

Story 1423 (1989 Tape 6) Narrator: Memduh Derin, 59,
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Garrulous Mehmet Ağa¹

There was in the old days a man who was called Garrulous Mehmet Ağa. He not only talked too much, but he also kept asking unnecessary questions. It was his long lists of needless questions more than anything else that caused people to call him Garrulous Mehmet Ağa. He became so notorious for his ceaseless questioning that his reputation became known even to the governor.

Curious about this man, the provincial governor had him called into his presence. Garrulous Mehmet Ağa greeted the governor, "Selamünaleyküm."

¹An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just an older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey. Inasmuch as Mehmet is not at all respected, the term may be used here ironically.

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"Aleykümselam,"² answered the governor. After two of them had carried on a conversation for a while, as they drank tea and coffee together, the governor thought, "O Allah, Allah! This man seems perfectly normal. What he is saying makes good sense. Why should he be given the name Garrulous Mehmet Ağa?"

Suddenly, however, the governor's guest asked a question that had nothing whatsoever to do with what they had been discussing. He asked the governor, "Could father play the saz?"³

Confused, the governor answered, "No, he could not."

Garrulous Mehmet Ağa responded, "That is very interesting, because my uncle could not play the saz, either. After having made that remark, the guest asked for permission to leave the governor's mansion.

²Selamünaleyküm/Aleykümselam--traditional exchange of greetings between Moslems not well acquainted with each other. It means roughly May peace be unto you/And may peace be unto you, too. If Selamünaleyküm is not responded to, the speaker should be wary of the one so addressed.

³A lutelike instrument having only three strings. The melody is played on one string. The other two strings may be used to make chords, but they more often provide mere drone notes, brushed by the passing hand but unfingered. It is the instrument used by singers and minstrels to accompany their lyrics.

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After his guest had departed, the governor said to himself, "I realize now that that man was not named Garrulous Mehmet Ağa for nothing! There was a good reason for calling him that."