that

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it was those metal handles which had attracted the lightning. When I awoke on the following day, I was in great pain and I became aware that I was badly burned.

My mother later told me that when I had wakened, I had cried loudly and that I had asked, "What happened to me?" At that point my mother did not wish to tell me anything about my having been struck by lightning because I had always been afraid of lightning. It wasn't until a week later that she explained to me what had happened.

said, "As you were walking back from the farm to the village, you were struck by lightning." Knowing how terrified I had always been by lightning, my parents were concerned about how my bad experience might affect me even if I survived. Neither they nor anyone else seemed to realize that I did not remember anything at all about the blow I had been struck by lightning. They kept asking me about

"What was it like?" "What did you feel?" "How did it happen?" They had many different ideas about what it must be like to be struck by lightning. I remember that

of them said a lightning blow felt like a powerful gush of water. The fact was that I did not see anything or know what had happened. But when I woke up the next day, I did know that I was suffering great pain.

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They could not take me to a hospital because the lage of Karaağaç was too far from the nearest city. Right after I had been struck by lightning, I was carried back to the village in an oxcart,<sup>1</sup> the only vehicle that was available. They had two oxcars in the fields, but one of them was broken, and they had planned to take that one back to the village empty. My mother and I were loaded into that cart. She sat in the cart and held me in her arms. On the way home I apparently began to struggle. She later told me, "I don't know what you did, but whatever it was, it caused both of us to fall out of the oxcart." My mother was eight months pregnant at that time, and everyone was afraid that the fall from the cart might make it impossible for her to bear the child. However, she gave a normal birth and had no problems with it at all.

According to my mother's account, the lightning struck my left side. She said that the left side of my dress had

<sup>1</sup>The Turkish oxcart--it is called kağnı--is apparently of early origin. The two large wooden wheels are solid (without spokes). The axle to which they are attached turns with the wheels, and there is so much friction between the axle and its housing that a loud, screeching sound accompanies any movement of the cart. A distinct sound that one cannot forget, this screeching can be heard for at least 100 meters. Because of the way it is built (and because oxen are lethargic), a kağnı moves very slowly.

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been burned away. That half of my clothes had disappeared completely, and the rest of my clothing had been torn apart or knocked away from me. My shoes had flown several meters from the spot where I had been struck. There were round holes in the ground at the places where my feet

been, and there were bits of my clothing at the bottoms of these holes, about two meters below the surface. Of course, exactly what had happened remains a mystery. I do not know what had caused these holes in the ground unless it was the electrical charge

There was an old belief that anyone struck by lightning should be buried temporarily in the earth in order to allow the electricity to be completely discharged from his or her body. But my uncle, who loved me tenderly and was shocked at how badly I was burned, said, "I cannot stand having her buried." My uncle had had some first-aid training, and it was really he who saved my life. He had bed-sheets soaked in buckets of cold water and then applied to my body. They put me to bed and covered me with these sheets. They kept changing the sheets. My mother later told me that when the first sheets were placed on my body there was a "ji-i-iz-z-z" noise, like the sound of water hitting the top of a very hot stove. They continued to

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apply the cold sheets for four or five hours before my temperature began to decrease and I was able to move a little

My uncle then said, "The lightning seems to have struck her partly from behind. That may have caused her stomach to fill with blood. We should, therefore, cause her to vomit so that she will get rid of it." They then began to force me to drink beverages made very sweet with honey.

My mother later told me, "It was very difficult to make you drink anything because your chin was completely numb. We were barely able to pour the liquid between your teeth." After they had continued forcing me to drink the sweet liquid for some time, I finally vomited. My mother told me later, "When I saw what you had thrown up, I thought that you would surely die. Some of what you threw up was burned. I said, 'Brother, there is no use in trying to help her any longer, for she is already dying. See what she has vomited. She must be entirely burned inside.'"

But my uncle answered, "Do not worry! Now that she has vomited, her stomach has been cleaned out. If she had not thrown up, she would have had no chance of recovering,

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now she is out of danger." From that moment, I began to recover.

Obviously my uncle's role in my recovery was very important. When they later explained to a doctor what my uncle had done, the doctor approved of his method. He said, "Do not worry about the child. She will survive. What was done to help her were the very same things I should have done. Now that they have been done, she will recover."

This was how I survived. It took me about a month to recover completely. During that time a great many people who had heard about my experience came to see me. My survival was considered a miracle by many of them. Among those who came to visit were many people I had never seen before. Of course the villagers at Karaağaç still talk about what happened to me--even those who do not now remem-

my first name. They reminisce about how the daughter of Saim Bey was once struck by lightning but is still alive. Even though I have not been in Turkey for more than six years while I have been getting my doctoral degree

in the United States, my mother says that everyone asks about me when she is in Karaağaç. Now I am completely healthy and not especially afraid of lightning, though a

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few flashes of it startled me the other day here.

My grandparents were deeply affected by my whole experience. My grandmother remained with me continuously three or four days and nights after I had been struck by lightning. She loved me dearly. She said at that time, my granddaughter survives, I shall sacrifice a large in thanks to Allah."<sup>2</sup> She really did what she had promised to do, sacrificing a large ram in thanksgiving. By that time, people could joke a little about my experience. Some laughed and teased me by saying, "How remarkable that you should have become a sacrificial girl at the age of twelve!"

Ever since that time my grandfather has called me sehit.<sup>3</sup> I have never understood why he called me that. It may be because I was saved from the wrath of Allah.

<sup>2</sup>In Turkish the single word adak refers both to the commitment to make a sacrifice and to the votive offering itself.

<sup>3</sup>A martyr who dies in battle.