

Story 1180 (1990 Tape 4)

Narrator: UnidentifiedLocation: Malatya, capital city
of Malatya ProvinceDate: 1990King of all
SahmeranŞahmeran¹ Sacrificed to Cure Padişah's Illness

Once there was and twice there was not, many years ago, there was a widow with a son named Belkiye. She had wished to have him in some good career, but after he had tried to make a living at this career and that career and many other careers, she grew very discouraged about him. He had, in fact, tried to work at thirty-two different kinds of jobs, but he simply did not persevere in any of them. Very discouraged about this, the woman took him to one of the many donkey drivers in their city. This particular donkey driver was hired to cut wood in the forest and haul it to the city, where it was sold. The widow said to him, "Ahmet Brother, I want to apprentice my son to you. Here he is with his axe. Doing this kind of work, he may be able to earn at least a little money.

Donkey-driver Ahmet agreed to this proposal, and soon after that, he and his woodcutters, including Belkiye, started out for the forest. They were gone for one day, two days, three days, and the widow began to worry about her son.

One day while they were still cutting wood in the forest,

¹Şahmeran (often spelled Şahmaran, the way it was pronounced in this telling) was the legendary King of Snakes. See ATON Notes volume for information on this and other variants

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it began to rain. To protect themselves from the downpour, they crawled into a cave. As they sat there in the cave waiting for the rain to stop, one of the woodcutters was scratching the surface of the cave floor with a stick. After a few minutes he uncovered a stone. It was not a rough stone of natural shape but a chiseled stone that was round on top and had tapered sides. All of the other woodcutters gathered around the digger because they thought that the stone might be a cover to some great buried treasure.² Working together, they tried to raise this chiseled stone. For several minutes they pulled it this way and pulled it that way without being able to raise it. At they were able to slide out of place this large round stone which was as precisely carved as a millstone. Looking beneath the place where the stone had been, they found not buried treasure but a honey well. Although they wanted to have this honey, they had with them no containers in which to put it. Several of them were therefore sent back to the town to get some tulums.³

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in ATON. See ATON Catalogue for ATON numbers for other variants.

²No peasant population is more interested in and involved in treasure hunting than the Turkish peasantry--and with good reason, for many treasures of numerous civilizations and cultures have been unearthed in their country.

³A tulum is the dried and cured skin of a sheep or a goat. Skinned almost intact in one piece, it is readily made into a bag that will hold 3-4 gallons. Before metal and plastic containers were easily accessible to rural Turks, they used tulums to transport thick liquids such as honey, yoghurt, and white cheese (which in Turkey is about the consistency of American cream cheese).

When these men returned with the tulums, everyone started dipping honey from the well into these bags. But after they had reached as far down as they could, there was still much honey at the bottom of the well. Donkey-driver Ahmet said to Belkiye, "We shall lower you into the well and you will dip the remaining honey into tulums. We shall pull up each tulum when you have filled it."

"All right, but don't leave me down there," said the boy.

"No, no! Don't worry about that," said the others

Belkiye climbed down into the well and scraped up every last bit of honey, enough to fill several more bags. Then he called up to the well mouth, "That is all there is here. There is not another scrap of honey down here. Now pull me up."

But they ignored the boy's request. Instead of pulling him up, they slid the chiseled stone back over the mouth of the well and left him there. When they got back to the town, they went to Belkiye's mother and said, "Your son was killed by wolves in the forest. Those wild beasts also tore apart the donkey he was driving. Here are his axe and his donkey's halter."

The woman burst into tears and began crying, "Ah, vah! Ah, vah!"⁴ Ah, my son! Vah, my son!" But what else could she do? Nothing.

⁴Traditional Turkish sounds of grief--at least in folktales.

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Back in the well, Belkiye thought about his difficult situation. How could he possibly get out of the well? While he was thinking deeply about this, he was also idly poking into one wall of the well with a stick.

Climbing through the hole he had made, he entered this garden and began to walk around in it. He found there a number of tables on each of which a snake lay at rest. This frightened him greatly, and he began to withdraw, but one of the snakes, seeing this, approached him and said, "Do not be afraid of us. Although you are a human being and we are snakes, there is no need to fear us. No one will bother you while are here."

Relieved by this comment, Belkiye began to explore the garden further. He discovered that there were at least several hundred tables stretched out in every direction, and most of them had snakes resting upon them. Walking among these many tables, he finally came to one on which was lying Şahmeran.

Şahmeran welcomed Belkiye to his kingdom, and the boy began to live there. To entertain him, Şahmeran told him stories, one after another. This went on for seven years, for Şahmeran did not want his guest to leave. But after seven years Belkiye day said to Şahmeran, "Lead me up out of here to the world above I want to go home.

"Alas, if I take you up there, it will not be long before

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I shall be killed. Because of that, I do not want to take you up." But in spite of that, Şahmeran finally felt ^{PITY} sorry for the boy and led him up to the surface of the earth.

When Belkiye reached his own home, he knocked on the door "Who is there?" his mother asked from inside the house.

"It is I, Mother--Belkiye, your son."

"Impossible! My son died seven years ago. Go away!" said his mother.

I am really your son, Mother! Open the door!"

After some further discussion, his mother opened the door and recognized Belkiye. He told her everything that had happened to him from the time he had left their town with the donkey drivers. He began living at home again, and Belkiye and his mother became determined not to be separated again.

Now it happened that at that time the padişah of their land had a serious illness that his ^{physician 113, 116} doctors had been unable to cure. As his condition was worsening, a doctor at last came along who understood his sickness. He said, "The only way in which you can be cured ¹¹³⁻¹¹⁶ is by eating the flesh of Şahmeran."

The padişah sent his servants out in all directions to search for Şahmeran. They looked everywhere, but they were unable to find him anywhere. Then one of the padişah's assistants said, "There must be someone in this land who is acquainted with Şahmeran and could tell us where to find him. People who have been in his presence develop flaky skin, like small scales, on

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the lower parts of their bodies. You should have a very attractive ^{pubic hair 116 w} bathhouse prepared, and then you should require all of people to come to the bath. They should take turns coming. When they are in the bath, we can see which of them have developed scales."

The padişah followed this advice, and all of the people in the town took their turns coming to the bath--everyone except Belkiye and his mother. When none of the people who came to the bath had any scales, the servants went from house to house to see if there were people who had still not gone to the bath. When they reached Belkiye's house on the outskirts of the town,

said to Belkiye and his mother, "Why haven't you gone to the bath? Today you must go! It is the order of the padişah."

"What does the padişah want from us? We are poor people, and may God help us We cannot go to the bath," said the mother.

"You must go, and it is especially important that your son go," the servants said.

"I cannot go to the bath," said Belkiye. But after some further discussion, they forced him to go to the bath. As soon as he entered the bath, it was revealed that he had scales on his body below the waist.

One of the servants said, "My padişah, this man has seen Şahmeran. See how flaky the lower half of his body is

The padişah said, "Now, Belkiye, I want you to tell me where Şahmeran can be found."

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Knowing that they would kill Şahmeran if they found him, Belkiye said, "I do not know anything about Şahmeran."

"If you do not tell us where he is, I shall have you killed," said the padişah. They argued for some time, but when Belkiye realized that the padişah would really kill him unless he revealed the whereabouts of Şahmeran, he at last led the servants to the honey well.

While this was going on, Şahmeran knew what was happening to Belkiye. At the same time, Belkiye knew that Şahmeran was aware of this. When Şahmeran came forth from the well, a

115-116 Jewish servant of the padişah was directed to carry him to the palace. Şahmeran said, "Keep your hands off me, dirty Jew! Belkiye, you carry me." As they were going to the palace, Şahmeran said to Belkiye, "Didn't I tell you that if I came to the surface of the earth, I would be killed?"

"I knew that, but they forced me to reveal your hiding place."

"It is all right. I knew exactly what was happening to you. You will be told to cut off my head, but don't do that. Say that you are afraid of me. The Jew will then cut off my head. Then you will be told to boil my flesh, drink the first broth made with it, and then place the second batch of broth in a bottle. But don't drink the first broth, for it would be harmful to you. Put the first broth in the bottle and drink the second broth. If you drank the first broth, it would cause

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you to swell grossly; but if you drink the second broth, you will become a very skilled medical doctor, another Lokman.⁵ The padişah will, of course, eat my flesh."

When they reached the palace, Belkiye placed Şahmeran on the floor. "Now cut its head off," ordered the padişah.

"I can't! I am afraid," said Belkiye.

The Jew said, "I can do it. I am not afraid." He beheaded Şahmeran. Then he said, "Belkiye, boil this flesh. Drink the first broth that comes from the boiling, and put the second broth in a bottle."

Belkiye boiled the flesh of Şahmeran in a kettle. He skimmed off the first broth and put it into a bottle. Then after the flesh was boiled some more, he drank the second broth.

Belkiye

The Jew became so

swollen that he was the size of a room.

⁵Lokman was a legendary figure, one of whose roles was that of a physician. He is sometimes referred to as a contemporary of Plato.