

Story 1558 (1977 Tape 10)

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of Erzurum Province

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Ömer Ümmiye Escapes from Azrail for Forty Years¹

Because Ömer Ümmiye did not have any kneecaps, he was able to run very swiftly. He could race with the wind. Hills and mountains were as easily crossed by him as flat plains were by other people. He could cover two days' distance in two hours.² That was the reason that he lived forty years longer than he was supposed to live.

Azrail³ was unable to catch him to take his soul because of Ömer's great speed. He could run faster than Azrail could fly. Unable to carry out his duty, Azrail appealed to Allah for advice. "O my Allah, I am not able to catch Ömer Ümmiye to take his soul. What should I

Allah replied, "Azrail, get a golden pickaxe and a silver shovel and place them in a newly dug grave. Ömer Ümmiye will come to get that golden pickaxe and that silver shovel. When he climbs down into the grave to get them, you can trap him there and thus catch him." Because Ömer Ümmiye was, by the

¹This interpolated story in ATON No. 1700 is a folktale in its own right. In order to avoid losing its identity entirely in that extremely long tale, we have (for indexing and cataloguing purposes) entered it here under its own ATON number.

²Until recently Turkish peasants described distances in terms of time it would take to traverse them on foot.

³Hebrew and Moslem Angel of Death

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will of Allah, passionately fond of gold and silver, he was unable to resist the lure of such metals whenever he saw them. He would do anything to get them and put them in his pouch. Then in the moonlight he would bury these precious objects. Most of the buried treasures that people find were placed in the earth by Ömer Ümmiye. He lived for forty years longer than he should have.

While Azrail was digging a grave with the golden pickaxe and silver shovel, Ömer Ümmiye detected the presence of those precious metals nearby. Some feeling within him drew him to the grave to get those precious tools. When Ömer arrived there, Azrail said to him, "Oh, Ömer, come here and lie in this grave."

"Why?" asked Ömer.

Azrail answered, "Someone died today, and he was just your size. If you lie in this partly dug grave, I shall be able to tell how much more I shall have to dig." Ömer was so eager to get the golden pickaxe and the silver shovel that he did as Azrail had requested. Once Ömer was lying in the grave, Azrail jumped on his chest and said, "That is enough! You have not allowed me to take your life for the past forty years, but now it is time for that to happen." Having said that, Azrail took Ömer Ümmiye's life.