

Story 767 (1970 Tape 13)

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The Innocent Yürük Who Defiled the Mosque

There was a Yürük¹ who lived in the mountains with his flock. After he had lived a nomadic life for many years, he became tired of that kind of existence, and he decided to live in a settled community. He thought that if he lived in a village he might overcome his ignorance and learn many new things. So he moved to a village.

Shortly after he moved there one of the villagers decided to buy a sheep from this Yürük, and he hoped to cheat him and get the animal very cheaply. The Yürük finally sold the villager one of his poorer sheep.

The villager was a very clever man, and he decided to play a trick on the Yürük. He invited the Yürük to have

¹A Yürük (Yörük) is a member of the only fully nomadic tribe still in Turkey. They earn what money they need by selling the products of their large herds of sheep, goats, horses, and camels. They live in large mohair tents. During warm-weather months they graze their flocks in the Taurus Mountains in low-rent pastures. When winter approaches they migrate through the Cilician Gates to the Mediterranean coast to a warmer climate. During Spring and Fall migrations, their flocks may block traffic for hours at a time.

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breakfast at his home on a bayram² day. They would have an early breakfast, and then they would go to the mosque together for the prayer service. He said to the Yürük, "You come to my house for breakfast, and after that we shall go the bayram service together."

The host put some laxatives in the food which he served his guest for breakfast. When they had finished eating they went to the mosque. In the middle of the bayram service the Yürük accidentally began defecating in his trousers. Mortified at his offense, the Yürük fled from the mosque. He later fled from the village too, for he felt that he could no longer live there after having committed such a great offense.³

After many years of living elsewhere, this Yürük one day decided to revisit his old village. He traveled to a point close to the village, but before entering the village

²A bayram is a religious holiday.

³It would be sacrilegious to defecate in a mosque at any time, but the offense is more heinous during a prayer service, for it destroys the spiritual purity acquired by all worshipers through their ritual ablutions before entering the mosque. If anyone makes any bodily discharge, it pollutes the service. The entire congregation must then leave the mosque, take new ritual ablutions, re-enter the mosque, and recommence the service from the beginning. A bayram service would be a long one.

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itself, he went to the outskirts where the village fountain was. He wanted to discover what the latest gossip of the village was and what the favorite topics of conversation were now, and he knew that the best source of such information would be the women who came there to draw water.⁴

As the women were doing their work at the fountain, the Yürük sat nearby eating a piece of bread and listening to their chatter. "My child is now so-and-so many years old," one said. "My son is this old," another said. Someone else said, "Why don't you have your son married to her daughter?" Finally one of the women said, "I remember very well the day on which my oldest son was born. It was on the day that the Yürük defecated in the mosque."

When he heard this, the Yürük realized that his impropriety in the mosque would never be forgotten in his lifetime. He decided, therefore, not to enter the village. Instead, he returned to his nomadic way of life.

⁴The village fountain, like the scuttle-butt on a sailing vessel, was a place where gossip and rumor were exchanged.