

Story 1783 (1994 Tape 5)

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Allah Rewards Simplicity and Honesty

Once there was and once there was not a family of three. They were a girl named Sefika, her very talkative mother, and her simple father. One day Sefika's mother said to her husband, "Why are you waiting any longer? It is time for our daughter to be married, but she still needs a quilt for her trousseau

The man was very poor. He said, "My beloved wife, how can I buy various things for her trousseau?"

In a shameless way the woman answered, "I do not know. Go and do whatever is required. Go and join the forty thieves and make some money by theft."

The poor man left home in tears. He went to the forty thieves and said to them, quite ingenuously, "Let me join you. My daughter, Sefika, needs a quilt for her trousseau. I shall assist you in robberies if I can earn enough money to buy that quilt."

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The forty thieves realized at once how naive this man was, and they decided that they could well use such a person in some of their robberies. They said, "All right. Come along with us. We intend to rob the house of a pasha¹ tonight." When darkness arrived, they went to the pasha's large house. Climbing to the balcony, they tied a rope around the waist of Sefika's father and lowered him into the mansion, saying, "Throw out onto the ground anything you find inside that is light in weight but heavy in value."

Inside the house the poor man could hear the pasha and his wife sleeping in the first room he entered, but he was unable to detect anything there that might be valuable. In another room he saw a large object lying on a divan. He grabbed this object and threw it outside, but the object was actually the fat, black family nurse. She was badly injured in her fall from the balcony to the ground below. When the forty thieves went to pick up what had been thrown from the balcony, they discovered the fat, black nurse, who began to moan loudly in pain. They said

¹A pasha is now simply a general. In Ottoman times he was often the military governor of a province or other large area.

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among themselves, "That fool that we brought here may do us more harm than good." They therefore fled at once, but Sefika's father did not know they had gone.

He continued on into the third room, where he saw the pasha's daughter sleeping. She was wearing no clothing, but she was partly covered by a beautiful quilt. Keeping his eyes off the naked girl, he looked only at the quilt as he said softly, "Little lady, little lady, please cover your body. I am going to take your quilt for the trousseau of my daughter, Sefika." But the girl was sound asleep, and so she did not hear his words

The poor man grabbed the quilt and then descended from the balcony to the place where he had thrown the first object. He looked for the forty thieves but discovered that they had gone. He also discovered that the first object he had thrown from the balcony was a human being, who was now moaning loudly. At first he wondered what to do, but when he realized that the woman was dying, he decided that he should pray for her. Sitting beside the woman, he took his Koran from his pocket and began praying

The sound of the nurse's moaning and the poor man's praying awakened the pasha and his wife. After looking

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through the house, they discovered that the nurse was missing, and then they recognized that one of the voices they heard outside was that of their nurse. They ran down into their yard and seized the man sitting beside the nurse and reciting lines from the Koran. The poor, simple

said nothing to them at first, but after he had completed his prayers, he said angrily, "Have you no fear of Allah?² I am the father of Sefika. My wife insisted

I join the forty thieves as a way of getting a quilt the trousseau of our daughter. The forty thieves brought me here to help them rob your house, into which

lowered me from the balcony. I entered your room. I entered the room where this woman was sleeping. I entered the room where your daughter was sleeping. The thieves told me to throw out whatever I found that was light in weight but heavy in value, but apparently I did just the opposite, for I thought at first that this woman might be a valuable object. In the third room I found a little lady sleeping. I admired the quilt which covered her, for I

²In Islamic belief it is forbidden (haram) to interrupt anyone in prayer. Some feel that it is equally haram to pass in front of someone in prayer, for in doing so, one comes between the worshiper and Mecca. Moslems always face Mecca when they pray.

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thought that it would be exactly what was needed for my Sefika's trousseau. I was too ashamed to look at the girl herself, but I took the quilt and left your house. Out here I found this woman moaning. I was praying for her as she was taking her last breaths of air, and I would not interrupt my prayer when you also arrived here."

Because Sefika's father was a simple man who had honestly confessed what he had done, the pasha forgave him. He said, "Take this quilt and leave, but promise that you will never steal again. You are a man with an honest heart, and so I am forgiving you on that condition. Pleased and grateful, the poor man promised not to steal anything else.

Sefika's father returned home happily and gave the quilt to his wife. He said, "Woman, I was able to this quilt while I was working for the forty thieves, but I have made a vow never to steal again."

But his wife was not satisfied with what he done. She said, "It is not only a quilt that our daughter needs for her trousseau. She also needs a brazier and tongs for cooking." Although the man protested that he had no way of getting these objects, his wife had no mercy

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on him. She simply said, "Go and become a matchmaker."³

Again the man set out from home, crying as he went. He began walking through the streets calling, "Matchmaker! I am a matchmaker!"

Some of the people who heard him became very annoyed. They said, "Get along, you dirty, shabby fellow! We want nothing to do with you!"

Toward evening, however, a student took some interest in this simple man. He said, "Come with me, matchmaker," and he handed Sefika's father a mecidiye.⁴ They went to a restaurant, where the student bought a large tray full of food. Handing the matchmaker an address, he said, "Deliver this tray of food to the woman who lives at that address and tell her, 'He will come in the evening.'"

The poor man took the tray of food to the address he had been given. He handed it to the woman who answered the door and told her what he had been instructed to say.

³Matchmaking is still an occupation in Turkey, where many marriages are arranged by the parents of the prospective bride and the prospective groom. The matchmaker is the contact agent who negotiates the marriage contract. In earlier times a much higher percentage of marriages were arranged.

⁴Silver coin minted during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecit I (1839-1861).

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To his surprise, the woman invited him to come inside and later share the meal that she would prepare. In the evening the student arrived, and the three of them sat down to eat, but before any one of them had taken a mouthful of the food, there was a knock on the door. It was the husband of the woman. He had been working at a distant place for several months. He had chosen that particular day to go home. At first the woman did not know what to do. She then took the matchmaker to the attic and put him in a wardrobe closet. She hid the student her lover, in another wardrobe closet down on the first floor of the house. After opening the door to admit her husband, she spoke very sweetly. She said, "Let my head be a sacrifice for the road that brought you here. You see, my husband, that I somehow knew that you were coming. See the big meal that I had prepared for your arrival. She spoke in this way in order to appear entirely innocent

Her husband was very pleased. He said, "My angelic wife, it seems that Allah must have revealed to you that I was coming. How, otherwise, would you have known to prepare such a fine meal?" He loved his wife dearly.

During their meal, the woman began to list all the

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people to whom she owed money. She said, "I owe this much for electricity, that much for water, and such and such an amount to the grocer." She was trying to extract much money as she could from her husband.

He answered, "Don't worry. The One above us will provide all that we need."

When Sefika's father overheard this conversation, he was shocked. He suddenly got out of the wardrobe closet and went downstairs. He shouted at the husband, "All I get for my work is one mecidiye! How shall I ever be able to buy things for Sefika's trousseau if I have to pay bills for your electricity, your water, and your groceries? You keep saying that the one above you will provide for all these things! Why should I pay it all? The student in the wardrobe closet downstairs should give some of money for those expenses!"

Stunned by what he had just heard, the husband asked his wife, "What is going on here? Who is this man? Who is the second man in the wardrobe closet?"

The woman did not know what to do or what to say, but that made little difference, for Sefika's father at once proceeded to explain what had happened. "I am

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father of Sefika. I once stole a quilt for Sefika's trousseau because my wife forced me to do so, but I then took a vow never to steal again. Then my wife compelled me to become a matchmaker so that I could earn enough money to buy other things needed in Sefika's trousseau. It is time for her to marry. The man you will find in the wardrobe closet downstairs paid me to bring here to your wife a large tray of food from a restaurant. He has been your wife's lover. We were just about to have a very fine dinner party when you arrived. I should not have said anything about any of this if you had not threatened to make me pay all of your bills. I simply could not stand the thought of all that expense, and so I got out of the wardrobe closet upstairs where your wife had hidden me and I came here to explain this to you. Shall I have to pay all of your bills, or will the student downstairs be required to pay some of them?"

When the husband recovered somewhat from his shock, he said to his wife, "While I have been away, you have been having an affair with someone else. Well, I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you." He repeated this

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three times.⁵ He next thanked the poor man for his honesty and handed him a large sum of money. He then said, "Take your daughter to a bath and have her cleaned. Then bring her here to me."

The poor man followed these directions and soon brought Sefika to the home of the newly divorced man. That man called a kadı⁶ and had himself married to Sefika. This arrangement was Allah's gift to the poor man for his honesty and goodness of heart. It provided him with wealth and peacefulness for the rest of his

The newly wed couple lived very happily together. They had all of their wishes fulfilled, and may we all be as fortunate as they!

⁵In earlier times a man could divorce his wife by making such a statement three times in the presence of witnesses. The narrator said here literally, "He divorced his wife from three to nine."

⁶In pre-Republican times a kadı was a judge of Moslem canonical law.