

Story 1582 (1977 Tape 12, 18) Narrator: Behçet Mahir, 68

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city of Erzurum
Province

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Three Legendary Physicians¹

There were three great medical doctors in history. The first one was the Blessed Lokman.² The second was Eflatûn Zaman.³ And the third was Çüllü Hekim.⁴ The Blessed Lokman found his answers to medical problems in herbs. He even found a cure for death in herbs. Herbs could speak, and they could speak so well that they even chanted the ninety-nine names of God. Lokman's real name was Camasep; the word lokman simply means doctor.⁵

¹The first section of this tale appeared in ATON 1700 as an interpolated account by Behçet Mahir. It had absolutely no relationship to "Hamzai Sahip Kıran," the story into which it was inserted, but we left it in the Hamzai story, thinking that it might later prove to have some connection. The second (and longer) section of this tale (1582) was also on tapes (1977, Tapes 18, 19) devoted primarily to Hamzai. However, this second section does not appear in ATON 1700, for it is obviously unrelated to the Hamzai story. This second section is a question-and-answer dialogue between Ahmet Uysal and Behçet Mahir triggered by Uysal's request that Mahir elaborate upon his earlier remarks (Section I of this tale) on the three physicians. It is all excellent folk history, much of which can (in one form or another) be found in other oral accounts.

²Legendary Arabian sage, among whose many roles was that of physician.

³Plato.

⁴Unidentified.

⁵Although one cannot dogmatize about what is "correct" or "incorrect" in a folktale, one can say that this sentence indicates confusion on the part of an aging storyteller of considerable

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When he found the cure for death, Lokman said, "From now on, no one will have to be buried in the earth." Wishing to test this cure, Lokman cut Apprentice Joseph to pieces and then poured his medicine over the parts. After a short while the apprentice's body was reunited, and he stood up. Lokman then said to Joseph, "Now it is your turn to cut me to pieces and pour the medicine on the parts of my body. I found cure for death, but we shall all still have to go through the Last Judgment. I do not want to be one of those questioned about his deeds on earth."

(Gentlemen, we must all give thought to the day of Last Judgment. Don't think, "I cheated this or that person. I committed many injustices against him. He took me to court, but I won the case. He could not do anything to me." Don't say that you have won any case in this world without giving thought to how the case will go on Judgment Day in another world. What will you do on that day? How will you answer the questions that God will ask you? Don't say, "Oh, I killed that person and thereby got my revenge." You may have gotten your revenge in this world, but have you considered how the matter may go in the next world? Gentlemen, we must all face the Day of Judgment. We will be questioned, and we will be judged on the basis of our deeds in this mortal world.)

fame. Camasep is a character usually associated with the snake king Şahmeran. See Şahmeran tales in ATON. Lokman or Lugman was the actual name of the ancient legendary doctor.

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Yes, gentlemen, Apprentice Joseph cut Lokman to pieces as he had been directed. But at that very moment God called Gabriel to him and said, "Gabriel, Lokman has found a cure for death. Go and knock the apprentice's arm so that he spills the medicine against death." The medicine was spilled at once upon the ground.

Only three parts of Lokman's body were touched by any of the medicine. Those three parts came to life and cried out, "Joseph, pour the medicine on the other parts! Pour it!" But Joseph was helpless. There was nothing that he could do to save Lokman.⁶

After Lokman's time there was his student, Plato, who found the answers to medical problems in the Koran.⁷ He read the Koran very carefully. One day when he was walking along

⁶We have found no evidence in any other folktale or any scholarly study that the life of the legendary Lokman ended in this way.

⁷This whole passage on Plato is unusual. All of its action is associated with Lokman in most folk accounts. Inasmuch as Plato is outside the Arabic/Turkish tradition, Turkish peasants know virtually nothing about him beyond his name. Books were marvelous and mysterious objects to the illiterate masses, and most wise men, sages, and magicians impressed others by carrying some tome--never mind its subject matter!--and consulting it (or pretending to consult it) for information. Lokman often carried a notebook into which he had written all of the medical knowledge he had accumulated. He never consulted the Koran, which was compiled more than 800 years after Plato's death and an even longer time after Lokman's death. Furthermore, there is precious little medical knowledge in the Koran.

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with the Koran under his arm, he was met by Gabriel on a bridge. Gabriel asked Plato, "Where are you going?"

Plato answered, "I am going to a certain mountain to get the herb which can cure death. I read about it in the Koran."

Gabriel said, "Very well! If you are such a learned man, you can probably tell me where Gabriel is at this very moment."

Plato answered, "Let me look in my book." He opened the Koran, read from it for a minute, and then said, "He is neither in the sky nor on the ground. He is on the water."

As they stood there on the bridge, Gabriel said, "Look again, and more carefully this time."

"All right," said Plato, and when he looked into the Koran again, he understood. He said, "You are Gabriel

Gabriel fluttered his great wings, and in doing so, he knocked the book out of Plato's hands and into the water. Only three pages remained in the hands of Plato, but from those three pages were derived all medical knowledge. All of the other pages fell into the river which watered the barley fields along its banks. That is why they now say that barley water can cure many ills

After Plato there came Çüllü Hekim, who could detect the presence of death or the absence of death by means of smell. One day as he was going somewhere, he saw a crowd

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of people before a certain house. He asked, "What has happened?"

One of the people of the crowd said, "There was a young pregnant woman here who has died. She died very suddenly in the middle of her period of pregnancy."

Çüllü Hekim sniffed the body of that woman, and the smell told him that she was not really dead. He asked, "Where are the relatives of this woman? I want to inform them that she is not actually dead." When the relatives appeared, he told them of the woman's condition and asked them for a long, narrow piece of glass. He said, "This woman is not dead. A fetus in her womb has grasped her life vein and shut off the flow of her blood. That is the reason that she seems to people to be dead." He measured and calculated very carefully, and then he inserted the strip of glass into the woman's womb. As soon as he did this, the woman regained consciousness immediately. She became conscious again because the strip of glass had struck the fetus's hand and forced it away from her life vein. Çüllü Hekim said to the people standing there, "When the baby is born, you will see that it has a hole in its right hand." Then he left. Time passed. In fact, a year and two days /sic/ passed, and finally the woman gave birth to a baby girl. It was then seen that the baby had a large hole in its right hand.--But, gentlemen, all the doctors in the world could not find a cure for death.

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/1977 Tape 187

Ahmet Uysal: Behçet Efendi,⁸ there were in the past three great physicians: Dr. Lokman, Plato, and Dr Çüllü Hekim. Please tell us more about these men.

Behçet Mahir: All right. I shall tell you more about those physicians. Plato was an apprentice of Lokman. For the seven years of his apprenticeship, Plato pretended that he was deaf, mute, and somewhat stupid, but actually he was not a bit deaf, mute, or stupid. He was a very intelligent man who served Lokman for seven years.

One day a man went to Lokman's office and said, "Quick, Lokman! Help us! Someone has tried to kill himself, and he seems to be dying!"

By using sign language Lokman told Plato what kind of medicine to prepare. When it was ready, they both went to the dying man's house. They discovered that the man had tried to kill himself with a knife, and as a result, all of his intestines were hanging out. Lokman exam-

⁸A mild honorific, comparable to Sir, it usually follows a first name: Hasan Efendi. At one time it was used to show respect to distinguished people, but it has become so devaluated in the twentieth century that it now is used only for servants and children.

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ined the man, and then he said to the family members there, "Quick! Go quickly and bring me two rose stems that have never been touched by human hands." When these were brought, Lokman wiped away the blood with a silk handkerchief and then picked up the intestines with the rose stems. Then he said to the patient, "Why were you fooled by a devil? Why did you try to kill yourself? Now please take your intestines back inside you again." After he had spoken in this way, the intestines dropped back into the abdominal cavity. Lokman then sewed up the abdomen and put some medicine on the wound. The patient soon became a new man.

Plato, who had watched this procedure carefully, said to himself, "Now that I have learned everything about medicine, there is no need for me to serve Lokman any longer." He therefore left Lokman and moved to Şam.⁹ He opened a medical office there and soon became famous.

His fame became so great, in fact, that

⁹Older name for modern Damascus

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news of it soon reached Lokman's ears. Someone said to him, "Oh, Lokman, you are as nothing compared to Plato. He is very great!"

Lokman was very curious about this report. He said to himself, "The knowledge of this profession was given to me by God. Who gave that knowledge to Plato? I shall go to Şam and see for myself. I probably should have done so before, for my patients have been getting fewer and fewer."

Lokman went to Şam and located Plato's office. Before he went to the office, however, he disguised himself so that Plato would not recognize him immediately. When Lokman arrived at Plato's medical office and drug shop, he was very surprised. He discovered that the Plato he had known as a deaf, mute, and rather stupid person could now speak and hear perfectly well, and he did not now seem at all stupid. In fact, he seemed to be a very intelligent man. Observing this, Lokman thought, "Vay!"¹⁰ This means that he stole my knowledge by tricking me! He

¹⁰A mild interjection to express surprise or regret.

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pretended to be deaf, mute, and stupid when in truth he had none of those qualities

While Lokman was there, a man came running into Plato's shop. He said to Plato, "Oh, Doctor Efendi, help! Someone has tried to kill himself."

Since Plato knew what kind of medicine was needed, he mixed some quickly, closed his shop and went to the injured man's house. There he saw that the injured man's intestines were hanging out. Plato said, "Quick! Quick! Go and get me a silk handkerchief and two rose stems that have never been touched by human hands." When these things were provided, Plato wiped off the blood with the silk handkerchief. Then he said to the injured man, "Why did you try to kill yourself? Why were you fooled by some devil? Now please take your intestines back into their natural place." As he was saying this, he kept using the rose stems in an effort to put the man's intestines into the abdominal cavity. Instead of moving inward, the intestines kept protruding more and more. Plato was greatly confused by this turn of events.

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Lokman was standing behind Plato, and he saw that the injured man was dying and that Plato was not going to be able to save him. He slapped Plato hard on the neck. When Plato turned his head to look around, he recognized Lokman, his former master. Lokman said, "Oh, Plato, you worked for me for seven years pretending that you were deaf, mute, and stupid in order to steal my knowledge, but you failed to understand the heart of that knowledge." Lokman then went to the dying man. He said to some people who were there, "Hurry! Quick! Go and get me a dirty handkerchief." Then he picked up the intestines with the two dirty sticks and said to the injured man, "Die! Go ahead and die. The world will not grieve that you are no longer a part of it!" The intestines at once slipped back into their cavity. Lokman then sewed up the abdomen and put some of the medicine on it. The patient soon revived and was fully alive again. Lokman then said again, "You learned what medicines to use, but you did not learn the true nature of man, a subject which lies at the heart of medical knowledge."