

Story 1846 (1984 Tape 6)

Narrator: Ali Çiftçi, farmer; by the time he recorded this tale, he must have been in his late 60s or early 70s

Location: Çıkırıkçı village, Sarıkaya kaza, Yozgat Province

Date: March 1984

Caliph Ömer¹ Saves an Army Hundreds of Kilometers Away

Once while he was caliph, the Blessed Ömer sent one of his commanders, a man named Şahre, on a military campaign. The enemy Şahre was to attack was at such a great distance from Medina, where Ömer lived, that it took the troops three months to march there.²

At one point in the battle Şahre tried to protect his troops by keeping the rear of his army backed up against a mountain. Unknown to Şahre, however, some enemy forces had already occupied the base of that mountain and were now preparing to destroy the rear guard of the Moslem army.

¹Ömer was the third caliph. (The caliphs were Mohammed's successors as administrators of Islam, but they were not prophets.)

²Until after the middle of the 20th century, most rural peasants traveled most of the time on foot. They measured distances in terms of how long it would take to walk to those places. Here the narrator says simply that the enemy was three months away.

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Back at Medina at that very time the Blessed Ömer was preaching the sermon from the mimber³ during the Friday noon prayer service.⁴ He suddenly paused for a moment, and then he shouted, “Beware, Şahre! Beware the mountain, the mountain! They are coming down upon you from the back of the mountain! Open your eyes!” Caliph Ömer gave that order at Medina to an army commander three months’ walking distance away! The worshipers at the mosque were confused, but not so the Blessed Ali.⁵ Ali made careful note of the time that the unusual statement was made from the mimber. He recorded the hour and the exact minute when it occurred.

³The pulpit in a mosque, not near the altar, as in a church, nor at the mihrab, which all worshipers face, but more nearly at the center of a mosque.

⁴Friday noon prayer service is the religious apex of the Moslem week. Friday is still the Moslem Sabbath, although in Turkey Sunday is the day of rest, when most businesses are closed.

⁵Ali was the fourth caliph, but he claimed that he should have been the first caliph, partly because he was a relative of Mohammed. He was deeply embittered when the elders of Islam selected the first three caliphs for their individual qualifications rather than for any blood connection with the Prophet. Resentment of Ali and his supporters caused the great schism in Islam between the orthodox Sunnites and the Shi’ites. The schism continues to this day, with some Moslem countries predominantly Shi’ite (pro-Ali), such as Iran, and some predominantly Sunnite, such as Turkey.

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Three months later when Şahre returned victorious from battle, he was met by Ali. Ali said to him, “Three months ago today at this hour and almost this exact minute, Blessed Ömer paused during his sermon to give you an order. What happened then?”

“May Allah be greatly pleased with the Blessed Ömer. If he had not warned us in time, the battle would not have ended in victory but in total disaster for us!”