

Story 1029 (1974 Tape 17)

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Muhiddin Arabi Vindicated

Muhiddin Arabi was one of the most prominent and saintly individuals of his time.¹ In his day there were many greedy and money-hungry people living in his city.² One day in the mosque he became so annoyed with these materialistic people that he stamped on the floor and said, "What you worship is beneath my feet!"

There was a treasure buried beneath the spot where he had stamped his foot, but the people present did not know that. They seized him and shouted, "He has put our God beneath his feet! Whom or what do we worship? We worship only God!" Holding him securely, they cut off his head and made him a martyr. He was not dismayed by their behavior, for before he was martyred, he knew that he had become one of the saints of God. Before his death he had had inscribed over the gate of the city fortress, "Take my

¹He lived in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, heyday of the Seljuk Empire.

²Born in Spain in 1165, he moved to Damascus, where he spent most of his life as a prominent Sufi mystic.

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revenge¹⁶⁹⁻¹¹² against these people. They have done such-and-such to me." It was written in an abbreviated and cryptic manner, but he felt that when Yıldırım Bayazıt³ reached that city, he would understand its meaning.

Some time later, Yıldırım Bayazıt arrived in the city. By that time he had captured territory on several fronts and expanded the empire. One of the things that he saw upon entering the city was the inscription over the gate of the fortress. God made it possible for him to read it easily and to know that it was addressed to Yıldırım Bayazıt asked those standing around him, "Who is the most prominent old person in this city?"

Members of the audience shout, "Old! Old! Very old! Very old!"⁷

Some of the local people went to a district of city where many old people lived and brought the oldest man they could find. When he was brought into the presence of Yıldırım Bayazıt, the Sultan asked him a question, but

³Yıldırım Bayazıt, the fourth Ottoman Sultan, reigned from 1389 to 1405, and was not of course a contemporary of Muhiddin Arabi. This historical confusion is typical of peasant narrators. They think of an attractive or strong and/or well-known historical figure to fill a given role. This tale is thus doubly legendary: the real Muhiddin Arabi does impossible things and has a real accomplice who is misplaced 200 years in time! In a variant, ATON 391, the ruler of Muhiddin Arabi's time is given as Selim I, who reigned from 1512 to 1520.

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the old man was unable to speak a word. Yıldırım then ordered, "Bring three young virgins." They stripped the clothes from these virgins and they stripped the clothes from the old man. As the old man sat on the ground, three virgins were ordered to press their bodies against his on three sides. This was done to transfer the energy in their young bodies into his body--like putting batteries in a radio.⁴

In this way they enabled this feeble old man to talk, and he began talking like a nightingale. He said, "My Padişah, tell me what you want of me."

Yıldırım Bayazıt said, "Do you know the exact spot where Muhiddin Arabi stamped his foot and said, 'That which you worship is beneath my feet?'"

"Yes, I know the place."

"Where is it? Show it to me."

Following the old man's directions, they went to the mosque. There the old man drew two lines on the floor and said, "He was standing between he-e-e-re and the-e-e-re."

Yıldırım Bayazıt had workers dig at that spot, after they had gone down a short way, they unearthed a huge

⁴This is an obvious anachronism.

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vase⁵ filled with treasure. He then had town criers announce to all the people coming to the mosque for the prayer service, "Inasmuch as today is Friday,⁶ I shall distribute all of this treasure to the worshipers after they have finished their prayers." He then placed the vase by the mosque door and placed an executioner on either side of it.

Word went around among the worshipers, "He said, 'I shall distribute this treasure after you have completed your prayers.' But for those who complete their prayers later than the rest, there may be no more treasure left! Say your prayers quickly!"

Do you know what happened? Those who hastened through their prayers and rushed to the door for a portion of the treasure were handed over to the executioners to be decapitated. Again a call went through the group of worshipers to hasten through their prayers or take the chance of losing

⁵The Turkish term here is küp. A küp may vary in height from about two feet to about eight feet. Like ancient amphora, they are used for storing wine, water, or olive oil. They are as common in the modern Middle East as they were in the ancient Middle East.

⁶Friday is the Moslem Sabbath, and the noon prayer service on Friday is the religious high point of the week. It is common for the affluent to give alms to those poor who are gathered outside the mosque at the end of that service. The sultan's largesse at this time and place is thus traditional.

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their share of the treasure. But those who were really religious people simply looked and then went on praying. What had they to do with the things of this world? They not leave.

After these faithful men had finished their lengthy prayers, the sultan said, "Yes, it is now quite proper to leave." He had a huge meal cooked for them,⁷ and after the meal was completed, he distributed all of the treasure among them. In this way he took revenge against the kind of people who had killed Muhiddin Arabi.

⁷What the narrator says here literally is this: "He a kitchen boiled for them."