

Story #235 (Tape #6, Summer 1970)

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Location: Yukarı Kise Köy  
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The Doctor's Failure to Communicate

*physician (Hacı Gönem)*  
The chief doctor of a hospital was visiting his patients. He went to each patient and questioned him, "What is the matter with you? What is your complaint?" and so forth. He questioned all the patients from right to left, while the doctors and nurses on duty were following him [over his neck], the narrator says] [because the chief doctor had suddenly decided to make this call--Ahmet Uysal's explanation], and he was questioning the patients directly.

There was a soldier in one bed, and the chief doctor approached him. He asked, "What is the matter with you?"

"Ehandi [for efendi], do not even ask me."

The doctor liked this man's accent and said, "Bring me a chair." They brought a chair and the chief doctor sat and they ordered him a cup of tea.

"Well, son, now tell me your complaint

"Ehandi, my illness is that my belly cimbuldiya [comical word; cimbuldiyar, he should say, i.e. sloshes]. My back aches, my arms ache, my branches [legs] ache, my eyes blur, my head aches.

The chief doctor thought a little. He guessed that the man was probably constipated. The doctor asked, "Have you got amel?" [diarrhea].

The patient thought he meant amel [which means religious works as opposed to belief]. "Thank God I have both amel and belief

The chief doctor thought a little and said to himself, "Well, he is right I asked him about amel and he answered about it." He said, "Son, I did not mean that. I mean, are you able to go out?" [a Turkish euphemism for having a bowel movement]

"If that is what you are inquiring about, ehendi, there is a male nurse here who will not let even his own father go out" [of the ward].

The doctor thought about this for a while and realized the man was right and that it was his fault. Perhaps he did not know how to ask the question. (You know, patients get tired and want to go out of the hospital for a walk.)\*

"Son, I did not mean that. I meant, have you got sürgün?" [sürgün=an exile, but also diarrhea--so, "Have you ever been exiled?"]

"Sir, I just went as far as Konya" [exiled there and had to report to police; exile to another city is punishment for a crime].

The doctor said to himself, "The fellow is right. Apparently I did not ask the question in the right way. I wonder how I can communicate with this fellow?" He then asked, "Son, can you urinate?"

At that moment the tea for the doctor was brought. "Sir, it comes out and goes like the tea you are drinking."

This was a good answer, and the doctor could not be angry with him. He was right because he had told what his urine looked like. "I wonder how I should ask him?" thought the doctor. Finally, the doctor had to say, "Son, can you defecate?"

"Ehendi, if you are talking about that, I strain and strain and can get just a little bit of something you could not break with your teeth."

The doctor stopped drinking the tea brought for him. He took pen in hand and wrote the following prescription: "For this fellow, a 5 tokat [slap] every

\*dışar çıkmak--literally and figuratively "go outside"

meal and a 1 sulfat" [sulphate medicine--folk idea of medicine] [tokat and sulfat rhyme and are humorous]. He then walked out.

I was there at the time.