

Story #486 (Tape #12, 1970)

Narrator: Sadık Erol, in 70's, who calls himself "eski Chauffeur," having been a driver for Atatürk in the early 1920's.

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Azrail¹ Delayed Three Years by the Will of Allah

Once there was a man who was so poor that his life was quite miserable. His wife said to him one day, "How long will this way of living go on? We are always half hungry, half satisfied. How long will this continue?"

The man replied, "What can I do? I keep trying harder and harder, and I continue to praise Allah, but I can get no results from either."

"If that is the case," said his wife, "why do you not travel? Go from place to place, seeing the world, and demand subsistence from Allah." His wife was a very shrewd woman.

The poor man took her advice and set out on a journey. Along the road he soon met a person to whom he said, "Selâmunaleyküm."

"Aleykümselâm," said the stranger. "Where are you going?"

"I am simply traveling," said the poor man, "and imploring Allah for my subsistence."

¹ Azrail is the Moslem angel of death, a figure about whom there are many beliefs, many tales.

"I am doing the same," said the stranger. "Do you happen to know how to read and write?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, in such-and-such a country there is a great epidemic of illness. People are dying there by the hundreds every day. Let us go to that land, for if you can read and write, you can read to them from the Koran, and I can do my part. I have the ability to be visible or invisible to anyone I choose. You can see me now, but others cannot. I also have the power to identify those who will live and those who will die."

*Thyssen
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"You are very talented," said the poor man

"Let us become friends and business partners, and together practice our skills. I shall indicate to you which patients will live and which will die. You can read a prayer to those who will survive, and then you can claim a fee for having cured them."

"That sounds like a very good plan," said the poor man.

They then went to that land where the epidemic was, though by this the numbers who were dying had decreased. The disease had lost some of its force. The poor man announced everywhere he went, "I can cure people by reading a certain prayer." The stranger was always with him, but because he was invisible they saw only the poor man. They took the poor man to a patient. He saw that his companion and partner was standing by the foot of the patient's bed. That was a signal they had arranged to indicate that the patient would live; if he stood at the

would mean that the patient would die. Those were signals upon which they had agreed.

In this way they "cured" many people. The poor man would refuse to pray for those who were incurable. They collected as many fees there they could, and then they went to another place to which the epidemic had spread. There were hundreds dying there every day. If he saw his companion and partner standing at the head of a patient's bed, the poor man would say, "No, I cannot pray for him. He is incurable." If he saw his companion and partner standing at the foot of a patient's bed, he would say, "Yes, I can cure him by praying for him."

The companion of this poor man was actually Azrail, who, of course, knew who would die and who would live, but for some time, the poor man did not know who he was. The two of them accumulated a great amount of money by working together in this way. When they had earned enough to live on for a long while, they decided to break up their partnership.

After reaching this decision, they walked further until they came to a fountain. There they took their ablutions and said their prayers. They then began to divide the money between them. Azrail gave one piece of money to his friend and then one to himself, and he continued doing this until only one coin remained. He said, "Friend, you take this piece of money, for it was you who read the prayer and cured the people. This should belong to you."

"But you told me which patients would recover. When I prayed, they did get well. That piece of money belongs to you."

They argued about this until their argument almost became a fight.

"I was simply a kind of assistant to you," said Azrail. "You were a poor man, and Almighty Allah sent me as your assistant, for he saw your miserable living conditions. I am a helper and an angel."

"What angel?"

"I am Azrail."

"Allah, Allah!"² Is that how you knew who would die and who would not?"

"Yes, that is how I knew, and because I knew, you were able to earn this money. I have no right to any of it, for I merely assisted you."

"No, no, you must take some of it," said the man.

"But I am an angel. What use would I have for money?" Azrail then gave all the money to the man.

When he was about to leave, the man said to Azrail, "Since you are Azrail, you might be willing to tell me the day upon which I am to die so that I can be ready. If I am warned ahead of time, I shall be able to make a proper disposal of my property."

"I shall agree to that," said Azrail. "But for now, Goodbye."

The man took all of the money and returned home where he now lived very comfortably. One day, however, he suddenly felt very ill. Looking up, he saw that Azrail was standing at the head of his bed. "Well, friend," said Azrail, "this is the time. So now get ready."

²This is a mild oath used by Moslems to indicate surprise or dismay. It is roughly equivalent to "Oh, Lord!" or "Heavens!"

"What do you mean, 'Get ready'?" asked the man

"I have come for you."

"But we had an agreement about this," said the man. "You were to come and inform me before I was to die so that I could make preparations. I have made no preparations."

"I have warned you already," said Azrail.

"When?" asked the man.

"Well, your father died, your mother died, your son died, and your other relatives died. Since the day on which we made the agreement, hundreds have died--in fact, hundreds of thousands have died. Were not these deaths warnings to you? This is the way I warn and inform people. You also had headaches, toothaches, and other pains, and they were all warnings too."

"Well, if that is the case, then I failed to understand them. What am I to do now?"

"You may make a petition to Allah," said Azrail.

"Well, then, you go and tell Allah that I shall take ablutions, repeat the Kulhuwallahi prayer³ three times, and say three rekats.⁴ Then let Him take my life."

³One of the most important prayers in Islam, it comprises Chapter 112 of the Koran: "Allah is One, the Eternal God. He begot none nor was He begotten. None is Equal to Him."

⁴A rekat is a series of physical movements and gestures performed during prayers. The number of rekats performed varies with the particular service of which they are part. At services where a dozen or more are required, there is a considerable amount of energy expended.

Azrail left and reported this to Allah, who granted the man's request. Returning, he said to the man, "Your request has been granted. Now take your ablutions, perform two rekats,⁵ repent your sins, and repeat twice the Kulhuvallahi prayer."

The man took his ablutions, performed two rekats, followed the required procedure for repenting of one's sins, and began to pray, "Kulhuvallahu ahad⁶--."

"Go on. Why do you not say the rest of it?" asked Azrail.

"Did not Almighty Allah permit me to repeat this prayer to the end?"

"He did."

"Then I shall repeat the next part [Allahu samed] next year. He granted me such permission, did He not?"

"Yes, He did," said Azrail. "And He would not change His mind."

"All right, then," the man said. He departed from Azrail and lived another year.

On exactly the same day of the following year, Azrail appeared again. "Come on! Get up!" he said.

⁵The narrator has changed the number of rekats and prayers here and henceforth to two instead of three.

⁶Without a knowledge of Arabic, we can take responsibility for neither the words used nor the pronunciations they are given. What appears here is a phonetic reproduction of what the narrator said. Since most Turks do not understand Arabic either, the words here may thus be twice removed from the Koranic passages cited. Anyone who is familiar with Arabic may wish to listen to the tape recording rather than rely on this transliteration.

"All right," said the man. He arose, took his ablutions, performed two rekats, expressed repentance for his sins, and repeated the rest of the first sentence of the prayer: "Allahu samed."

"What about the rest of the prayer?" asked Azrail.

"I shall say the rest next year. That was permitted by Allah, and He will not change His mind."

"All right," said Azrail.

The third year, Azrail returned and said once again, "Come now!"

"All right," said the man, and, as before, he took ablutions, performed his rekats, stated his repentance, and repeated the rest of the prayer: "Emyelid ve lem yuled ve lem yekunlehu kuhuvem ahad."⁷

Although the man tried hard to stop somewhere in this part of the prayer, he was unable to do so. Allah did not permit him to do so, for now his time had come.

Azrail said, "Almighty Allah allowed you an extension of three years. I thought I could take your life the first time I appeared to you here, but He extended it. One's life cannot be taken until the exact time, even the exact hour, has arrived. Your time to die has now arrived."

"I surrender myself," the man said.

Azrail then took this man's soul, and in that way Azrail performed his duty.

⁷There may also be a syntactical reason for the lack of a stopping place in this passage.