

Story 1985 (1996 Tape 5)

Narrator: Ayla Demirtürk, 28,
teacher

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Acıpayamlı kaza,
Denizli Province

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Sinfulness of Parent Reflected in Child

There was once a scholar whose wife had a son about a year after their marriage. By the time the child was old enough to walk about by himself, it became clear that he was very active and at times quite uncontrollable. He was frequently misbehaving, breaking objects, and getting himself into all kinds of difficulties. Trying to restrain his harmful recklessness kept his parents constantly busy and constantly worried about him.

When the boy grew old enough to play outside, he created bigger problems for them. When neighbors placed drinking cups by the village fountain, he would fill them with sand and pebbles. He sometimes threw stones and broke the jars of women going to the fountain to get water. Occasionally he also broke windows by striking them with stones. He thus became a problem to the whole community as well as to his family.

For some time the scholar's neighbors remained patient with the boy's naughtiness, but they were surprised that a man as wise and respectable as the scholar would have such a child. They avoided

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complaining for awhile, because the scholar was otherwise a good man and an esteemed member of the community. But finally, when they could tolerate the child's abuse no longer, they decided to visit the scholar and talk with him about it. Several of them went to his home, where one of them said to him, "We consider you a good man and an excellent neighbor, but your son is a troublemaker. We are tired of your son's mischief, which has afflicted all of us. We have come here to complain about his misbehavior."

The scholar was shocked but not entirely surprised by what his neighbors had reported to him. He asked, "Are you sure that my son is actually a troublemaker? Can you tell me what he has done to deserve being called a troublemaker?"

The spokesman for the neighbors then explained the reasons for their annoyance with the boy. "He has broken some of our windows. He fills our drinking cups at the fountain with sand and pebbles. Worse yet, he has often broken the clay jars our wives take to the fountain to fetch water. He is a spoiled child."

The scholar answered, "I understand now. I am sorry about this, and I promise to do something to correct this situation."

After his visitors had departed, the scholar called his wife to him and said, "I can hardly believe what our neighbors have just reported about our son. I believe that you and I have always been

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gentle and considerate people. Why, then, is our son so troublesome and abusive? Our neighbors say that he is a spoiled child and a troublemaker. Have we committed some great sin in the past for which Allah is now punishing us by giving us such a child? Let us think about this and try to determine what it was that we did wrong.”

After a few days had passed, the scholar and his wife renewed their discussion of this matter. The scholar said, “My dear wife, I have spent many hours thinking about what I may have done to deserve having such an unruly child, but I cannot remember any offense great enough to deserve such punishment.”

Then his wife said, “I think that I know the cause of our trouble. While I was pregnant with our son, I one day went to visit the wife of one of our neighbors. On a table in her house I saw a plate full of lemons, and my mouth began to thirst for them. I was too shy to ask my friend for a lemon, but while she was out of the room, I pierced one of the lemons with a needle and sucked out all of its juice. It was wrong for me to do that, and the lemon became at once haram¹ to me.”

¹Helal/Haram—Muslim religious concepts. That which is helal is that which is permissible according to canonical law. That which is haram is forbidden. There is no obligation or restriction or penalty for doing or taking whatever is helal, but there will be a penalty on Judgment Day for doing or taking what is forbidden. To accept something from a donor is helal; to take it or steal it is haram. To do anything morally or religiously improper is haram. Dying or

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Her husband said, “Ah, now we both know why our son is a troublemaker. Allah has apparently punished us for your sin of stealing a lemon.” He thought about this for a moment, and then he spoke again. “A pregnant woman should be very careful about what she does, for any sin she commits may return in her child to punish her. But now we must find some way to have your sin forgiven.”

endangered people often declare helal anything they have given to or done for another person, so that that person will not go to Judgment indebted to another (which is haram unless declared helal by the benefactor).