

Story #485 (Not on tape)

Narrator: Dr. Hilmi Tamkoç

Location: Told at Lubbock, Texas,
but narrator was from
Cheshme, Izmir Province

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The Speedy Return of Ashik Garip¹

Ashik Garip once lived in Tiflis.² There he was in love with the daughter of a wealthy family, but the girl's father did not approve of this love. All his efforts to win this girl were useless, for her family did not approve of his way of life and would not accept a poor man as a bridegroom.

Ashik Garip finally decided to leave that city and seek his fortune in a distant land. He was going to make a gurbet.³ He set out and travelled southward for many days, stopping along the way to sing at village Coffeehouses. Finally he reached Aleppo, in what is now Syria.

After remaining at Aleppo for more than a year, Ashik Garip desired more and more to see the girl he loved, even if he was not permitted to marry her. Buying gifts for his relatives and friends, he set out after

¹Legendary "lover poet" who is better known for the folk romance about him than for any specific biographical data. Ashik Garip, like Leyla and Mecnun, is an account of frustrated love sublimated into intellectual and finally spiritual love.

²Georgian city, presently the capital of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.

³Literally gurbet means exile or distant travel. In the folk tradition, it always carries the connotation of fortune seeking in a distant and dangerous place or one dangerous of access; to go on gurbet is like going to the end of the earth.

the morning prayer⁴ from Aleppo for Tiflis. He walked toward the north-east, without either horse or donkey, for in those days poor people travelled on foot. After several hours he reached the bank of the Euphrates River, but he discovered that the bridge which he had expected to cross had been washed away in the spring floods. He walked along the bank of the river looking for a boat to take him across to the other side, but he could find none.

After he had given up hope of crossing the river that day, he saw coming along the river bank an old man with a long white beard.

"Selâmunaleykum," he said to this grandfather⁵

"Aleykümselâm," said the old man. "What is the trouble, my

"I wish to cross this river, but there is no way for me to do so. The bridge is no longer here, and there are no boats anywhere along this river."

"Where do you come from, and where are you going?"

"The matter is such-and-such. I am from Tiflis. For more than a year I have lived at Aleppo, and now I wish to go home again."

"Close your eyes, my son," said the old man. When Ashık Garip closed his eyes, the old man said, "Now open your eyes." When he opened his eyes, Ashık Garip could not see the river at all, but before him lay a large town. As he walked into that town, he discovered that it

⁴The first of the five daily prayers prescribed for faithful Moslems, sabah namazı is performed at sunrise.

⁵The narrator used the word dede here for grandfather. Although the name of Hızır is not mentioned, the old man is clearly he. The narrator confirmed this fact after he had completed the tale.

Kars.⁶ After taking ablutions, he entered a mosque there for the noon prayer.

In the afternoon he set out again on his way to Tiflis. He had not gone very far from Kars when the same old man with the long white beard appeared before him. Again he said, "Close your eyes, my son." Ashik Garip closed his eyes, the old man said, "Now open your eyes." When he opened his eyes Ashik Garip found that the old man was gone, but he saw a city ahead of him, and he soon recognized some of the buildings that he knew to be at Tiflis.

Ashik Garip went to his home in Tiflis and was reunited with his family. He gave his mother and sister and friends the gifts which he had brought for them from Aleppo. Then he made an arrangement to speak with the girl he loved. After the usual greetings, the girl said to him, "What did you bring to me from Aleppo?"

"I have brought you these poems which I composed there," said Ashik Garip. "I shall also tell you something which I did not tell to my mother or sister, and that is this: Today I attended the morning prayer service in Aleppo, the noon service in Kars, and the evening service⁷ at Tiflis."⁸

⁶The distance from Aleppo to Kars, a provincial capital in extreme northeast Turkey, is a distance of between 700 and 800 kilometers.

⁷This prayer service, called Aksham namazi, is held at about the time of sunset.

⁸Saints and other religious figures in folktales are often given the power to transport themselves instantly over great distances. There are numerous accounts of dervishes and mystics who go each day to pray at Mecca. Until the age of air travel, this would have been impossible without divine or supernatural assistance. In this tale the religious person is not given the power to do this himself. He is, rather, transported by Hızır.