

Story 947 1977 Tapes 27
and 28)

Narrator: Behçet Mahir

Location: Erzurum, capital city
of Erzurum Province

Date: March 22, 1977

Saint 211
Habik Father¹ on Virtue

Habik Father used to walk through the city of Erzurum twice a week. All the people would come to see him while he was on these walks, and they would ask him for advice about various things. Back in those days he had a black slave who used to accompany him on his walks. One day while Habik Father was walking on Yenikapı Street, followed by his slave, that black slave saw a red gold² coin that someone had dropped. Bending down quickly, the slave picked up the gold coin. Nobody saw him do this, but Habik Father was aware of what had happened without having to see it. Turning his head back toward the slave, he said, "A straight man does not bend down. What did you do? Leave there what you got and follow me." The helpless black servant left the red gold coin on the street and followed along behind Habik Father again

¹ Habik Father was one of the best-known saints of the Erzurum region.

² Pure gold is never red, but Turkish peasants commonly refer to red gold as some especially valuable kind of gold. It appears in many Turkish folktales. Any gold that has a reddish color has been adulterated with some other metal, usually copper.

One Friday not long after that, Habik Father went to the mosque for prayer service. He had at that time a faithful servant named Ahmet who did the cleaning and cooking at the lodge.³ Each Friday at prayer time Ahmet helped Habik Father remove his shoes before entering the mosque and then put them back on when he left. On the Friday I am telling you about, Habik Father entered the mosque, and the prayer service began. Before long, Habik Father was wet from his head to his feet. Why? There was a man just ahead of him who was sleeping and snoring. Habik Father's servant, Ahmet started prodding that man with his foot in an effort to awaken him. Who was that man? Nobody seemed to know. The fellow did not awaken at all but just continued to sleep. But there were some eyes which were able to see the man recognize him.

Here is some verse that applies to this situation:

Eyes that can see to the heart are wise;

Knowing perfection is hard to attain

The caravan passes. Measure the curtain of human life and see what it holds. The human body is like the caravan, for it too passes as life passes. It is even now departing.

³ The reference here is to a dervish tekke, a monastery or convent.

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Look quickly backward and forward and gauge the distance you have gone, for this is your last chance to do so. The grave awaits all at the end of the road. See how all people come and then go! We hear from the left and we hear from the right, "Hasan has gone! Hüseyin has gone too!"⁴ We cannot linger for long before we too will go. So open your eyes and take action before it is too late!

Everyone was very curious about the fact that Habik Father had sweated so profusely during the prayer service. After the service had ended, Ahmet helped Habik Father put his shoes on again, and the saint then said, "Ahmet, come along with me." After they had returned to the dervish lodge, Habik Father said, "Ahmet, son, go to Kapan's bakery, and after giving them my greetings, tell them to make a good yağlı⁵ for us. Then return to Lâlepaşa Mosque and find there the man who was sleeping during the prayer service. Speak

⁴ The narrator might have said Ahmet and Mehmet (equivalent to the American Tom, Dick, and Harry) have gone, but he chose names of men who had long been a legend of passing. Hasan and Hüseyin, sons of Caliph Ali, are considered martyrs of Shi'ite Islam. Hasan, the fifth Caliph, was forced to abdicate and return to Medina, where he died, reputedly from poisoning. Hüseyin, the younger son, was slaughtered while fighting fanatically to defeat his father's foes and recapture the Caliphate. Neither achieved much in his life, but both in their dying crystallized the Shi'ite sect.

⁵ A kind of pie made of ground beef, a special kind of bread dough, and special seasoning.

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into his ear very softly, "Habik Father is awaiting your presence at lunch. He sends you his greetings and invites you to share the noon meal with him."

When Ahmet the servant heard this, he said to himself, "Oh, oh! now we are going to put our foot into something!" But, of course, he set out to do as he had been instructed. He went to the bakery and ordered that a yağlı be prepared. Then he proceeded to Lâlepaşa Mosque and found the man still sleeping there. He spoke into the man's ear quietly the words that Habik Father had told him to say.

The sleeper awakened suddenly and asked in surprise, "Is Habik Father here?"

"Yes," said Ahmet

Bareheaded, barefooted, and wearing ragged clothes, man arose and began walking rapidly in the direction of Habik Father's house. Helper Ahmet tried to keep up with this man, but he was unable to do so and was left behind. This confused Ahmet, who said to himself, "Never before in all my life have I seen this man. He is not from Erzurum, and yet he knows exactly how to go to get to Habik Father's house. He gives the appearance of having traveled that road quite frequently."

When the man reached the dervish lodge, he entered and said, "Ah, Habik, my brother!"

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And Habik Father responded, "Oh, welcome, welcome, brother!"

Now listen to what his brother then said to Habik Father:

Observe this world and practice goodness.

If you achieve goodness, do so among good men.

Virtue cannot be attained by all men

Choose as companions only those who are good

Habik Father then responded, "Oh, please forgive us! Forgive our ignorance!"

The two wise men then sat down, and Ahmet served them their lunch. After they had eaten and talked for a while, Habik Father said to his servant, "Ahmet, show the road to this other father."

After Ahmet had shown the road to the guest and returned, Habik Father began scolding his helper: "Did you enjoy what happened? Were you pleased by what you caused our guest to say? You caused that father to speak very sour words to me. He said,

Observe this world and practice goodness.

If you achieve goodness, do so among good men

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Virtue cannot be attained by all men.

Choose as companions only those who are good.

The man meant this: 'You have taken into your lodge a person who is not a real man. Find the real man and educate the real man!'

Yes, the seeds of wisdom must be inside a person. teacher can do little if the student does not show some effort, does not try hard enough. What can a teacher do by himself? Nothing. The teacher cannot succeed unless the student works hard. Therefore we must all work hard to learn, and we must work honestly.

I always tell my nation, "This nation is mine! This government is mine! And I am mine too! O Sons of Turkey, stay wide awake! Be alert! Sleep not, but work! This country is yours, and you should work for this country! Work for your fathers and mothers! Work for the government, the nation! Everyone loves hardworking people, especially if they work for the good and work for the right. Work in seriousness! Let the heart within you be the same as your exterior. They may speak two different languages, but they come from the same book!"

Habik Father was not the only one of his kind. There have been many such saints who have come and gone, and there

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will be still more who will come and go. People of this area who are thirty or thirty-five years of age remember Ahmet. He lived in the house of Habik Father, and he died there about twenty-five years ago.⁶ ¶

⁶ This can hardly be taken literally if one is to give credence to Behçet Mahir's tale (ATON 945) which pictures Habik Father as a contemporary of the fourteenth-century sultan, Murat I.