

Story 1000 (1975 Tape I) Narrator: İbrahim Aydın, 78

Location: Aksu village,  
Bozüyük kaza,  
Bilecik Province

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Proving a Woman an Infidel

There were two friends who graduated at the same time from a medrese<sup>1</sup> in İstanbul. They were both very capable men, and eventually one of them became Müfti<sup>2</sup> of Egypt and the other became the Şeyhülislam<sup>3</sup> in İstanbul.

One day the Müfti of Egypt made a religious pronouncement. He said, "Women are by nature infidels and yet a Moslem man needs one of these creatures." This pronouncement was talked about by many people, and before long it became a subject of discussion among the residents of İstanbul

<sup>1</sup> A medrese was a seminary, often part of a mosque complex, in pre-Republican Turkey.

A senior Moslem priest who is appointed to be an interpreter of Moslem religious law.

<sup>3</sup> The highest religious official in the government, at one time a powerful political as well as religious figure. Today in Turkey he is the only religious official in the government, and his role is not political. Today he has jurisdiction over such religious matters as the precise hours for prayer services, schedules for religious holidays, etc.

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When the wife of the Seyhülislam heard about this pronouncement by the Müfti of Egypt, she was disturbed by it. She asked her husband, "Why should your friend say that women are infidels? What is his reason for this? I want you to find out his reason for thinking that, and unless you do, I shall not live with you any longer."

A message was sent to Egypt asking the Müfti to come to İstanbul. After the two old friends had talked for a while, the Seyhülislam said, "My wife is very upset about your pronouncement that women are infidels. How can I prove the truth of your statement to her?"

The Müfti thought for a minute, and then asked, "How much money is spent here for a gift to a woman at the time of her engagement ceremony?"<sup>4</sup>

"About this much," said the Seyhülislam, naming a figure.

"Well, then, let us make up two gift packets

<sup>4</sup> Engagement between a prospective bride and groom is a much more formal and elaborate thing in Turkey than it is in most Western countries. It involves ceremony, special dress, and a large feast attended by all members of both families involved. An engagement gift may be as important as a wedding gift.

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worth that much apiece. In them we shall put earrings,

other kinds of jewelry, and some gold. You will

take both packets home and place them on a table.

Then you will call your wife and point at these

packets. When she opens one of these packets and

finds the earrings and jewelry and gold, she will say,

'This must be for me, but for whom is the other

package?'

"You will then say, 'In my youth, before I was

engaged to you, I was in love with another woman, and

she was in love with me. As it turned out, we were

unable to get married, for you were my kismet, and I

married you. She was married to some other man. Now,

however, her husband is dead, and her friends have

insisted that she marry again. They have come to me

saying, "By the will of God and the recommendation of

the Prophet ask that you marry this woman." This

other packet is an engagement gift for her.'"

<sup>5</sup>When a matchmaker tenders a marriage proposal, he or she always opens the discussion with the formulaic statement "I have come by the will of Allah and the consent / or approval or recommendation / of the Prophet / Mohammed / to ask for the hand of X for Y."

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"Your wife will probably reject this proposal, and then you should say, 'Anyone who rejects the will of God and the recommendation of the Prophet is an infidel!'"

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