

Story 1526 (1973 Tape 13)

Narrator: Bayram Sat (Köpekçi Bayram)

Location: Senir village,
Silifke kaza,
İçel Province;
taped at Kargıcak
village

Date: 1973

Evil Repaid with Good

There were two friends who were going to travel together. Before they departed from home, however, they were visited by Hızır,¹ who asked each of them, "Would you rather have the great suffering that is your lot early in life or later?"

The first man² answered, "Let me have that suffering while I am young."

The second man said, "Give me my suffering when I am older."

"Very well," said Hızır. "That is the way it will be."

As they were starting on their journey, the second man

¹Once a water deity and fertility god--and still both those figures to most farmers in southern Turkey--Hızır is more widely known now as a granter of wishes, a last-minute rescuer from disaster, and a special messenger and agent of God. In these latter three functions he appears fairly frequently in Turkish folktales. Not mentioned by name in the Koran, a chapter of that work was later named after him. He is assumed to be the person instructing Moses in Chapter XVIII of the Koran, where he is referred to by God simply as "our servant."

²The two characters are not given regular names but are called Good and Evil. While the one is a good person and the other is evil, they appear here in a folktale, not a Morality Play. We have not, therefore, used those abstractions as names. The reader may, if he/she wishes, restore the abstractions.

Story 1526

said, "Friend, let us not eat from both our food packs at the same time. Let us both eat the food from your pack until it is consumed, and then we shall eat the food from my pack."

"All right," said the first man.

Whenever they became hungry as they were traveling along, they ate their meals from the supply of food brought by the first man. The day after that first pack of food had been finished, the second man opened up his own food pack and started to eat from it. When the first man went and sat by him, the second man asked, "What is it?"

"Well, friend, I am hungry."

"Then get out some of your bread and eat it," said the second man

"But we ate all of my food!" answered the first man.

"I shall give you a slice of bread for one of your eyes." The first man took out one of his eyes and exchanged it for a piece of bread.

Two or three days later they were sitting in the shade of a large tree. The second man said, "Give me your other eye and I shall give you some bread."

"But, friend, I will then not be able to see at all!"

"I don't know about that, but if you want any bread, you must give me an eye for it." Again the first man exchanged an

Story 1526

eye for some bread, and then he was blind.

After the second man had left, the first man sat there beneath the tree until it became cool and quiet. He knew then that it was night. To protect himself, he climbed to the top of the tree.

It so happened that beneath that tree was the place where the fairies met once every seven years, and that very night was the time of their meeting. After they had gathered there they exchanged secrets known only to fairies. One said "Human beings do not know it, but there is much treasure among those ruins over there."

"Yes," said another fairy. "They also do not know that there is a great supply of water near the surface of the ground between here and those ruins."

"Nor do they know the medicinal power of the leaves of this tree above us. If a blind man pulled leaves from this tree and laid them across his eyes, he would recover his sight."³

³In tales of this kind the virtuous but abused person may overhear valuable pieces of information uttered by jinns, fairies, demons, or other supernatural agents. Just as often in Turkey, he may acquire this information from a conversation among 2 or 3 birds. Inasmuch as they speak in human language, such birds also seem to be of supernatural origin. In some Moslem tales, the birds seem clearly to be (or to represent) members of such mystical groups of saints as The Three, The Seven, The Twelve, or The Forty.

Story 1526

The first man in the treetop heard all of their conversation. He took his right eye from his left pocket and his left eye from his right pocket.⁴ He placed them in his eye sockets and then covered them with leaves from that tree. In this way he regained his sight.

next morning the first man asked the first person he saw, "Who owns this land?"

It is owned by Ahmet Ağa."⁵

first man then went and found Ahmet Ağa. He said to Ahmet Ağa, "Friend, give me a tiny piece of land. It need be no bigger than the size of an ox."

"Why would you want such a small piece of land?"

"Because it would be something more than I have now answered the first man.

After the ağa had agreed to fill this strange request, the first man borrowed one of Ahmet Ağa's oxen and a piece of

⁴The narrator has omitted part of this tale, the part which explains how the protagonist recovered his eyes.

⁵An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

Story 1526

rope. He then stood the ox in the small ruin the fairies had talked about. Then he drew the rope in a circle around the ox and claimed that as the piece of land the ağa had granted. He then dug the treasure out of the ruin, and with some of that wealth he bought a large piece of the ağa's land, including that part above the underground water supply. With the buried treasure and the money he made from selling the water, the first man became so prosperous that he built many inns and baths. The suffering Hızır had warned him about had ended.

The second man wandered about for seven years, but he had not been successful. He finally went back to the tree where he had left his fellow traveler. He saw now, however, that there were inns and baths there. Wondering who owned all of this property, he went to the mansion nearby, knocked on the door, and called, "Hey, friend!"

"Yes! Come in!" answered the first man from inside. He had recognized the voice of the traveler

After they had talked of this and that for a while, the second man said, "I once left a good man beneath that tree over there.

"Who was that good man?"

"Well, his eyes were blind and

"It was I," said the first man.

"I don't believe it!"

Story 1526

"Well, you can see that my eyes do not look normal. See how they squint!"

"How did you recover your vision? And how did you get all of this wealth?"

"It is all the result of information I received at night after I had climbed to the top of that tree," said the first

"Then let me go to the top of that tree, too."

"Yes, go!"

That evening the second man climbed to the top of the tree. He was very envious of the success of the first man. He said to himself, "I shall take all of that property away from him."

It was exactly seven years since the first man had heard fairies' conversation, and when it grew dark the fairies returned for their usual meeting beneath the tree. Some of them were angry this time. One of them said, "Some human being took from beneath the ruin the treasure I told you about at our last meeting!"

Another fairy said, "Some human being also withdrew all of the underground supply of water that I told you about."

Another said, "Could it be the same human being who took the treasure and the water?"

Story 1526

Still another asked, "Could there be a human being hiding in the top of this tree during our meetings and listening to what we say?"

"Climb up and see!" they all said.

That fairy climbed to the top of the tree and called down, "Yes, there is a human being sitting here on a branch."

"Throw him down!" all of the other fairies called back.

The fairy in the treetop struck the second man and knocked him to the ground. It was a very tall tree, and the second man was fatally injured.

When the second man did not return to the mansion in the morning, the first man went to the tree to look for him. When he found him lying beneath the tree, the first man asked, "What happened?"

"I was going to take part of your property," said the second man.

The first man said, "No, that is not what I am talking about. What caused you to be so badly injured?"

But the second man answered, "I was really going to take all of your property."

The first man had the other carried to his mansion and placed in a bed. "It is sometimes necessary to return good for evil," he said, and sat down beside the injured man.⁶

⁶This story is a truncated coalescence of two folktale types See Notes Vol. VIII.