

Story #430 (Tape #1, 1968)

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The Hoca's Adjustable Vision

An aga in a city of Bokhara once had three sons. The two older brothers were obedient to their father, but the third was not. The father gave this son a great amount of advice, but the boy never listened to him. Finally the ağa dismissed him from his family, saying to his neighbors, "I have rejected my youngest son. He may go wherever he wishes." This ağa was a very wealthy man.

After leaving his home, the youngest son traveled from place to place. One day he reached a large village where 600 or 700 families lived, and he decided to remain in that village. The people there asked him where he came from and what kind of work he could do. "I come from such-and-such a place in Bokhara," he said.

"Well, what kind of work can you do?"

"I can herd sheep and goats. I can build houses. I can work as a laborer at anything."

"Our muhtar," they explained to him, "has no shepherd. Why don't you tend his goats and sheep?"

The young man worked as a shepherd for three years in that village. They had a custom there to beat any man who remained in the village for three days without going to the mosque [for prayer service]. They would *Punish* beat him hard enough to break some of the bones on one side of his body.

If he remained there for a whole year without attending the mosque, they would kill him. That was their custom, a requirement in that village.

Well, this young fellow lived there for three days, for five days, but still he was not worshipping at the mosque. He was not only the muhtar's shepherd, but he had also fallen in love with the muhtar's daughter. The young man fascinated her,<sup>1</sup> and she fell genuinely in love with him. The muhtar called the hoca to him one day and asked, "Do you ever see that fellow in the mosque?"

"Never," said the hoca.

"But please, Hoca, think carefully," said the muhtar. He then called a town council meeting to have the young man questioned in the presence of the elders of the town. They would give him three wishes, and after that, the end: they would kill him.

What could the young man do? He was in love with the muhtar's daughter and she with him. He began thinking very hard about the problem, and when he went home, the girl saw that he was worried. "What are you thinking so deeply about?" she asked him.

"I am caught in your father's trap. Why did I ever come to this land? I am sorry I came here now. They will give me three wishes and then they will kill me, but I do not even know what the wishes should be."

The girl said, "Let me give you some advice. The first day you should demand my father's horse. Mount it and ride around the countryside on it for a while. Your second wish will be a demand that they give me to you.

'I want the muhtar's daughter for my second wish.' I shall tell you later

<sup>1</sup> The literal Turkish here says "he tied her to himself."

what your third wish should be."

They sent the village guard to bring the young man before the village council. They then asked the hoca if he had ever seen this fellow in the mosque.

"By the name of Allah, Muhtar Efendi," said the hoca, "I looked to my right and he was not there; I looked to my left and he was not there;<sup>2</sup> I looked among the congregation and he was not there either."

"All right, Hoca," said the muhtar. Then, turning to the young man, he asked, "Well, what is your first wish?"

"Your horse."

"Very well," said the hoca.

He had three days in which to enjoy that wish. He mounted the horse and rode around the countryside during the first of these three days. Then two days were left. When the three days had passed, they asked him, "What is your second wish?"

"I want to marry your daughter," he said to the muhtar. The muhtar hesitated, but he had to accept any wish that the young man made. The young man married the girl right away, and he then had three more days of freedom following that wish before he had to make his final wish. During those three days, his wife said to him, "I shall tell you what your third wish should be. It is the hoca who is most hostile to you. After your third wish, they will kill you, and I shall be left a widow. When the members

<sup>2</sup> The expression here used is selâm vermek, literally, to give greetings; but it also has a special connotation here, for it is the term used when, after the farz part of the religious service in the mosque, each worshipper looks to right and then to left in a kind of social gesture. Since the worshippers are lined up in almost military fashion, this gesture is similar to "dressing right" and "dressing left" in close-order drill in the army.

of the village council meet, along with the peasants and the guards will say, 'Tell us your third wish. After that is fulfilled, you will die.' You will say to them, 'Here is my last wish. Bring me a heavy hammer, weighing ten kilos. With this hammer I shall hit the head of the muhtar and each member of the council once and the head of the hoca three times.'"

"All right," said the young man.

At the meeting of the council, they asked him, "What is your last wish?"

He answered, "Gentlemen, my brothers, my teachers, my neighbors, I have eaten so much of your bread that I cannot make my wish known." But when they insisted, he said, "My first wish was the muhtar's horse. My second wish was the muhtar's daughter. Here is my third wish. Do you see this hammer which weighs ten kilos? I want to use it to hit on the head each member of the council once, the muhtar twice, and the hoca three times.<sup>3</sup> Do you accept this?"

"Just wait for about five minutes," the muhtar said. He then turned to the hoca and said, "My Hoca, I ask you once more whether or not this man was in the congregation."

"By Allah," said the hoca, "when I looked to my right, it seemed as if he were there; and when I looked to my left side it seemed as if he were there too!"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This is not, of course, an exact repetition of the instructions from his wife, but the changes are unimportant.

<sup>4</sup> The hoca's comment is funny in Turkish, partly because of the ludicrous jingle of its sounds: "Sağıma selâm verdim var gibi gibiydi; soluma selâm verdim var gibi gibiydi." --Perhaps a better way to approximate the Turkish is to translate it this way: "When I looked to the right, it seemed as if as if he were there; but when I looked to the left, it seemed as if as if he were there too."

*Euphemism*

The muhtar became very angry with the hoca and said, "I do you I don't know what!<sup>5</sup> Of course he was there--right in the middle of the mosque!"

<sup>5</sup> This is a standard euphemism for an obscenity.