

Story 2092 (1999 Tape 1)

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Çal kaza,  
Denizli Prov-  
ince

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Punishment by Jinns<sup>1</sup>

This is an account of someone in our time who punished by jinns. That person was Süleyman Topuz, who, at the time of his bad experience, was employed by my father to tend his large vineyard. Uncle<sup>2</sup> Süleyman told me this story when I was a child and when he was 53 years old. Since that time he has passed away.

When Uncle Süleyman was a young man, he spent all of his spare time carousing with friends. Some evenings they had a few drinks of alcohol and then they walked about the streets singing together. Sometimes they would dance at wedding celebrations. At one particular wedding they danced and sang until very late in the night. In

<sup>1</sup>The word jinn suggests two very different kinds of supernatural creatures. The first is a huge otherworldly being who comes forth from a bottle or appears in response to some signal, such as the rubbing of a magic lamp or ring. This creature then proceeds to give the caller supernatural or magic aid to achieve what he wishes. The other kind of jinn is seldom seen in its own form. It is a spiritual force referred to in some Sufi beliefs and in other mystical systems.

<sup>2</sup>In Turkey, as in some other lands, children often address older friends as uncle or aunt. This is a term of respect, not of blood kinship.

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fact, it was close to dawn when Uncle Süleyman slung his rifle on his shoulder and started home

He had gone only a short distance when he saw on the road ahead of him a hen with 15 chicks. They blocked his way. When Uncle Süleyman observed this, he moved to one side of the road in order to avoid them. But as soon as he had done this, the chickens also moved over to that side and blocked him again. He moved back and forth, from left to right and from right to left, in order to get past them, but they continued to make it impossible for him to proceed any farther.

He became exasperated by this situation, and at first he did not know what to do. Then he remembered that he was carrying his rifle with him. Taking it from his shoulder, he began firing at the chickens. But something happened to Uncle Süleyman, and he fell unconscious to the ground. When he regained consciousness, he felt a great pain in his face. It was twisted badly to one side, and his mouth was pulled out of place.

When his face did not return to its normal shape, he consulted some wise old men about this difficulty. They decided that the chickens he had fired at must have actually been jinns. What else could have twisted his face so

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badly? Uncle Süleyman accepted this explanation of what had happened to him.

All of the time that I knew him, Uncle Süleyman had a twisted face and a cracked mouth. He told me that since his own punishment, he had discovered several other people who had been punished in the same way but for different reasons. They all had distorted faces. He felt sure that he and the others had all been struck by jinns for evil deeds they had committed.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Metin Ekici was reminded of this account after reading an analogous incident in Warren S. Walker's essay "Some Tales Behind the Tales in the Archive of Turkish Oral Narrative." Walker's anecdote is here reproduced.

In late 1980 in the town of Devrek, a kaza center of Zonguldak Province, we met a small group of men who were good storytellers, but among them was a narrator who was almost unintelligible because of a physical impairment. His face was badly twisted to one side by what I assumed was Bell's palsy. We thanked this unfortunate contributor for his efforts, even though we could not utilize them. His appearance was not by then unfamiliar to me, for I had observed it recently in several other men in Turkey, although in all my previous life I had seen such cases only three or four times. After our ailing acquaintance had left, I asked an elderly merchant, through an interpreter, "Why is Bell's palsy seen so frequently in Turkey? It is a nervous disorder and not a communicable disease."

"What do you mean when you say 'Bell's palsy'?" he asked. After the symptoms had been described, he responded, "That is not a disease at all but a curse."

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"A curse? For what offense?"

"It is a punishment for anyone who has accidentally or otherwise urinated upon a saint's grave."

(It should be noted here that saints are far more numerous in Islam than in Christianity. Although some distinguished saints are buried in tombs, most of the rest are interred in wayside cemeteries where there is no protection from inadvertent sacrileges.)

Closer in some ways to Ekici's account is an autobiographical experience reported to us by Prof. Dr. Suphi Kormalı. He related this experience to Warren Walker while the latter was collecting folktales in Malatya Province in June 1989. His comments were not taped, and what follows is Walker's recollection of the incident Kormalı detailed.

Kormalı reported that one rainy day while he was still a child, he was returning home from school. On one of the streets along which he had to pass was a deep puddle of rainwater. In order to avoid that puddle, he swerved off the sidewalk and walked around the submerged section. By the time he reached home, he was suffering a seizure of weakness and dizziness. At no time did he undergo any facial distortion. When his condition did not respond to a doctor's medication, Kormalı was referred to a local religious leader, a hoca, for counseling. After listening to the boy's own account of his illness, the hoca concluded that in leaving the sidewalk to avoid the puddle, Kormalı may have walked through a gathering of jinns who frequently met in that area. Although the child was unaware of having done such a thing (for jinns are invisible to most people), the jinns nevertheless punished him for his unwitting sacrilege. The hoca recommended some sort of penance to placate the jinns. When the penance had been completed, Kormalı's illness was cured.

Regardless of the dynamics of this incident, it should be noted that jinns are visible to and accessible to a



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few very devout clerical personnel and to some mystics. When ordinary people feel that they need some intercession with jinns, they often search for a cinci (jinn-wise) hoca.

Punishment of human beings by jinns may occur for a wide variety of reasons. A common Turkish expression is cin çarpması (jinn-struck).