

Story 902 (DTCF Tape 2)

Narrator: Ali Çuga, odacı at
Hacettepe University

Location: Ulutepe village, Turhal
kaza, Tokat Province

Date: 1966

The Vanity of Human Status

There were once two famous sheiks¹ in Turkey, one living in Ankara and the other in Istanbul. The Ankara sheik said one day, "I have all the qualities of a sheik. I know everything that there is to know."

But the Istanbul sheik, who had lost a hand, claimed that he was superior in knowledge to the other sheik. When word of this claim reached the Ankara sheik, he said to himself, "Let me go to Istanbul to see that man and have myself examined by him. That is the only way to know for certain whether he is superior to me or I to him."

Traveling toward Istanbul, he had reached the outskirts of that city when he saw a club-handed man plowing a field. This man held the handle of the plow firmly with one hand, and he held the ox goad under the arm that was club-handed. He called to the traveler, "Selâmünaleyküm."

¹ In the Turkish context the word sheik (Turkish, seyh) usually refers to the head of a dervish tekke (convent). In the Arabian context it often refers to a man who is both the religious and political leader of a whole tribe or other community.

Story 902

"Aleykümselâm,"² responded the Ankara sheik.

"Where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I have heard that there is a club-handed sheik at Istanbul. It is that man that I have come to see. I wish to be examined by him."

Inasmuch as a guest had come to see him, the other man released his team of oxen and said, "Very well, let us go to my home, which is quite near." He did not introduce himself, and so the Ankara sheik did not know that this was the very man he sought. "What is the object of your visit to the Istanbul sheik?"

"Well, the matter is such-and-such. I heard that he is the only person who has more knowledge than I have. I want to discover whether he is really superior to me in this respect or I to him."

The Istanbul sheik said, "While we are walking to my house, let me ask you a question. If you can answer my question, then you can also defeat the club-handed sheik of Istanbul." He asked the question, but the Ankara sheik was unable to give any answer to it. When they reached the host's house, they sat down for a while and rested themselves.

² The traditional greeting between Moslem strangers: Peace be unto you / May peace be unto you also.

Story

Then they had dinner.

After dinner, the club-handed sheik of Istanbul gave this account. "Once a number of years ago, the padişah had his scales set up, and everyone was being weighed.³ As my turn to get on the scales approached, there was a man just ahead of me in line, and in front of this man was his son. When the son stepped on the scales, the weigher said, 'His sins were light, and his virtues heavy.'

"Then the father stepped on the scales, and when the beam of the scale was rocking up and down, it was clear that his sins were going to weigh more than his virtues. Seeing this, his son grabbed a loaf from a basket of bread and placed it on the scale, thus making his father's virtues equal in weight with his sins

"When it was my turn, I went up to the pans of the scales, where I discovered that my virtues weighed less than my sins I stretched my hand out for a loaf of bread, but I had just barely touched the bread when a sword struck my wrist, and my hand was cut off

"When I awoke, I felt a sharp pain in my arm. Looking about, I realized that I was in bed. There were neither scales there, nor basket, nor any loaves of bread. I saw that my

³It becomes apparent at this point that this tale is allegorical.

Story 902

arm had been chopped off and was bleeding, while nearby my hand was lying on the floor. Look here--it was this arm that had been chopped off.

"Then I said to myself, 'What is the value of being a hoca and a scholar? It is all vanity!' Having concluded this, I got myself a team of oxen and a plow and started farming. If you produce bread for mankind, everything is within your reach. You can climb on the scales and pass the weighing test. You can possess all good things and pass into heaven for baskets full of bread will appear at the weigh station to add to your virtue. What is the value of being a sheik? The best thing to do is to be a farmer and feed poor hungry people. There is nothing to be desired in the office of a sheik.

The Ankara sheik agreed with what he said and returned home

⁴A hoca is a Moslem priest.