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## **A Proverb Poem by Refiki**

**T**HE OTTOMAN PROVERB POEM translated here is a slightly shortened version of the eighteenth or nineteenth century original, published in Dehri Dilçin, *Edebiyatımızda Atasözleri* (Proverbs in our literature) (Klişecilik ve Matbaacılık T.A.Ş., Istanbul, 1945). The author of the poem, Refiki, who probably came from Kayseri or İçel in central or southern Anatolia, unlike many of his predecessors, appears to have made little or no effort to employ the proverbs used to elaborate a religious theme. Rather, he preferred to adopt a lighthearted, and at times sardonic, approach, occasionally distorting or even subverting the meaning of the proverbs used.

With the exception of the first stanza, which is rhymed ABAB, all the remaining stanzas are rhymed on the pattern CCCB, DDDDB, etc. The last line of each stanza ends with *demişler*; “they say.” The following stanzas may be taken as typical:

Kış ayları gelir, yağınca karlar,  
Gezerler izini, tavşan ararlar;  
Nâs beyinde avcı adam sayarlar  
Bir taşla iki kuş vuran demişler.

The winter months come, the snow falls,  
People go out and look for the footprints of the hare;  
Among the people a man is considered a hunter  
Who can kill two birds with one stone, they say.

Kötülük eyleme hiç bir âdeme  
Fursat verme düşman dediğin keme  
Kimselere varıp sırrını deme  
Dışını göstermez kapan demişler

Don't do any harm to anyone,  
 Don't give an opportunity to anyone you consider an enemy;  
 Don't divulge your secrets to anyone,  
 Those who don't show their teeth don't threaten anyone, they say.

Collections of Turkish proverbs can be consulted in Ömer Asim Aksoy's *Atasözleri sözlüğü* (A dictionary of proverbs) (Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1971), and in Metin Yurtbaşı's *A Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs* (Turkish Daily News, 1993). Some of the original Turkish proverbs used in the proverb poem translated here (with the appropriate English stanza number and an English translation) are given below.

## A PROVERB POEM BY REFIKI

1. Friends, listen to these proverbs,  
 Their truth you can't deny;  
 Consider these old sayings,  
 They very seldom lie.
2. They do not come from nothing,  
 They're based on common sense;  
 They do not speak of reason,  
 But of experience.
3. Travel educates a man,  
 They say it makes you wise;  
 Underneath a ragged coat,  
 They say, such wisdom lies.
4. Have patience, it's a virtue,  
 Walk on the other side;  
 Brawling curs want not sore ears,  
 That cannot be denied!
5. Fear is a great inventor,  
 It magnifies a scene;  
 No need to fear the thunder,  
 Whose lightning can be seen.
6. Do not be mean and selfish,  
 You know it isn't right;  
 Girls who cannot dance oft say,  
 "My skirt is far too tight."

7. Be watchful and be wary,  
But seldom grant a boon;  
The man who calls the piper  
Will also call the tune.
8. Do not fall for temptation,  
It really doesn't pay;  
The cat that ate the candles  
Has lost its sight, they say.
9. Be kind to those that love you,  
Act now, do not delay;  
Don't put off till tomorrow  
What you can do today.
10. Long life has long misery,  
That much is very clear;  
When the rain comes, so they say,  
The cracks will disappear.
11. People say, self do, self love.  
But take note, my brothers;  
In this world a snake is held  
By the hand of others.
12. A still tongue makes a wise head,  
That's what the proverbs say;  
Shallow streams make the most din,  
And every ass will bray.
13. Small is often beautiful,  
Great winds blow on high hills;  
To each its just proportion,  
All must be as God wills.
14. All that glisters is not gold,  
White silver draws black lines;  
Vice may dress in virtue's clothes,  
To further its designs.
15. He that steals can hide, they say,  
Nothing could be plainer;  
If you'd steal a minaret,  
Take a larger container.

16. Give and do not count the cost,  
I'm sure you've heard that said;  
Don't steal from a dependent,  
Nor hunger for his bread.
17. Take pleasure where you find it,  
If you can stand the wrack;  
But think, it was the last straw  
That broke the camel's back.
18. Where chimney smoke is blessing.  
Remember when you roam,  
Even in a gilded cage  
The crow will long for home.
19. Let the nightingale complain,  
His fate's already sealed;  
The wife stays in the kitchen,  
The workman in the field.
20. When you get into trouble,  
Think what the proverbs say;  
Trust not slow running waters,  
A man who looks away.
21. Also an old enemy,  
He'll never be a friend;  
Man is to man a devil,  
Take care whom you offend.
22. Don't mix sour things with sweet,  
That's always a mistake;  
Take care where you poke about,  
You may disturb a snake.
23. In winter men go hunting,  
Best not to hunt alone;  
They say the mighty hunter  
Kills two birds with one stone.
24. It's good to be ambitious,  
That cannot be denied;  
But two lions cannot sit  
Upon a single hide.

25. They are rich that have true friends,  
True friends are hard to find;  
Love a friend despite his faults,  
Keep this advice in mind.
26. Make friends wheresoe'er you can,  
But always watch the door;  
As they say, if you want peace,  
You'd best prepare for war.
27. By all means plant an orchard,  
But think before you dig:  
The father plants an orchard,  
The son won't give a fig.
28. Give and do not count the cost,  
True friendship knows no fee;  
Virtue brings its own reward,  
I'm sure you would agree.
29. Do not talk ill of others.  
Remember, when you do,  
Death is a great leveller,  
He'll surely come to you.
30. Take time when time comes, they say,  
Go now, and don't delay;  
Now is now and then was then,  
That's what the proverbs say.
31. Life is but a span, they say,  
Death is the end of all;  
When you are least expecting,  
Then he is sure to call.
32. He that treads in dung, they say,  
Leaves very little trace;  
Honor always shows the man,  
Past shame, they say, past grace.
33. Don't complain! Too oft the best  
Will undermine the good;  
Nature is the one true law,  
The ax will find the wood.

34. Make your enemy your friend,  
Then you'll avoid much grief.  
But take great care! Dogs that bite  
Don't always bare their teeth.
35. Poverty is not a crime,  
But it is sure a curse;  
Do what you must, drag dead dogs!  
Put money in your purse!
36. Silence is sweet medicine,  
That is a useful tip;  
A wise head makes a close mouth,  
The captain saves the ship.
37. Patience is a virtue,  
By God it is ordained;  
They say the dervish waited,  
But also, he attained.
38. Think before you marry,  
Consider what is said;  
Bachelors are kings, they say,  
They're seldom in the red.
39. Silence is sweet medicine,  
They say few words are best;  
Speak fitly or be silent,  
That's what I would suggest.
40. Death cannot be commanded,  
It keeps no calendar;  
One thing alone is certain,  
To it you must defer.
41. A good friend is a blessing,  
That much is very plain;  
If at first you don't succeed,  
Then always try again.
42. Trust not an old enemy,  
He'll never be a friend;  
He'll always be offended,  
Whatever you intend.

43. Always take things as they come,  
And cope as best you can;  
Where there are no sheep, they say,  
The goat's a gentleman.
44. He that travels much, knows much,  
It teaches you to see;  
Too much travel spoils, they say,  
I'm sure you would agree.
45. Take good care, the saying goes,  
Whose company you keep;  
He that makes a crow his guide  
Ends in the garbage heap.
46. Anger sets the house on fire,  
Wrath killed the foolish man;  
Anger punishes itself,  
Avoid it if you can.
47. Should you make an enemy,  
Be he a tiny ant,  
Treat him with the same respect  
You'd show an elephant.
48. Great wealth is oft a burden,  
But it should not be spurned;  
Poverty breeds strife, they say,  
Spend only what you've earned.
49. The mad dog bites his master,  
He eats the shepherd's bread;  
He pisses on the mosque wall,  
Or so at least it's said.
50. Don't spend time in dreaming,  
Don't sit about and moan;  
Deeds are fruits, words are but wind,  
You reap what you have sown.
51. Much usage makes a habit,  
Always eat by pleasure;  
Drink less, be home by midnight,  
Always drink by measure.



52. Don't argue with a Christian,  
It really doesn't pay;  
Wranglers never want for words,  
They always win the day.
53. Don't add fuel to the fire,  
Don't make a problem worse;  
Pour oil on troubled waters,  
That is, do the reverse.
54. Give freely to a neighbor,  
It's always the best way;  
A morsel, freely given,  
Increases love, they say.
55. Fill your pitcher when you can,  
While the fountain's playing;  
Don't say it doesn't matter,  
Such things still need saying.
56. When you go to the market,  
Take note what it reveals:  
The good man makes a bargain,  
The bad man lies and steals.
57. To each his proper station,  
*A han* or a *külhan*,<sup>1</sup>  
A man's a man for a'that,  
From here to Astrakhan.
58. Give and spend and God will send,  
Give alms unto the poor;  
The hand that gives will gather,  
It will enrich the store.
59. Virtue brings its own reward,  
Be temperate and true;  
Traitors seldom prosper,  
Whatever else they do.
60. Keep to the straight and narrow,  
Maintain a steady pace;  
But if you take the wrong road,  
Turn back. It's no disgrace.

61. Be patient, work together,  
No need to run a race;  
One hand will wash another,  
But two will wash a face.
62. Fortune rules the lives of men,  
Who knows what it will bring;  
Great fortune brings misfortune,  
Sometimes it deals a ding.
63. Accept what you are given,  
Do not lament your fate;  
Cheer up, it may not happen,  
It never is too late.
64. Now, Refiki, say no more,  
Here your work is ended;  
May God forgive the poet,  
If he has offended.

TEXT AND TRANSLATION OF THE PROVERBS

Stanza 3: *Kepenek altında er yatar.*

Under a coarse felt cape there is found a man.

Stanza 4: *İtle dalaşmaktan çalıyı dolaşmak yeğdir.*

It is better to walk around a prickly bush than to engage  
in a dogfight.

Stanza 5: *Şimşek görünen buluttan korkulmaz.*

One should not fear a thundercloud whose lightning can  
be seen.

Stanza 6: *Oynamasını bilmiyen kız "Yerine dar" demiş;  
yerine genişletmişler "gerimdar" demiş.*

The girl who doesn't know how to dance will say,  
"There isn't enough space!"

And when more space is given, "My sleeves are too tight!"

Stanza 7: *Parayı veren düdüğü çalar.*

He who pays the piper calls the tune.

Stanza 8: *Caminin mumunu yiyen kedinin gözü kör olur.*

The cat that eats the candle in a mosque will go blind.

- Stanza 9: *At bulunur, meydan bulunmaz, meydan bulunur, at bulunmaz.*  
If a horse is available, an arena cannot be found;  
if an arena is available, a horse cannot be found.
- Stanza 11: *El eliyle yılan tutulur.*  
By the hands of others a snake is held.
- Stanza 12: *Çok söz ozanda yaraşır.*  
Many words suit a wandering minstrel.
- Stanza 13: *Büyük dağın dumanı büyük olur.*  
High mountains are usually shrouded in mist.
- Stanza 14: *Saman altından su yürüttür, üstüne çıkar vaaz eder.*  
He makes water run under the chaff, and sits on it to preach.
- Stanza 15: *Minareyi çalan kıltfını hazırlar.*  
He who steals the minaret first prepares the wrapper.
- Stanza 16: *Yanmış harman öşrü vermez.*  
A burnt harvest cannot be taxed.  
*Temelsiz bina tez yıkılır.*  
A building without a foundation is soon demolished.
- Stanza 17: *Deveyi yardan uçuran bir tutam ottur.*  
For a tuft of grass the camel fell over the cliff.
- Stanza 18: *Bülbülü altın kafese koymuşlar "A vatanım" demiş.*  
Though the nightingale was put in a golden cage, yet it cried for its home.
- Stanza 20: *Suyun yavaş akarından insanın yere bakandan kork.*  
Beware of water that flows slowly, and a man who looks down.
- Stanza 21: *Adam adamın şeytandır.*  
Man is the tempter of man.
- Stanza 22: *Her deliğe sokma ya yılan çıkar ya çıyan.*  
Don't put your hand in every hole, a snake or a centipede might come out.  
*Tatsız aş tuz neylesin, akılsız başa neylesin.*  
What use can salt be to tasteless food?  
What use is counsel to a foolish head?

- Stanza 24: *İki arslan bir posta sığmaz.*  
Two lions cannot sit on a single hide.
- Stanza 26: *Hazir ol cenge, ister sulhu salah.*  
If you want peace, be prepared for war.
- Stanza 27: *Baba oğluna bir bağ bağışlamış  
oğul babaya salkım üzümvermemiş.*  
The father gave an orchard to his son.  
The son didn't even give his father a bunch of grapes.
- Stanza 28: *Iyilik eden, iyilik bulur.*  
Those who do good will find good done to them.
- Stanza 29: *Kötü söyleme eşine ağu katar aşına.*  
Do not scold your wife. She might poison your soup.
- Stanza 30: *Gün bugün saat bu saat.*  
Today is today and the hour is this hour.  
(No time like the present.)
- Stanza 31: *Az yaşa çok yaşa akıbet gelir başa.*  
Live a little or live long, the end will come down on one's  
head.
- Stanza 32: *Arşızın yüzüne tükürsen yağmur yağıyor sana der.*  
They spat in the face of the shameless man, and he said,  
"it is raining."
- Stanza 33: *Bulunur baltayle orman.*  
The wood is found with an ax.
- Stanza 34: *Isıracak it dişini göstermez.*  
A dog that intends to bite does not bare its teeth.  
*Düşmana fırsat verme.*  
Give no occasion to an enemy.
- Stanza 35: *It sürü para/akçe kazan.*  
You can even earn money dragging dead dogs.
- Stanza 36: *Gemisini kırtaran kaptandır.*  
He who saves his ship is the captain.
- Stanza 37: *Sona kalan dona kalır.*  
He who is late is left.

*Beğleyen Derviş muradına ermiş.*  
The Dervish who waited attained.

Stanza 38: *Beğarlık sultanlık.*

A bachelor's life is a Sultan's life.

Stanza 39: *Deveye gördün mü. Yeden görsün.*

"Have you seen the camel?" "Let him who leads it by the rope see it!"

Stanza 40: *Vadesi yetmiş çare yoktur.*

There is no remedy for one whose time has come.

*Ölen ile kim ölmüş herkes sırasını bekler.*

Whoever has died with one who died?  
(Everyone waits his turn.)

*Ölen ardınca kimse ölmedi.*

No one has died after a dead man.  
(It is not wise to mourn for too long.)

Stanza 41: *Herkes ne ederse kendine eder.*

Man makes himself.

*Kendi düşen ağlamaz.*

He who causes his own fall should not cry.

*Canan canin yoldaşdır.*

A friend is a companion for one's soul.

Stanza 42: *İnsanı görürsün ne bilirsin.*

You see the man but how can you tell what he has in his heart.

*Eğriyim neden korkarım. Doğruyum neden korkarım.*

I'm crooked that's why I'm fearful; I'm honest that's why I'm not fearful.

Stanza 43: *Koyun bulunmadığı yerde keçiyeye Abdulrahman çelebi derler.*

Where there are no sheep, goats are called gentlemen.

Stanza 45: *Kılavuzu karga olanın başı dertten kurtulmaz.*

He who takes a crow as a guide will never be free from trouble.

Stanza 47: *Düşmanın karınca ise de hor bakma.*

If you should have an ant for an enemy don't scorn it.

- Stanza 49: *Eceli köpek cami duvarına siğer.*  
The dog who is doomed to die makes water against the wall of the mosque.
- Stanza 50: *Herkes ektiğini biçer.*  
Everyone reaps what he has sown.
- Stanza 51: *Dadanmış kudurmuştan beterdir.*  
He who has a taste (for food or a place) once is worse than a madman.
- Stanza 52: *Söz dediğin yaş deridir, nereye çekersen oraya gider.*  
A word is like raw leather, it stretches the way you want it to.
- Stanza 53: *Yangına körükle gidilmez.*  
One should not add fuel to the flames.
- Stanza 54: *Lokma karın doydurmaz, şevkat/muhabet artırır.*  
A morsel will not fill a stomach, but it will increase love.
- Stanza 55: *Sinek ufaktır, ama mide bulanır.*  
A fly is a small thing but it makes you sick.  
*Su akarken testiye doldurmalı, yağmur yağarken küpeleri.*  
The pitcher should be filled while the water is flowing.
- Stanza 56: *Ağır basar, yeğni kalkar.*  
That which is heavy presses down; but that which is light rises.
- Stanza 58: *Paran kadar zekâtin artsın.*  
May your charity increase as much as your wealth.
- Stanza 59: *Cenabette keramet olmaz.*  
No miracle can be expected in uncleanness.  
*Ibadetle cennete girilmez temiz kalp gerek.*  
One cannot enter into heaven by worship alone.  
*Gönül hoşluğu maldan iyidir.*  
Contentment of the heart is better than provisions.
- Stanza 60: *Yoldan çıkmak ayıp değil yola girmemek ayıptır.*  
It is not shameful to have gone a wrong way, but it is shameful not to turn back.

*Eşegi yoldan çıkararı sipasinin oyması.*

What embarrasses the donkey is the foal's gambols.

Stanza 61: *El ile yıkar, el döner yüzu yıkar.*

One hand washes the other, but two hands wash the face.

Stanza 62: *Gün döğmadan neler doğar.*

All kinds of things may be born before dawn.

NOTE

1. A *han* is a prince or sovereign; a *külhan* is a stoker in the bath house, or a rough and ready fellow.