

Story #513 (Tape #12, 1970)

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[Mahmut the Blanketmaker],
aged 50

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The Wise Son Saves His Uneducated Father

A padishah was touring his city one day with his aide [valet is the word used here]. He noticed several children playing in the street, but when he approached them, he saw one standing apart with his bag [çanta] hanging from his shoulder.

"Why aren't you also playing, son?" he asked

"I am coming from school," the boy said.

"Let me see what you have in your school bag." The boy took out the section of the Koran he had been using.¹ "Where is your lesson?" The boy opened to one of the pages. "But this is not your lesson." (In those days, children were required to mark with a candle the location of their lessons [presumably because there were then no page numbers to designate place]. "Your lesson must be A, B, E, S," said the padishah.²

"Yes, I know, but since that word means useless, I did not want to say it."³

¹In pre-Republican Turkey much of a child's education was based on the Koran.

²One's A, B, E, S in Turkey is similar to American A, B, C's.

³Vulgar or unflattering words are avoided in Turkish conversation lest someone present, especially a person of higher status, interpret them as veiled mockery of themselves. Thus when one must use a word like eshek [donkey], one prefaces the word with "I beg your pardon."

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The padishah was pleased with this polite answer and gave the boy a gold lira

"No, efendi, I cannot take this money because my father would ask me where I got it."

The padishah bent over the child and whispered in his ear, "You can tell them that our padishah father has given you the money."

The boy still refused to accept it, saying, "No, efendi, I cannot take it. They would say to me, 'If the padishah gave money, he would not give just a single lira but many.'"

The padishah then gave the boy more money and proceeded on his way. He visited several shops and talked to the people in these businesses. He finally stopped to look at an oil press where sesame oil was being made. Calling the owner to him, he asked him, "How much oil do you get from a kilo of sesame seed?" After this question and others had been answered, the padishah turned to religious matters and asked him some questions about religion. Now, the man could give no answers that satisfied the padishah, and so he had the man arrested.⁴ Now it happened that this man was the father of the boy who had, just before, given such proper answers to the padishah's questions.

When the boy returned home from school that evening, he found that his father had been arrested by the padishah. After learning

⁴Basic questions about Moslem religious duties were supposedly known to all of the faithful, and secular leaders, being also religious leaders, often catechised people whom they met --at least, they did so in folktales.

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the reason for his father's arrest, the boy went immediately to the padishah. The padishah received him into his presence and at once remembered him as the boy with whom he had talked a few hours earlier

"What brings you here, son?"

"I have come to see you about the arrest of my father."

"Who is your father?"

"My father is the owner of the oil press."

"Yes, your father know his trade well, but he knows nothing about our religion."

The boy said, "Yes, efendi, my father knows his business thoroughly, but feeling bitterly his ignorance in other matters, he is having me educated. If anyone is to be held responsible for my father's ignorance, it should not be he but his father. He is the one who should be punished. We are innocent."

Pleased with this answer, the padishah released the father and rewarded the boy with still more gold.