

Story 1387 (1989 Tape 6)

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Child Prodigy as Hatmaker

In earlier times almost all of the hats manufactured in Konya were made of felt, and both the felt business and the hat business employed many people. There was once a widow who made an arrangement with a hatmaker to take her son into his shop as an apprentice. In this way the boy would learn a trade and would be able to make a good living.

The boy began to work at the hat shop, but he worked there for just one day. On the morning of the second day, the boy did not get up but remained in his bed sleeping. His mother shook him and said, "Wake up, Son, or you will be late for work!"

The boy answered, "Mother, I am not going to go to work any more

"Why not, Son? How are you going to learn a trade unless you go to work?"

"Mother, I learned the whole trade yesterday. I now know perfectly well how to make hats from felt.

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Disturbed by this remark, the woman said, "Oh, Son, don't say such a thing! Is it possible that you could learn the whole business of hatmaking in just one day?"

"Yes, Mother, I learned all about it. If you push down on the middle of a piece of felt, it will turn into a fez.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, if you pull up on the center of the piece of felt, it will become a külâh."<sup>2</sup>

Later that morning the boy's master came to the door and asked the mother why her son had not come to work. The woman answered, "My son did not go to work today because he said that he had learned the whole hatmaking trade yesterday."

"Aman!<sup>3</sup> How could he have learned so much in such a short time?"

"Oh, I don't know. He just said that if one presses

<sup>1</sup>A flattopped hat shaped like a truncated cone. In the later Ottoman period it replaced the turban as the most prestigious form of male headwear. Because of its association with Islam, it was outlawed in the new secular Republic of the 1920s, though it is still worn in some other Moslem countries.

<sup>2</sup>A pointy-topped conical hat.

<sup>3</sup>Aman is a common exclamation in Turkish. It may (negatively) mean alas or oh, dear! More positively, it may suggest oh, my goodness or the equivalent of wow! or golly!

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down on the middle of a piece of felt, the hat will be a fez, and if one pulls up on the middle, it will become a külâh."

"O Allah, Allah!" said the amused master. "Here is a boy so clever that he not only learns the hatmaking trade in a day but also teaches it to his mother that same evening!"