

Story 1638 (1974 Tape 35) Narrator: Behçet Mahir, 65;  
odacı at Atatürk  
University and  
coffeehouse racon-  
teur

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city of Erzurum  
Province

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Ishmael Saved from Sacrifice

"Oh, give a child to me," said Abraham,

"And I shall offer him as sacrifice."

The prayer accepted, she /Hagar/ conceived a  
child,

And when at last nine months, nine days had  
passed,

From secret source a child came to this world,  
Entered the realm of light to see his kin.

The child became the Blessed Ishmael.

Thus Allah granted Abraham his wish

Good fortune was bestowed upon his head.

The child reached three, reached five, reached  
six years' age,

But Abraham forgot the sacrifice.

Was it just something he had dreamed about?

Was it satanic, human, or Divine?

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He wakened from his sleep one night and said,  
"You pledged your son, Ishmael, in sacrifice."  
He said to Hagar, "Groom the boy today,  
And I shall take him with me to cut wood."  
She tinged his hand with henna,<sup>1</sup> combed his hair  
Then kohled<sup>2</sup> his eyes and dressed him with great  
care

Soon father, son departed hand in hand.  
As soon as they had traveled out of sight,  
The cursed Satan came for evil cause  
Tormenting Hagar till she gave rebuke:  
"You offer only evil to mankind.  
My Ishmael's sweat is scented like perfume:  
His father is a prophet of our god.  
Say what you will, I'll shun you evermore."  
Stung by her words, rebuffed, the devil flew  
To Ishmael and said, "Here's news for you.  
Your father brought you here to slaughter you.

<sup>1</sup>A reddish-brown dye used to color the hands for ceremonial occasions. A bride's hands, for example, are usually hennaed before the wedding ceremony begins.

<sup>2</sup>Kohl is a black substance used to shade the eyelids. It is especially popular in the Middle East.

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It's such a pity! Do not go with him!"  
 "Flee from my sight at once," said Ishmael,  
 "Or I shall give you ample cause to cry!"  
 In wrath he struck the devil with a stone,  
 Blinding forever one of Satan's eyes.

child had reached divine maturity.  
 "Father," the boy remarked to Abraham,  
 "Has all the earth been somehow moved aside?"  
 "We'll bivouac in this vineyard for the night.  
 Our purpose is to reach Mount Arafat,<sup>3</sup>  
 Where you will be our Allah's sacrifice.  
 "But will you not be punished," Ishmael asked,  
 "For causing me the pain of dying so?  
 Can father be a foe to his own child?  
 Think twice of this, my father. Kill me not!"  
 "What can I do against Divine command,  
 Against a duty made so manifest?  
 Your death was tangled in my wish for you."

I but known of this, I'd have prepared.

Yes, I'd have cleansed my heart of fright by now

<sup>3</sup>A mountain near Mecca, now one of the stations on the prescribed ritual route for the pilgrimage. Long before the origin of Islam, Arafat had been a place sacred to primitive religions.

## Story 1638

And sought forgiveness for my mother's pains.<sup>4</sup>  
 I'll not now see her till the Judgment Day.  
 Now let my mother cry for me in vain  
 And strain her lungs in yearning for her son.  
 Now blindfold me before you strike the blow,  
 Lest, knowing that life is sweet, I hinder you.  
 When Abraham had bound his son's two arms,  
     Ishmael lay moaning on the ground,  
     angels stood in rows above and watched.  
 "Untie my arms, for, Father, I accept  
 Whatever Allah ordered as my lot.  
 Strengthen your arm for what it has to do.  
     not rebel or act on Satan's words,  
 Because the God of mercy wants my life.  
 View not my face for fear it weaken you.

<sup>4</sup>This involves the helal/haram concept in Moslem religious faith. Helal refers to an action or situation or condition that is permitted or acceptable, while haram refers to what is forbidden and religiously unacceptable. Keeping one's life and relationships with others helal is done with an eye on Judgment Day, when supposedly one's religious credits and debts will determine the kind of afterlife one is accorded. It is considered haram to die with any form of indebtedness which has not been declared helal. People parting to go on a long or possibly dangerous journey declare helal anything they have given to each other or service they have performed for each other. It is of special importance for a person to have his/her mother declare that she has forgiven them (made helal) for the milk with which she nursed them and for the suffering which she endured on their behalf.

## Story 1638

Borne down by angels from the sky above  
 word of Allah struck before the knife:  
 "Oh, harm him not; cut not a single hair!"  
 Allah made His power immanent,  
 As rows of angels prayed for Ishmael  
 Abraham struck three times with his knife,  
 No flesh was slashed, no single hair was cut  
 Amazed at this, the father stabbed a rock  
 And split it wide apart from end to end.  
 Too dull for flesh, the knife could cut a rock!  
 Divinely ordered, Gabriel placed a ram  
 Upon the altar, saying, "God is great!"  
 If Allah's intervention had not come,  
 If all that had been planned for had prevailed  
 The child would surely have been sacrificed.<sup>5</sup>  
 Taking this story from an epic poem,  
 Behçet Mahir now gives it to the world.

<sup>5</sup>The story of Abraham's rescue from the necessity of sacrificing his son Isaac is Biblical; the Koranic version makes that son Ishmael, who was subsequently to become the Arab patriarch. The scriptural version of the story of Ishmael becomes slightly altered in various ways in the oral tradition. In ATON 1637 it serves as an interlude in a folktale quite unrelated otherwise to the patriarchal accounts. Inasmuch as it is a story complete unto itself, we have extracted it and given it separate status as ATON tale No. 1638.

Story 1638

Accept it as a sacred souvenir.

It was the work of Sumani,<sup>6</sup> now dead.

<sup>6</sup>A late 19th- and early 20th-century minstrel of eastern Turkey whose work influenced that of Mahir.