

Story 1826 (1970 Tape 16)

Narrator: Unidentified old man who also told tales 1817, 1820, 1821, 1822

Location: Karaağaç village, Karacabey kaza, Bursa Province

Date: 1970

Greed--A Parable

One day several boatloads of fishermen landed on a beach. Some of them took their nets ashore, spread them out on the sand, and began repairing them. While they were doing this, other fishermen began cleaning fish to prepare a meal for the whole group

As this was going on, two travelers came along. They were dressed in ordinary clothes, and they looked like ordinary people, but they were really the padishah and his vizier. In those days padishahs often traveled around in disguise in order to inspect their territory and to see for themselves how their people were getting along. As the padishah was watching the fishermen cleaning and cutting up fish, he saw roll from inside one fish a small ball about three centimeters in diameter. He asked a fisherman, "What is that little ball?"

"I don't know," answered the fisherman.

"Will you give it to me?" asked the disguised

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padishah.

"Why should I give it to you? No, I won't!"

"Will you sell it to me?"

"No!"

"How much do you want for

"I don't want anything for it, because I do not wish to sell it."

"Boy, sell it to me!" demanded the padishah.

"No, I won't!"

"I shall give you ten golden liras for it.

"I do not intend to sell it."

"Twenty golden liras?"

"No!"

"One hundred golden liras?"

"No!"

"Well, then, how can we make a bargain about this?"

After a moment the young fisherman said, "We shall put the ball in one pan of a scale, and you will then place enough gold in the other pan to raise the ball. In that way, you will be paying me the ball's weight in gold."

"Very well," said the padishah. He thought, "This ball cannot weigh any more than three or five¹ other balls."

¹In Turkish, three or five is a colloquial expression which may mean a couple or a few.

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Then he had quite a large amount of gold placed on the pan opposite the one holding the ball, but all of that gold did not lift the ball a bit. Amazed and confused by this, the padishah quietly ordered the vizier to go and get the Şeyhülislam² to explain this unusual situation.

The vizier left at once and went to the palace, which was not far from the beach. He immediately took the learned man to where the padishah awaited him. After explaining to the Şeyhülislam what had happened, he asked him, "What was the cause of that? What is that ball on the scale?"

"Give me a little time, Your Majesty. I shall go to the library and search in my books for answers to your questions."

"All right, but hurry as fast as you can," answered the padishah. The Şeyhülislam returned in just a few minutes with the book containing the information he sought.

²In Ottoman times he was the highest-ranking Moslem jurist in the government. When the state became secular with the founding of the Republic, he was the only religious figure in the government, but he has no influence on political affairs. His function is primarily to establish the precise times of the beginnings and endings of holy days and of the sacred month of Ramazan. These calculations are based on the old Islamic lunar calendar.

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He said, "That ball, Your Majesty, is the eye of a rich man."

"Well, what does that have to do with this situation?"

"It cannot be satisfied with gold, Your Majesty--no matter how much you may give it. The rich man's eye is so greedy that gold can never fill it.

"Then what can fill it?" asked the padishah

"Stand back from the scale a little, Your Majesty, said the learned man. He then removed all of the gold from the one side of the scale. In its place he put upon the scale a handful of soil, and the ball began to move upward at once. He then explained, "The greedy eye of covetousness cannot be filled except by the earth of the grave."³

³This parable is apparently intended to illustrate the point of a well-known Turkish proverb: "İnsanın gözünü bir avuç toprak doyurur." This is translated, "[Only] a handful of soil will fill a man's eyes." See Yurtbaşı, Metin. A Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs (Ankara: Turkish Daily News, 1993), p. 179.