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Hızır as Wolf: A Moslem Parable

In an earlier time there was a shepherd who lived in a forest, where he pastured his sheep and his goats. His flocks would be scattered about in different sections.

One day three wolves appeared as the shepherd was pasturing his animals. One of the wolves said to him, "You are going to give each of us a sheep from your herd."

*Animal--wolf  
speaks human  
language*

"No, I cannot give you any of my sheep. Let me go and get per-  
*McMohammed - Prophet*  
mission from the Prophet Mohammed. I shall ask him what he thinks about this, and then perhaps I can give you some sheep tomorrow."

"Why don't you go right now to get permission so that we might have them today?"

"Well, if I left right now, you would probably eat all of my sheep."

"No, we would not eat any of your sheep, and we shall take an oath to that effect."

"All right, then. But first I want to hear your oaths."

The first wolf said, "If I touch any of your sheep, may there be heaped upon me all the sins of those who do not go to prayers when they hear the ezan,"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The ezan is the prayer call chanted by the muezzin from a minaret for each of the five daily prayer services at a mosque.

The second wolf said, "If I touch one of your sheep, may there be heaped upon me all the sins of those men who rear daughters but keep them from men and from marriage,"

The third wolf said, "If I touch any of your sheep, may I have heaped upon me the sins of all those men who treat themselves better than they do their guests,"<sup>2</sup>

The shepherd listened carefully as the three wolves took their oaths not to eat any of his sheep while he was gone. Then he left to go and see our Prophet Mohammed. When he reached the Prophet, he said, "Efendim, three wolves came to where I was grazing my flock and asked me to give one sheep to each of them. I refused to do this, however, without first having your permission. That is why I am here."

"What did they say? Those wolves usually eat the sheep they see."

"No, efendim, they swore that they would not eat any of them while I was away."

"How did they swear to this?"

"The first wolf said, 'If I touch any of your sheep, may there be heaped upon me all the sins of those who do not go to prayers when they hear the ezan.' The second wolf said, 'If I touch one of your sheep, may there be heaped upon me all the sins of those men who rear daughters but keep them from men and from marriage.' And

<sup>2</sup>This is one of the tokens of the sacredness attributed to hospitality by Moslems.

the third said, 'If I touch any of your sheep, may I have heaped upon me the sins of all those men who treat themselves better than they do their guests.'

"My son, those were not wolves. Go back there. They were Hızır. I might hear the ezan, but if I were blind and had no one to take me by the hand to lead me to the mosque, I could not go. In that case, I might have a young but mature daughter of marriageable age, but I would not be able to take her out in public where she might be seen, because I couldn't see to do so. If people came to visit me while I was blind, I would be unable to know for certain I was treating them better than or worse than I was treating myself. I simply would not know. Why don't you go now?"<sup>3</sup>

The shepherd returned to his flock. He found all his animals just as he had left them. He counted them one by one, and there were none missing.

Suddenly a wolf appeared as if out of nowhere. "Goodbye," it said and disappeared.

This is the end of my story.

[Ahmet Uysal: "Was it Hızır that appeared in the form of a wolf and then disappeared?"

Narrator: "Hızır was wandering about in the form of a wolf. He also travels in the form of a human being, but the shepherd saw Hızır as

<sup>3</sup>This becomes a kind of parable in which certain religious principles are discussed.

blindness

a wolf. Such beings are ermis people.<sup>4</sup> These ermis people show themselves in different forms to ordinary people. They will sometimes show themselves to people who are angry or who are greatly depressed. Hızır may also arrive between the afternoon and the night, when the doors of necessity [need] open.<sup>5</sup> Hızır may also appear when someone is very busy or is drinking, and he will then ask questions that might anger or irritate one, but if the person can control his annoyance and accept these questions as being reasonable, he may receive answers to the questions.

Hızır may ask a question, like, 'What are you doing?' Or he may say, 'Come and sit here by me so that we may talk.' If the person cannot control his temper and says, for example, 'Go away and mind your own business. I have other things to do,' Hızır will leave.

I have heard from our elders and from scholars that these ermis people approach ordinary human beings three times a year. Of course, no one knows just how they will appear, because they are unpredictable. They always appear in some different form. They may even appear to you in the

<sup>4</sup>Ermek means reach or attain. Ermis people are those said to have attained a blessed status and are saints.

<sup>5</sup>It is thought that in twilight hours saints' tombs, where people go to ask for help, have their door or window open; i.e., at that time saints are most receptive to prayers.

form of a good friend." ]<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>This is the very stuff of which saints' legends are made. Throughout the medieval period, countless saints' legends flourished in both Moslem and Christian lands. In Jewish belief Elijah may appear to mortals as an old, feeble, and needy person. If he is treated hospitably and respectfully, the person so receiving him will be blessed with good luck. The same is said of Hızır in Moslem lands. It is no accident that the Elijah and Hızır legends are similar, for one aspect of Hızır is definitely derivative from the Jewish tradition. May 6, the day especially sacred to Hızır in Turkey, is called Hidrellez, a combination of Hızır and Elias (the Turkish word for Elijah).--See Warren S. Walker and Ahmet E. Uysal, "An Ancient God in Modern Turkey: The Cult of Hızır," Journal of American Folklore, 86 (1973), 286-289.