

Story 1837 (1984 Tape 6)

Narrator: Ali Çiftçi, farmer; by this time, in late 60s or early 70s

Location: Çıkırıkçı village,  
Sarıkaya kaza,  
Yozgat Province

Date: March 1984

A Prayer as Talisman<sup>1</sup>

There was a rich merchant who had many caravans carrying merchandise to different cities. This merchant had a copy of the heavenly prayer first brought by Gabriel to Mohammed. On one of the caravan trips which he himself led, he read that prayer every night before retiring. Although he did not know it, he was being followed day after day by a robber. Each night the robber tried to plunder the caravan, but the prayer prevented him from doing so. After the merchant had read aloud the prayer, he and his caravan were protected as securely as they would have been in an iron castle.

One evening the merchant was especially tired, and he carelessly forgot to read the heavenly prayer. Finding the merchant no longer shielded by an iron castle, the robber began to plunder his

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<sup>1</sup>ATON tales 1836 and 1837 are about a prayer brought to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel. It had never been divulged to any earlier prophet. Apparently the narrator recited this prayer for Ahmet Uysal, who taped tales 1836 and 1837, but, ironically, the prayer does not appear anywhere in the recordings. See 1836 for evidences of the prayer's potency that are different from the evidences in this tale.

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possessions. While this theft was going on, the merchant awoke and asked the robber, "Who are you, and what are you doing?"

"I am a robber and I have been trailing you for eighteen days in order to plunder your caravan. Every night when I attempted to do this, however, I found you unreachable, for you were protected by something that was as secure as an iron castle. But I found you without that protection tonight, and so I am taking whatever I wish from your possessions."

"Come now, son, and change your plans. I have forty caravans, and I shall divide them with you. Then we shall each have twenty. Cease being a bandit,<sup>2</sup> and we shall work together. Then when I die, you will inherit my twenty caravans too. Alas, alas! How careless I was! I have a special prayer that protected me night after night as long as I continued to read it every evening before retiring. But this past evening I forgot to read it!"

"If you will give me that prayer," said the bandit, "I shall give up robbery and become your partner."

"Very well," answered the merchant, "I shall give you that prayer."

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<sup>2</sup>Throughout this tale the thief is called harami, a term for robber or bandit that is used mainly in folktales. It may be derived from the word haram, which means forbidden or evil.

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After he had received that prayer, the former bandit used it as a talisman. Separating the inner and outer layers of skin beneath one of his arms, he had the prayer, folded small, sewn into place there. In that way it became almost a part of his body.

The rich merchant and the former bandit worked together for several years. Then when the merchant died, his twenty caravans became the property of the former bandit. But the authorities did not understand how he had come to acquire the merchant's property, and they accused him of having stolen it.

This happened during the time of Harun Reşit,<sup>3</sup> and so the former thief was taken before that caliph for judgment. After considering this man's case, Harun Reşit ordered his executioners to behead the former robber. The executioners took the convicted man aside and tried to behead him. In turn each executioner raised his sword above the head of the condemned man, but they were unable to bring them down upon his neck. They reported to Harun Reşit, "We were unable to behead him. Something prevented us from bringing our swords upon his neck!"

"Hang him, then!" ordered the caliph.

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<sup>3</sup>The greatest of the Abbasid caliphs who ruled from 750 to 1258. Harun Reşit (Haroun al-Raschid), who flourished around the year 800, was a figure so colorful that he appeared as a character in several of the tales in the Arabian Nights.

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The executioners took the former thief to a tree. They stood him on a chair and tied around his neck a rope which had been attached to the tree. But when they removed the chair, his body did not fall. Instead, it rose on the rope until he was able to sit on a lower branch of the tree.

When they could not hang the condemned man, they reported this to the caliph. Harun Reşit responded, "Well, tie a stone around his neck and throw him into the sea!"

Following this order, the executioners tied a heavy stone to the neck of the condemned man. When they threw him into the sea, however, the stone did not sink. Instead, it floated, and the condemned man sat upon it, safe from the waves.

The executioners returned again to Harun Reşit. They said to him, "We could not behead this man. We could not hang him. We could not drown him, for when we threw him into the sea, he would not sink."

"Bring him here," said the caliph. "Let us see what it is that makes him so unusual." When the former thief was brought into his presence, Harun Reşit asked, "What is the source of your invulnerability?"

"I have a prayer," answered the man. "As long as that prayer remains with me, you cannot harm even a hair of my head."

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When Harun Reşit heard this, he said, "I shall not only forgive all your crimes, but shall also make you my grand vizier!"