

Story 877 1964 Tape 2)

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Hacı¹ Mehmet Efendi² and the "Cenabetler"³

There was once a gentleman named Hacı Mehmet Efendi of Mecca who came to Istanbul to live. By profession he was a grocer, but he also sold various other odds and ends in his shop. After walking about in Istanbul for a while, he bought a modest little shop in Üsküdar, which was, at that time, a very plain and unpretentious part of the city.⁴

Each morning when he heard the ezan⁵ chanted for the morning prayer service, he went to the mosque and participated in the worship. After the service was over, he would go to his shop, where he would usually have a very good day of

¹ Hacı means pilgrim. After a person has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca, this honorific always precedes his/her name.

² Efendi is a term of respect that follows a man's name. It once was applied to men of distinction, but in recent years its prestige has been so devaluated that now it is applied only to children and servants.

³ A cenabet is a person who has not followed sexual intercourse immediately with a bath; a person in such a state of impurity brings bad luck both to himself and to those with whom he has any contact. Cenabet may also be used as an adjective.

⁴ Üsküdar is a district of Istanbul on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus.

⁵ The call to prayer made from the minaret of a mosque.

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business activity. In fact, his business got on very well. One day three wags observed how much business he did and guessed at how much profit he probably made. They decided among themselves to upset Hacı Mehmet Efendi's business for a day. Their leader said to his companions, "One of you will hold the left corner; one of you will hold the right corner; and I shall hold the middle."⁶ After each prayer service, one of us will intercept him as he comes to his shop and ask for the location of the nearest bath."¹⁴⁻¹⁶

The next morning, Hacı Mehmet Efendi went, as usual, from the prayer service at the mosque to his shop. Saying, "Bismillah!"⁷ he opened the door of his shop.

Before he could enter his shop, however, he was greeted by the wag from the left side, "Selâmünaleyküm, O Hacı Father!"

"Aleykümselâm,"⁸ he answered.

"Hacı Father, I am a stranger," said the wag.

"A stranger?"

⁶ Humorously "up-stage," melodramatic military language for saying that one will approach from the left, one from the right, and one from the center.

⁷ "In the name of God," said by devout Moslems at the beginning of any and every undertaking.

⁸ The traditional greetings between Moslem strangers: Peace be unto you / And peace be unto you too.

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"Yes. Tell me quickly where there is a bath, a bath!"

"Take the first turn to the right and then the next one to the left. Facing you will then be a fountain and a gate. The gate is the entry to a bath." After he had given the man these directions, he said to himself, "That fellow was in such a hurry to find a bath that he must have been a cenabet!" He was upset by this situation and concluded that it would not be wise to start his day's work until he had again taken his ablutions^{15, 16} and gone to another prayer service.⁹ He therefore closed his shop and went to a coffeehouse^{15, 16}, where he remained until the noon prayer service was announced.

After taking his ablutions at the mosque fountain and attending the noon prayer service, Hacı Mehmet Efendi returned to his shop. As he was unlocking the shop door, the wag from the right side called to him, "Selâmünaleyküm.

"Aleykümselâm," he answered.

"Hacı Father, I am a stranger."

"A stranger?"

"Yes. Tell me quickly where there is a bath!"

"Take the first turn to the right and then the next one to the left. Facing you there will then be a fountain and a

⁹ After taking ritual ablutions before a prayer service, one is said to be in a state of spiritual purity. One remains so until something impure destroys the effect of the ablutions.

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gate. The gate is the entry to a bath." As the man ran off, Hacı Mehmet Efendi said to himself, "O my God, I have run into another cenabet! This is not a good time for business, for I shall have bad luck!" Thinking in this way, he locked up the shop and returned to the coffeehouse again.

When the afternoon prayer service was announced from the minaret, he went to the mosque yard, took his ritual ablutions, and entered the mosque for the worship. Again he went to his shop, thinking that he might still do some business that day. As he was unlocking the shop door, however, he was again greeted, "Selâmünaleyküm."

"Aleykümselâm," he answered. And then before the wag could utter a word, Hacı Efendi said, "You're a stranger? You need a bath quickly? Turn first to the right and then to the left, and facing you there will then be a fountain and a gate. The gate is the entry to a bath." After giving the man these directions, he said to himself, "By God, the whole city must be cenabet! This is no day for business!" Saying this, he locked up his shop without even entering it and returned home