

Story 921 1981 Tape 8)

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of Sarıkaya, Yozgat
Province

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Sahmeran ¹²⁶⁻ Sahmeran¹ Sacrificed to Cure ¹²⁵⁻¹³⁰ King's Illness *Sahmeran*

There was once a man named Camesep who was a woodcutter. He and several companions went to the forest every day to cut wood. One day while they were on their way to cut wood, discovered a honey well.² It was filled with excellent honey. They dug out this honey, took it to town, and sold it for a good price. They all made a great amount of money this way. Digging deeper and deeper into the honey well, they finally reached the bottom. Being curious to know more about the bottom of the well, they tied a rope around the waist of Camesep in order to lower him to the bottom, but when he was halfway down, they cut the rope. Then they ran away, leaving him in the well

When Camesep reached the bottom of the well, he saw a beetle digging a hole into the side of the well, and Camesep noticed that there was a light shining through that hole.

¹Mythical King of Snakes mentioned frequently in Persian and Turkish tales.

²Although honeybees usually swarm in hollow trees, some do build hives in the ground.

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Widening the hole which the beetle had started, Camesep soon enlarged it enough so that he could pass through it. When he did so, he came to a large and beautiful garden where there were many tables and chairs. Since he was by then very tired, he sat down in one of the chairs and fell asleep.

The owner of this garden was Şahmeran, King of Snakes. When Camesep awakened, he was welcomed by Şahmeran, who invited him to be his guest. Camesep accepted this hospitality, and he lived for seven years in the palace of Şahmeran. To keep his guest from becoming bored there, Şahmeran told him stories. He told the young man a new story every day.

One day as Şahmeran was telling a story, he heard Camesep give a long sigh, "Ah-h-h-h!" The King of Snakes understood at once that Camesep missed his own land and wished to return there. Şahmeran said to him, "I could lead you back to the upper world, but the human being is nursed with raw milk³ and is not trustworthy. You could do harmful things to me."

Camesep said, "I would not do a single thing to harm you Trust me!" He then took an oath not to harm Şahmeran in any way. Şahmeran at once led the young man back to earth.

The ruler of Adana at that time had what seemed to be an incurable illness. No one had been able to find a remedy

³An expression suggesting the qualities of an animal which would forget its benefactors.

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for it. One day, however, a wise doctor said to the king's attendants, "If you wish to cure your king, you will have to find Şahmeran, King of Snakes. Then you must cut him into three parts: head, middle, and tail. These parts must be boiled in separate kettles. Then the king's doctors must drink the broth from the middle part. This broth will give them ability to understand the language of plants, and they will then be able to discuss with the plants which herbs to in order to cure the king. But be careful that no one drinks the broth from either the head or the tail of Şahmeran, for that person who does so will die immediately."

The king's men asked this doctor, "How can we find Şahmeran?"

The doctor replied, "There must be people living in this region who have seen the King of Snakes and can tell you where he might be found. Anyone who has seen Şahmeran develops red spots on his body

The king's attendants then said, "Surely someone from this kingdom must have seen Şahmeran, and we must find that person." They had a very large public bath constructed, and they issued orders that everyone between the ages of seven and seventy must bathe there. They hoped that in this way could detect someone marked with the red spots of Şahmeran. When Comesep learned of this order, he avoided going to

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that large bath. He said to himself, "If they should take a look at me in the bath, they would know that I had seen Şahmeran. Then they would torture me until they got from me information about where Şahmeran lives." But the king's men used geomancy,⁴ which revealed to them that there was indeed a man in that town somewhere who had seen Şahmeran. The king's men then started searching every house in the town, one by

They finally found Camesep and ordered him to take his clothes off. When he did so, his many red spots were visible to the searchers. They took Camesep to the king's palace

there they said to him, "If you do not tell us where Şahmeran lives, we shall hang you. Decide very quickly!"

The result was that poor Camesep was forced to tell what well Şahmeran lived in. As soon as he had done so, all of the hocas⁵ went to the top of that well and began reciting prayers in order to draw Şahmeran out of the well.⁶ Finally,

⁴Turkish people practice a form of geomancy or "divining" known as remel or remil. This is accomplished by the use of several multi-surfaced objects--sometimes dice, sometimes the knuckle bones of sheep. To each face of the object some value or meaning has been assigned. When these objects are all together cast upon the ground, the signs, symbols, and values of the facets turned upward supposedly convey a message. The whole action is called "casting remil."

⁵A hoca is a Moslem priest.

⁶The prayers used in this context apparently have incantatory power.

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after one especially long prayer, Şahmeran could no longer resist, and so he came forth. When he came out, he looked into Camesep's face with great disappointment. Sad and miserable about had happened, Camesep told everything to Şahmeran and then added, "This was really not my doing. They forced me to tell. I am very sorry.

The king's men wanted to carry Şahmeran to the palace, but the King of Snakes would not allow them to do so. He said to Camesep, "You carry me to the king's palace."

Camesep picked up Şahmeran and placed him inside his shirt to protect him. As they were going along, Şahmeran said to Camesep, "Now they will cut me into three pieces. They will then boil the three parts separately and pour the broth from the three parts into three separate bottles. They will put the broth from my head in the first bottle, the broth from my middle section in the second bottle, and the broth from my tail in the third. You must arrange to switch the places of the first and second bottles. If you cannot switch them and if you should drink from the first bottle, the broth it contains would kill you at once. The same effect would come from drinking the broth in the third bottle. You must drink of only the broth in the second bottle. Don't forget that!"

When they reached the palace, the king's men cut Şahmeran into three parts and cooked each part separately

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They poured the broth into three separate bottles, and then they lined up the bottles. Just before they were going to order Camesep to drink the broth in the first bottle, he shouted to them, "Run! Run! The condition of the king is rapidly growing much worse!"

While the king's men moved about in confusion at this announcement, Camesep switched the positions of the first and second bottles. When they then ordered him to drink the first bottle, he drank the first bottle in the row of bottles but that was now actually the second bottle. It had no visible effect upon him, but all those who drank from the other two bottles died at once.

Ahmet Uysal: Was Camesep an apprentice of Lokman Hekim?⁷

Ali Çiftçi: No, Lokman Hekim was long before the time of Camesep.

Ahmet Uysal: Is there any relationship at all, then, between Camesep and Lokman Hekim?

Ali Çiftçi: No. In fact, this story is much longer than the one about Lokman Hekim.⁷

A messenger then came to Camesep and said, "The king wants to see you at once."

As Camesep was walking to the king's palace, every plant along the way spoke to him. Each told him what human ailment

⁷Legendary ancient physician.

Language of plants
human ailments
spoken by plants

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it could cure, and it was from this information that Camesep discovered a remedy for the king's illness. It was through the use of that plant that the king was cured and his health completely restored.