

story #50 (Tape 52)
1961-1962

Narrator: Hasan Kaçar, Muhtar
Location: Erem Sultan, not far from
Sarıyar Dam, about 150 km.
west of Ankara
Date: April 1962

53

#50

A Legend of Yunus Emre¹ and His Teacher, Erem Sultan

When Erem Sultan, the blind teacher, had between three and four hundred students here, Yunus Emre was among the group. He used to cut wood in the forest and carry it on his back for the school.² He always cut wood that was straight and perfectly even in length, while the other students were less careful about their bundles of firewood. Many of them were jealous of Yunus Emre and laughed at his great care in wood cutting.

One day his teacher, Erem Sultan, asked him, "Why is it that your wood is so evenly cut?"

"Any other kind of wood is really of no use in this place," he answered, "Only perfect pieces are appropriate here."

When all of the other students had finished their studies at this religious school, they left, but Yunus Emre stayed on with Erem Sultan for a long time. He was not ready yet to leave. But one day he was upset about something that had happened at the school, and he wondered whether he should then leave. He went to the forest to bring some wood, all the

¹Yunus Emre (? - 1307) was one of Turkey's greatest poets. A peasant from central Anatolia, he became one of the country's most profound, and, at times, mystical poets. He is usually listed as a Folk Poet, a misleading label, for it designates only the vernacular language, Turkish, that he used; those who wrote in Turkish were called Folk Poets; those who wrote for the court, the Divan Poets, used Persian.

²As in medieval monasteries, students did all of the maintenance work at schools such as Erem Sultan's. Yunus Emre was one of the school's wood cutters. The school is today a mausoleum for Erem Sultan and his family, a popular shrine for pilgrimages. ---This tale was told in one of the rooms of this medieval school.

Story #50

while thinking about his problem. He cut his wood and stacked it, but when he was ready to carry it home, he discovered that he had forgotten to bring his rope. While trying to find something with which to tie it, he noticed the approach of two snakes who came and coiled their bodies tightly around the bundle of wood. "Please do not take us all the way to the school," they said, "for we fear to be seen by Emrem Sultan. Let us go just before you reach the place." *Snakes -- two -- serve, voluntarily, as rope to bind bundle of firewood*

Yunus Emre proceeded to walk back to the school, but his mind was filled with his problem, and he forgot all about the snakes. Instead of releasing them before arriving, he carried them, still wrapped around the bundle of wood, right into the school. When the snakes realized where they were, they uncoiled immediately and fled. The wood that Yunus Emre was carrying crashed loudly to the floor. Emrem Sultan said to Yunus, "If you are going to act that way about cutting and carrying wood, then don't do it." He thought that Yunus had deliberately thrown down the wood. A day or two after that, Yunus Emre left his master and went to another village, about half an hour's walk from here.

It was Friday, and when he reached his destination, he went to the mosque for the special service of that day. There was a spring before the mosque--it is now called Emre--where he and two other men going to the service made their ablutions before entering. After the service, Yunus Emre and the two strangers sat down for lunch, but none of them had anything to eat. One of the two strangers prayed to God for a plate of food for them. The prayer was answered, and the plate of food arrived. After they had eaten this plate of food, they were still hungry, and so the other stranger also prayed for a plateful. Again the prayer was answered. When it was Yunus' turn to pray, he said, "Oh, God to ~~whatever authority~~ ^{whatever authority}

Miracle -- food provided by God -- response to prayer
Food -- miraculously provided by God -- response to prayer

Story #50

these two men prayed for food,³ let him send me something to eat." After saying this, he received not one but two plates of food.

The two strangers were surprised at the result of Yunus' prayer, and as they were eating, one of them said to him, "To whom did you pray?"

"To whom did you pray?" Yunus asked the men.

"We prayed to God through you," they told him.

When Yunus Emre heard this, he was surprised, for he had not known until then that he had attained this level of favor with God, that prayers made through him would be answered.⁴

After this incident, Yunus left that village and came back to Emrem Sultan, but he was embarrassed to appear before his master. Instead, he went and saw his wife and asked her what to do to be forgiven by Emrem Sultan.

"He is praying in the school right now," she said, "But he will be coming out in a moment. If you lie in his path when he walks into the garden, you will draw his attention and thus get an audience with him. If he asks, 'Who is this man?' I'll say, 'It is Yunus.' Then, if he says 'Is it our Yunus?' I'll say, 'Yes.' Then you should get up right away, for he may try to strike you violently, and if he did strike you, the blow might have the force of God behind it."

Emrem Sultan came out of the school, and as he walked along the path, his foot touched the body of Yunus Emre. "Who is this here?" he asked.

"It is Yunus," said his wife

"Is it our Yunus?" asked the teacher.

"Yes," she said, and at that, Yunus Emre stood up.

³Unorthodox in many of his beliefs, Yunus Emre did not hold any anthropomorphic concept of God.

⁴Martyrs and other holy men were used as intercessors to make more effective man's prayers; in this way they are similar to patron saints.

Story #50

Emrem Sultan did not try to strike him but instead said, "Look here, Yunus, I might have let you pass from this world unaware of your great powers, but you have hurried and discovered them for yourself." From something that he felt in the presence of Yunus Emre, Emrem Sultan sensed this progress in his student.

After this, Yunus Emre began his travels. I don't know to how many countries he traveled, but you probably read about them in your history books. If you do, you will find that he has been talked about in many lands. He finally settled in Sarıköy [on the railroad between Ankara and Istanbul] and after living there for a while began building a tomb for himself. Emrem Sultan heard about this and wished to visit his former disciple again before he died, and so he traveled to Sarıköy, riding there on the backs of two snakes. -- two

When Yunus Emre saw his former teacher approaching, he wanted to show him his ability. He said to the workmen who were building the tomb, "Throw down your trowels and jump from the wall." After they had done this, he said to the outer wall, "O blessed Wall, walk!" and the wall started to move slowly toward Emrem Sultan. When his attendants told him what had happened and when he felt the wall that approached him, Emrem Sultan said, "Yunus, you are now showing your superior power. I can command living things, like these snakes, but you have command over even inanimate things."

Miracle -- wall moves at command of holy man (Yunus Emre)

Well -- mover -- miraculously -- at command of holy man (Yunus Emre)