

Story 1998 (1984 Tape 7)

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Misplaced Pity May Cause Evil

Once a man and his wife were traveling to Bandırma. They were riding upon their donkey. After they had gone some distance, they came upon a blind man. The wife felt pity for the blind man, and she said to her husband, “We should take this blind man along with us. We should put him upon the donkey, and we should walk along beside it.”

The husband responded, “Wife, don’t you know that misplaced pity may encourage evil? We should continue on our journey and not become involved in any way with this blind man. He will find his way along, just as he was doing before we noticed him.” But the woman argued that they should help the blind man, and in the end she prevailed in their discussion. They helped the blind man mount the donkey, and then they themselves continued on foot. Some time later they arrived at Bandırma, the destination of the married couple. The husband said to the blind man, “Sir, this is where we must part. Please dismount, for we must take our donkey now.”

But the blind man, holding the halter tightly, said, “What are you talking about? This donkey is mine.”

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The woman asked, "How can you claim that our donkey is yours? We helped you by letting you use our donkey." But the blind man insisted that the animal was his. The argument grew louder and louder until it attracted the attention of a night watchman.

The blind man said to that policeman, "These people are trying to take my donkey away from me!" But the husband and wife claimed that they were the real owners of the donkey. Finally the night watchman took the three of them before a kadı.¹ The kadı listened to what each of the three said. The husband said that they had met the blind man along the road, and because his wife had felt pity for the man, they allowed him to ride their donkey while they walked. "This blind man is so daring that I am afraid that he may even claim that my wife is his, too."

The kadı was unable to decide which of the men he should believe. Even after he had gone home for dinner, he continued to puzzle over this case. The kadı's wife saw that he was deep in thought, and so she asked him, "My dear husband, what is on your mind?" The kadı told her about the blind man and the married couple. After thinking about the case for a few minutes, the kadı's wife said, "Let me make a suggestion. Prepare a bottle of salty water and have all

¹A kadı was a judge of Muslim canonical law in pre-Republican Turkey.

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three of them drink it. Next, have them beaten and thrown in jail. Then see what happens.”

Because he had no ideas himself about how to resolve the case, the kadı followed her suggestion. He prepared a bottle of salty water and gave it to the three claimants to drink. When they refused to drink any of the salty solution, gendarmes² forced them to do so. Then the gendarmes beat them and threw them into prison.

Very tired from their traveling and from the treatment that had been given to them, the husband and wife began talking to each other in the middle of the night. “Oh, Wife, I could not convince you to avoid any contact with that blind man. See now what we are suffering as a result of that contact!”

The wife replied, “Yes, I refused to listen to your words and insisted on extending pity to the blind man. What trouble that has brought us!”

The blind man then said, “That pity gave me an opportunity to start a lawsuit. I had nothing to lose, and I do not regret it a bit!”

²Gendarme is obviously a loan word from French. Very early in the 20th century French culture had a considerable impact on Turks. Usually the word gendarmes refers to members of the army who have been assigned to the Ministry of Interior to maintain law and order in rural areas which have no regular police forces.

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They tell this story to illustrate the truth of the old proverb³ which says, “Misplaced pity may cause evil.”

³Although numerous proverbs and frequent preaching have exhorted people to show pity and mercy, there is at least one Turkish proverb that supports this tale’s warnings about these qualities. “Merhametten maraz doğar / hasıl olur” means “Mercy begets harm.” See Metin Yurtbaşı, A Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs (Ankara: Turkish Daily News, 1993), p. 500.