

Story 1951 (1964 Tape 9)

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Harun Reşit's¹ Palace vs His Home

Whatever faults he had, Harun Reşit never failed to be generous to the poor. No one who asked him for help was turned away empty-handed. Since he was charitable to one and all, it was not surprising that he was benevolent toward his own brother, who was also at times quite poor. This brother was named Behlül Dane, although some people called him Behlül-ü Dane. Dane (or tane) means unique, and Behlül Dane was indeed unique in some ways. He cared nothing about Harun Reşit's great wealth, and he often disregarded the importance of his brother's position as the caliph of Islam. He lived a very humble life. He was also a free spirit who followed his own inclinations. Some people considered Behlül Dane insane, but others

¹Harun Reşit (Haroun al-Raschid) was probably the most powerful of the Abbasid caliphs. There is little doubt that he was also the most colorful of the Abbasid caliphs, for stories about him abound, including several in The Arabian Nights. He was at the peak of his power and influence around the year 800.

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felt that he was instead a very knowledgeable and wise man.² Those who thought him mad were often evil people. Those who were both virtuous and intelligent thought him unique.

One day Harun Reşit bought some meat and other foods at the marketplace. Handing these to Behlül Dane, he said, “Take these to my home.” Picking up all of the items that his brother had purchased, Behlül Dane took them to the cemetery and hung them on a tombstone. Some time later Harun Reşit returned to his palace and asked if Behlül Dane had delivered the different kinds of foods he had bought. Acquainted with Behlül Dane’s unusual behavior, the servants laughed and replied that they had not seen him at all that day.

Harun Reşit immediately ordered that Behlül Dane be brought into his presence. Then Harun Reşit said, “Behlül, what have you done with all of the delicious foods bought and gave to you? I told you to take them to my home.”

Behlül answered, “Brother, I took them to your home, just as you had directed me to do.”

“But the servants here told me that you did no such thing.”

²Legend has it that Behlül Dane was the half brother of Harun Reşit. Legend also has it that he was mad. If he was mad, there was method to his madness. His antic disposition was a “cover” for his role as satirist and critic of the powerful and wealthy—not excluding Harun Reşit. In tale after tale Behlül Dane propounds moral truths and provides valuable religious insights.

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“Aha! Now I understand what you mean. If you had told me to take those foods to the palace, then of course I should have brought them here. But you told me to take them to your home, and that is just exactly what I did. I took them to the cemetery and hung them on a tombstone, for that is where your real home is located. If you had told me to bring them to your guest house, where we spend time on this earth, I should have brought them to the palace.”

Any intelligent person listening to this story can learn a lesson from it.