Story #546 (1974 Tape #9)

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Location: Tale taped at Ankara but Coğkun is from Tonus village, kaza of Şarkışla, Province of Sivas

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The Life of Ibrahim Ethem, Padişah of Horasan

You know, many saints, holy men, caliphs, prophets, and padişahs have passed away. In the old days they did not make just anyone the padişah. For example, they used to have the princes write down or say something, and then they would judge them by that to see if they were fit to become padişah not. Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent was made padişah in that way.

They said to him, "Do something! You are a prince who may be crowned, but show us something of yours that would indicate you are worthy of being padişah."

He recited the following couplet: "There is nothing that enjoys greater prestige than state [position] among men; But a breath of good health is of more value than state." Looking at this, they decided that he was worthy of becoming padişah

Ibrahim Ethem was another one of these padişahs. He was reared in Horasan. In Horasan there were three- or five-storeyed apartment houses made of mud brick, say that having mansions and palaces built in this

1 Horasan (Khorasan, Khurasan) is a province of Iran. In the 9th and 10th centuries it was one of the areas occupied by Turkish tribes as they moved westward. It was an area where Moslem mysticism thrived, and there are many accounts of mystic figures known as Horasan Dedes (grandfathers).

2 This is a well-known couplet, now proverbial, though its real origin is in doubt. Halk içinde muteber bir nesne yok devlet gibi / Olmaya devlet cihanda bir nefes sahhat gibi.

3 Not a padişah but a saint and scholar who wrote a famous scientific study, Marifetnâme.

4 Moslem priest.
world is very bad, for in the next life you will be forced to carry them on your back. Perhaps that is just a legend.

Although Ibrahim Ethem was a good paşâ, he was also a learned hoca and a saint as well. He prayed, attended the mosque, and met with other hocas. One day when he was sleeping in his palace, it began to tremble. He began saying, "Allah! Allah!" and to utter the salavat.\(^5\)

He looked and saw a huge man, half as tall as a minaret, standing above the palace. He first said, "Bismillah,"\(^6\) and then demanded, "Who are you?"

"Paşâ Ibrahim Ethem," the man asked, "how many people are there in your family?"

"Two or three."

"Would you be answerable for them?"

"To whom should I be answerable for them?"

"To Allah," said the man. "Do they, for example, perform the namaz?"\(^7\)

"By Allah, I cannot tell you that for certain."

"You see that the palace is shaking and may fall down, and so you should strive a little for things of the other world as well as of this one." Saying this, the tall man (tall as a minaret [sic]) disappeared.

\(^5\) **Salavat getirmek**—to utter the first principle of Islam: "God is the Creator of man. There is but one God, and Mohammed is his Prophet."

\(^6\) I begin with the name of Allah—a propitious remark made by Moslems before beginning any undertaking. The word used here is a shortened form of **Bismillahirrahmanirrahim**.

\(^7\) **Namaz** means prayer, but it usually refers to the ritual prayer said during the five daily prayer periods.
padişah was very frightened, and he wondered whether he should tell his wife of this: "It happened thus and so. The palace was shaking, and a man sent by Allah said such-and-such things to me." He wondered about this all night, and in the morning he decided to leave the palace without telling her or anyone else. In the morning he put on sandals and walked to the mountains of Mecca. He had a two-months-old son whose name I have now forgotten. In the mountains of Mecca he associated with dervishes. He spent his life praying and cutting wood, which he sold to earn a few akçe.\footnote{The akçe was a small copper coin of the Ottoman period.}

On the morning that he left the palace, the viziers came to console his wife. She ruled the land for some time, but one day she was dispossessed of her power. Their son was then starting to grow up, but she never told him that his father had been a padişah. At the age of eighteen he began wondering why he did not have a father. He asked his mother to tell him the truth about this.\footnote{The narrator was confused earlier in the tale. Apparently the padişah had told his wife of the visitation of Allah's messenger but had not told her that he himself was leaving Horasan.}

explained that one day while they slept the palace trembled. "Your father was Padişah Ibrahim Ethem. Such-and-such happened. He barely saved himself, and then he disappeared."

In the morning the son put on his sandals and started towards the mountains of Mecca, sometimes on foot and sometimes on horseback. He had been told in Horasan of his father's carrying wood with the dervishes in the mountains of Mecca. He asked people if they knew a dervish named Ibrahim Ethem.
They pointed for him. "That tall, white-haired dervish over there is named Ibrahim Ethem."

He was certain that that man was his father. He went to him and kissed his hand.

"Who are you, son? Where do you come from?"

"My name is such-and-such, and I am from Horasan. The name of Ibrahim Ethem is frequently mentioned at Horasan. May I carry your wood and bring you your water for ablutions? Would you let me do this?"

"I would, with pleasure," he answered, though the boy had said nothing about being his son.

He helped his father in this way. He carried his wood, which they sold. They walked barefoot because they were trying to gain spirituality. In those days people often took the path of spirituality. It was not then as in the present age of science. Of course, some people still take such a path.

One day the son was involved in deep thought, and he said to himself, "Look at him, once a padişah, carrying wood in the mountains of Mecca—half hungry, half not—earning a few akçes a day." Then to his father he said, "Baba, let me sing some hymns for you. Would you like that?"

"I should like to listen, son."

10 The reference here is to ritual ablutions taken before each of the five daily prayer services.

11 The word baba means father literally, but it is also used for an older dervish, Dervish Baba. Since the son has not yet identified himself, the term here must be meant in the latter sense.
Leaving his estate and property,
His crown and throne in Horasan--
Coming over here to carry wood
For eighteen years, my father--
Leaving me at two months' age
And going on the hunt--
Coming here to wear the dervish clothes,
My wood-bearing father--
Coming here to the land of Mecca--
Taking his long staff in his hand--
Putting his axe beneath his belt.
See now my mother's nostalgia;
She steadily weeps for you,
You who have come here barefoot
My wood-bearing father.

"Are you then my son?"
"Yes, I am."

After a long conversation, the father finally said, "Thanks to Allah, we have seen each other. What do you say we should do now?"

The son said, "I am going to take you back. Although eighteen years have passed, your fame is still talked about back home."

"No, I do not wish to return, son."

"Well, then, will you show me a miracle?"

"I can do that," the father said. There was a stream running past them. He performed two Rekats\(^\text{12}\) of namaz by this stream, and

\(^{12}\text{A rekat is a unit of namaz, a complete cycle of gestures and postures (with accompanying prayers), beginning at the standing position and returning to that position.}\)
then, taking a needle, began to mend his coat. He dropped his needle into the stream, and then he spoke to the fishes, "O fishes, bring me back my needle. You know best whether or not to do this." After a while a fish took the needle in its mouth and brought it to Padişah Ibrahim Ethem. "See what a good fish it is," he said. "When I see such miracles, I am very happy. As they say, miracles are not in birds and trees and stones but in people."

As a result of this, the boy realized that his father had reached a high level in the dervish order. In fact, the man who had appeared to him had been Hızır, blessed be his name.\(^\text{13}\)

The son still insisted on his father's returning, but his father said, "No, son, I cannot go with you. Take my greetings to your mother. Tell her to pray. Tell her how the fish brought me my needle. I may return some time after you get back." He kept his son there two or three more days, not wishing to part with him. Then he promised that he would release him after just one more day, and this he did.

When the son had gone 2,000 meters, the father stood praying and weeping a little. He cried out, "O Allah! Take my soul away! I was once a padişah, but I left my kingdom to come here where I became a dervish. I walked here barefooted. Then my son came to me and wanted to take me

\(^{13}\) Hızır is the most popular Moslem saint in Turkey, where he is the object of a large cult. Actually, he is an ancient fertility god surviving into the present. He has various functions: granter of wishes, last-minute rescuer from disaster, agent of fertility on the farm, messenger and/or agent of Allah. It is in the last of these roles that he is referred to in this tale, for apparently the narrator means here that Hızır was the very tall man who stood above the trembling palace and warned the padişah to forsake his worldliness. --After uttering Hızır's name, the narrator says reverently Aleynisselâm--greetings be unto him—an expression of great respect comparable to blessed be his name, the freer translation which we have used here.
with him. I know not whether to go or stay. (That is why they call an uncertain man Horasan-minded.\textsuperscript{14}) O Allah, please take away my life!"

There were many dervishes carrying wood, walking barefooted, praying, and offering sacrifices there in the mountains of Mecca. When the padişah started to pray, his son could just barely be seen in the distance, but now he was not visible any longer. When he looked again in that direction, he saw a huge snake\textsuperscript{15} rising in the air. Reaching that place, he found that several dervishes had built a fire to heat water with which to wash the body of his son who had just died.\textsuperscript{16} They did not know that he was the son of Ibrahim Ethem. He walked to where they were, and they said, "Come along, dervish father."

"Well, he is my son! He came all the way from Horasan and wanted to take me back with him, but I did not go. Then I cursed myself and asked Allah to take my life." Crying then, he sang the following song.

\begin{verse}
Missing his father, he came--
Learning my present condition--
Burning with ancestral fire--
Remain an orphan, stranger son.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{verse}

\textsuperscript{14}This interpolation by the narrator may possibly be accurate, but we have no documentation for this expression.

\textsuperscript{15}Snake is a metaphor for the rising spiral of smoke.

\textsuperscript{16}The ritual washing of the corpse is a very important part of Moslem burial custom in Turkey.

\textsuperscript{17}The word used here is garip--strange--but it means strange in the sense of being \textit{gurbet}--in exile or in a strange land.
May your mother keep missing me--
Let her keep watching the roads--
Let her burn with the love of your father.
Remain an orphan, O stranger son

You sought me among the dervishes--
You knew I had gone to cut wood.
You have pierced my troubled chest.
Remain an orphan, O stranger son.

Let your mother lose her mind--¹⁸
her express her nostalgia.
others sit upon our throne.
Remain an orphan, O stranger son.

After singing these stanzas, he said, "Well, after all, this was his [kismet] [lot, destiny]." He then proceeded to bury him at a place
1,000 or 2,000 paces from there.

(This story is told at greater length and detail as an appendix
to the Mevlit.¹⁹ --I told many tales in my younger years and made many
village women cry over them. I was something of a molla [theology student]
in those days. Students were called mallas at that time. --Well, this is
the story of Padişah Ibrahim Ethem.)

¹⁸ This is not meant literally but in the sense of being subject to
grief, an irrational condition.

¹⁹ Mevlit (Mevlüt) is a cantata on the birth and life of Mohammed written
by Süleyman Çelebi of Bursa. It is performed as a requiem service some
time after the death of a person, and in subsequent years as a memorial
service. The story of Ibrahim Ethem is not usually printed with the Mevlit,
though Talibî Coşkun may have seen or heard of a volume in which they were
printed together.