

Story 980 (1985 Tape 3)

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The Apprentice Shoe Salesman's Prayers Fulfilled

There was once a widow who had a son. She wished to place this boy in a trade of some kind so that he could earn a living.

greeted him,

"Brother," she said, "I am entrusting this son of mine first to Allah and then to you. I do not want any money for his service. Instead, you can just send our daily bread to us. That is all I shall ask. Let my son train to become a shoe merchant like you. As you know, his father passed away recently."

shoe seller answered, "It would be my pleasure to do that, Aunt Hatice."

boy was employed in the large shop, but he was quite different from the others who worked there. He was a jokester

¹The traditional exchange of greetings between Moslems who are strangers to each other: May peace be unto you/And may peace be unto you too.

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who used every occasion to make people laugh. The other employees used to say to each other, "Let's listen to him and see what in the world he will say next." They enjoyed humor so much that they often neglected their work just listen to him.

One day someone died, and all of the workers in the shoe shop were very sad. Before long, however, the boy had them all laughing again. Although they laughed at his jokes, they felt that they were not appropriate at that time, and so they complained to the owner. They said, "We like his jokes well enough, but sometimes he creates such humor without considering either the time or the place, without considering whether or not it is appropriate. Yesterday, for example, we were all grieving because of the death of Celâl Efendi's⁵⁵ mother, but he made us all laugh. We were all ashamed of ourselves for laughing in the presence of Celâl Efendi." ^{47, 57}

When the shoe merchant heard this account, he grew very annoyed at the boy and slapped him in an effort to teach him some good manners. He said, "My son, you behaved shamefully yesterday. You should have shared the grief of your fellow workers." In this way the merchant gave the boy some

²Efendi was once a term of respect applied to distinguished men. It followed the given name, as it does here. The status of the term has been so lowered in modern times that it is now applied only to children and servants.

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good advice.

But the boy was greatly upset by this. He said, "Master, I did not know that Celâl Efendi's mother had died. I never ask my fellow workers about such things, and I never ask for anything from them. When I ask for something, I always ask it of Allah. For example, I prayed to Allah, 'My dear Allah please give me a beautiful girl with blue-gray eyes, and give me also a sack of gold.' Having prayed that way, I never give up hope of receiving what I asked for." The owner of the shop slapped him again for making such a wish.

The boy was so very upset that he decided to run away. He walked and walked a great distance until he finally reached İstanbul. Because he came from a small village, he was astounded by many of the things that he saw in the city. He stared rather stupidly all around him. After a while an old man, noticing his confusion, said to him, "Son, come over here. Where are you from? What kind of work are you able to do?"

The boy said, "Oh, father, I can do anything that you of me. I came here from a small village in Anatolia."

The old man thought to himself, "The Anatolians are usually honest people. I shall try to help this young man. Then he said to the boy, "Son, you will work at my house for only one hour, and then I shall pay you a lira for your work."

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In those days a lira was worth a great amount--not the way it is today. Then the old man continued, "But you must not tell anything to anyone about what you have seen in my house. You must hold your tongue about that."

The boy said, "Very well. All right. I shall never tell anything to anyone. Besides, I do not know anyone in this city to whom I could tell anything anyway. I am a stranger here."

The old man then took him to his home. After they had entered the house, the old man extinguished the lamps and lighted a small candle. He said to the boy, "Now take off your outer garments."

The boy was perplexed by this instruction. He thought, "That old man What is he up to? What does he want from me? Why should he want me to be almost naked?"

The old man repeated, "Son, remove your outer clothes keep on only your underwear." The boy did as he was directed

Then the old man led him to another room. It was a dark, somewhat smelly room without any windows. The candle light was too weak to reveal the contents of the room at first, but when the boy's eyes became adjusted to the near-darkness, he saw that the room was full of gold coins. His job was to shovel up the gold and put it into bags so that it would not be tarnished by the dampness in the room. He thought to himself

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"Apparently the old man had me remove my outer garments so that I could not hide any of this gold in my pockets."

The boy shoveled up gold continuously for an hour. The old man then called, "Son, your time is up. You may come out of that room now." After the boy came out and dressed, the old man first paid him his lira and then said, "Son, now you have learned about my house. Look here out this window You can see that there is a mosque behind this house, and in the courtyard of that mosque there is a fountain. Come to that fountain every day, and I shall call for you to work for an hour each day for a lira. Is that agreeable to you?"

"Of course it is!" the boy said with great enthusiasm. "I shall come every day!"

Having dressed completely and having received his lira, the boy left the old man's house and went to an inn.^{50, 5²} There he rented a room for ten para.³ His daily meals there cost him only ten or fifteen para, and so he would be able to save most of his earnings

The days passed quickly. Three days, one week, ten days passed, and every day he received his one lira regularly.

³A para was 1/40 of a kuruş, and a kuruş was 1/100 of a lira. The para was phased out many years ago, and in the 1980s the kuruş has also disappeared. Devaluation has lowered the value of the lira to 1/700 or at times even 1/800 of a dollar, and in such a situation the kuruş loses all significance

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Then one day while he was working his hour in the gold room of the old man's house, he noticed sunlight coming through a small hole where a brick in the outer wall was broken. After a few minutes he saw a small cat entering that room and departing from it through that hole. It seemed that some mischievous boys had tied a sack on the poor cat's neck and then turned the creature loose. The boy thought, "Why don't I fill the cat's bag with gold? Perhaps some poor person will find the cat and be rescued from poverty." Placing some gold in the bag, he tied it around the cat's neck again and forced the cat to leave through the hole in the wall.

The following day the boy went, as usual, to the mosque yard to await the old man's call, but the old man did not appear or send any message. No one called him to work in the old man's house. He went there for several more days, but there was not any further call for him. He thought, "Ah, I should not have put gold in the bag of that cat. The old man must somehow understand what happened. He may even be a saint and thus be able to see without even looking.⁴ I shouldn't have done that. Now I may again become poor and hungry. My savings will not last very long.

⁴ Saints supposedly have many special powers, among them the ability to read minds, prophesy, and intuit the nature of things.

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While he was walking about, sadly and aimlessly, the saw the little cat with the small sack of gold still tied around its neck. Catching the cat at once, he removed the sack of gold. He went to a money changer and exchanged one gold coin into smaller denominations of money.

With his new wealth, the boy went to a clothing shop and bought a new suit and new shoes. On his way back to his inn, he saw a sign announcing that there was a very good house on a large lot for sale at such-and-such a place. When he went to that place to look at the house, he discovered that it was the house of the old man for whom he had worked. It seems that the old man had died and that his daughter had put the house up for sale. At the auction everyone was bidding and bidding and thus driving up the price of the property. The boy asked, "May I enter the bidding?"

"Of course," they said. "If you have enough money to compete with the other bidders, you have as much right to bid on the house as they do."

As soon as he entered the bidding, he said, "I shall 11,000 liras for the house."

The other people interested in the house were astounded. They had been raising the bidding price at the rate of fifty or one hundred liras at a time, and here was a buyer who raised the bid by 1,000 liras. They said to each other,

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"Don't bother to offer any further bids. He wants the house, and he will get it.

Thus the house was sold to the boy. He was very happy to make this purchase, for he knew well what he was getting. He was getting much more than just a house.

A short while later he found a very beautiful girl sitting on his doorstep and crying. Looking more closely at her, he discovered that she had blue-gray eyes. He fell in love with her at once. He asked some of the people standing nearby about this girl. They told him, "Her father died very recently, and she is an orphan now. The man sitting over there is her uncle. If you want to know more, you should ask him about the girl.

Going to the uncle, the boy said, "Will you please give me permission to marry your niece?"⁵

The uncle was most surprised by this question. He thought, "This young man appears to be very rich. Why should he want to get married to my poor orphaned niece?" But he said, "If you wish to marry our niece, we should be greatly pleased." And so they were married under these very unusual circumstances

Shortly after the wedding, the boy had the whole house

⁵This would, in Turkish real life, be an unthinkable way of asking for the hand of a girl, regardless of how impoverished or unfortunate she might be.

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rebuilt. At the same time he opened a very large and luxurious shoe store where only the most expensive shoes were sold. Knowing the secret of the room full of gold, he was able to do all this with no difficulty.

Now let us leave him for a while and turn to his mother. The day after her son had run away, this woman went to Abdullah Bey's shoe store, where her son had been apprenticed. She said to the owner, "Oh, Abdullah Bey, my son did not come home last night. Where is my son? Tell me! I want my son back, dead or alive

The boy's name was Ahmet. Abdullah Bey posted notices requesting information about a shoe-seller's apprentice named Ahmet, but there was no response to these notices. He then offered a reward for information about the whereabouts of Ahmet, but still he could not locate Ahmet. He spent so much time and money searching for the boy that he lost everything. After he was forced to close his store, he went out along the roads, wandering far and wide in search of the boy.

After traveling to many different places in the country, he came one day to Istanbul, where he asked everyone that he met about a shoe-seller's apprentice named Ahmet. No one knew of such a person, but several people said to him, "We know nothing about an apprentice named Ahmet. The only Ahmet we know about who has anything to do with selling shoes is

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Ahmet Bey, the owner of a very large shoe store. He came from somewhere in Anatolia, but he was a very rich man and not an apprentice. He bought a very old house and rebuilt it so well that it now looks like a palace."

After he had heard several remarks of that kind, Abdullah Efendi grew very curious about this wealthy Ahmet Bey. He went to Ahmet's store and walked about observing all it held. As he was doing so, Abdullah was observed by Ahmet from his large and comfortable office. He called out to him, "Abdullah Efendi Abdullah Efendi!"

Abdullah Efendi was amazed to hear someone in Istanbul calling his name. He looked to his left, he looked to his right, and then he saw the boy gesturing at him and calling him. He did not, however, recognize the boy as his former apprentice, Ahmet, for Ahmet had changed a great deal. He grown much taller. He was now very well dressed. When Abdullah finally realized who the boy was, he said, "Ahmet, I was at first unable to recognize you."

"Please sit down, Abdullah Efendi; sit down. I was able to recognize you." He offered Abdullah Efendi coffee and tea, and he then sent a message to his wife saying, "I shall bring a guest home with me. Get everything ready for our guest."

Then he took Abdullah Efendi to his home. After they had eaten their dinner, they went into the parlor to drink

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Ahmet said, "All right, we shall attend to that. Take this sack of gold for yourself. I am so happy and so grateful to you. It was you who made me a real man and a businessman! Give my greetings to my mother. I cannot return to my home area now, but I shall bring my mother here.

Astonished by all of this, Abdullah Efendi said, "Thank you!" and left

These people had their wishes fulfilled, and may we have ours fulfilled too. This is where our story ends