

Story 1896 (1996 Tape 3)

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of Isparta Province

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I Love You as Much as I Value Salt

Once there was and once there wasn't,¹ time within time,² when the sieve was in the straw,³ there was a sultan who had three sons. One day the sultan decided to test these three sons in order to see how much each of them loved him. He called the three boys to him and asked the oldest, "Son, how much do you love me?"

¹Formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales, this is known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run to several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a nonsense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce in English the rhyme scheme.

² "Time within Time" refers to the chronology of events in an interior world. A person may dream or fantasize at great length during only a few seconds of ordinary time. One may even seem to spend many years in that other world within; one may take a job, marry, have children, and see them grow to maturity. In Turkish this is called Zaman Zaman İçinde. It is elsewhere sometimes referred to as "Frozen Time" or "Moments of Eternity."

³The sieve is never in the straw. While threshing grain, workers pass the detached grain and finely ground straw through a large-mesh sieve. Longer pieces of straw which may still have grains attached to them do not pass through and will need further threshing. So the straw is in the sieve, not the sieve in the straw.

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The oldest son answered, "My dear father, I love you more than I do gold and the most valuable of jewels."

When the sultan asked his middle son the same question, that boy said, "I love you more than I do the rarest of fruits and the most tasty food."

When the sultan asked his youngest son the same question, that boy answered, "My love for you is so great that I value you as much as I do salt."

When the sultan heard this response, he became angry. He shouted, "How dare you tell your father that you value him as much as you do salt? I order you to leave this palace immediately." The sultan gave his youngest son 500 gold coins and then disowned him.

Taking the gold, the youngest son left the palace. He mounted his horse and also left his father's kingdom. In the new land to which he moved, he used his 500 gold coins very carefully in starting a business. As time passed, he became a successful and wealthy merchant. He married a very beautiful girl who bore him several children.

During all that time his father remained the sultan of his native land. One day the youngest son decided to invite his father to dinner in his own mansion so that he could teach that ruler how much he really loved him. He said to a servant, "Go to such and such a neighboring

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country and invite its sultan here for a fine banquet.” When this invitation was given to the sultan, he accepted it at once, for he was very fond of good food.

On the appointed day, the sultan and all of his household arrived at the mansion of the youngest son. After a pleasant conversation with his family, the youngest son signaled the servants to prepare the tables for dinner. When the many dishes of food were placed on the tables, they looked very attractive and inviting, but the youngest son had earlier ordered his cook not to put any salt in the food.

Thus when the sultan began to eat, he discovered that he did not like the attractive food, for it did not have any flavor. When the meal was finished, the host asked the sultan, “Your Majesty, how did you like the food that was served?”

The sultan answered, “The food looked as if it would be delicious, but it did not taste like anything. It had no flavor. I think that all that food lacked salt.”

The host answered, “O my sultan, let me tell you a story. There was once a ruler who had three sons. He asked all of his sons how much they loved him. The oldest said he loved his father as much as he loved gold and precious jewels. The second said he loved his father as much as he valued the most delicious of foods. The youngest

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said that he loved his father as much as he valued salt. That sultan did not like the answer of the youngest son, and so he disowned the boy. I am that boy whom you disowned. Yes, I am your youngest son and you are my father. I used the 500 gold pieces you gave me to build a successful business. I invited you here to show you the importance of salt and the real value of my love for you.”