

Story 2186 (1999 Tape 15)

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kaza, Denizli
Province

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Bekri Mustafa¹ Outwits Sultan Murat IV

The padishah Sultan Murat IV issued a decree against drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, and gambling anywhere in the large territory that he ruled. It was announced that anyone who violated any of these restrictions would be punished severely.

This decree upset Bekri Mustafa and a group of his friends who consumed quite a bit of alcohol every day. They couldn't get along without drink, and so they at once gave thought to finding a solution to their problem. They asked each other, "Where should we go?"

Then Bekri Mustafa offered a clever suggestion. He said, "Come on! Let us go to the cemetery and enjoy ourselves there." They went to the cemetery and immediately began to drink. Abandoning all caution, they drank even more freely than usual, unaware that they were being

¹Bekri Mustafa was a legendary alcoholic. In Turkish folktales he almost always appears during the reign of an Ottoman sultan named Murat, though which Sultan Murat is often not indicated. When a specific Murat is mentioned, it is usually Sultan Murat IV (1623-1640).

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observed until finally they discovered that they been surrounded by watchmen, police officers, and gendarmes.² Without wasting any time, these forces of the law took Bekri and his friends to the palace. After questioning the captives briefly, it became evident that it had been Bekri Mustafa who had led the group to the cemetery to drink. Bekri was, therefore, taken the presence of the padishah.

With all of his power and dignity apparent, Sultan Murat was comfortably seated upon his throne. He said to Bekri Mustafa, "Have you not heard that all drinking, smoking, and gambling have been outlawed in the empire which I rule?"

"May Allah forbid that I should ever break any of the laws you establish for the territory you rule me to do such a thing is unthinkable!"

"Well, if that is the case, then why were you your friends drinking in the cemetery?"

"Ah, my padishah, with your permission I should like

²Turkish cities and large towns have their own police forces, but in rural areas law and order are maintained by units of the army that have been placed under the command of the Ministry of Interior. The French influence on Turkish culture sometimes appears in loan words such as gendarme.

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to comment on that matter."

"Go ahead and say what you wish," responded the sultan.

"Your Majesty, your decree stated that there should be no drinking, smoking, or gambling in all of your lands. However, a cemetery is not your land but the land of the dead."

Sultan Murat IV had a good sense of humor, and he was mildly amused by Bekri's comments. He therefore forgave Bekri's offense, something which he had also done on earlier occasions. But before releasing Bekri Mustafa and his friends, the sultan warned them not to commit this particular offense again.