

Story 1027 (1974 Tape 17) Narrator: İbrahim Parvanoğlu,
a bus driver

Location: British Petrol gas
station on outskirts
of Sivas; but narra-
tor is from Suşehri
kaza of Sivas Province

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Behlül Dane¹ on Poverty and Wealth

day while the Blessed Behlül Dane was resting at home, a man came to him with a question. The man asked "O Your Excellency Behlül Dane, is poverty or wealth the more desirable condition in this world?"

Behlül Dane answered, "Friend, in my opinion it is better to be poor than to be rich."

"Can you explain that to me, O Behlül Dane?"

"I can at least tell you how I reached that conclusion. I had a dream in which I saw a thin iron sac² heating on the fire. It was to be used to pass judgment upon people. After the sac was very hot, they brought in two men. They

¹Behlül Dane was supposedly the half-mad half brother of the great Abbassid Calif Herun Reşit (Haroun al-Raschid), who flourished c.800. There is little documentation for this, however, and so Behlül Dane must be considered legendary. A gadfly and holy fool, he used the guise of madness as a cover under which he could with impunity castigate the powerful and wealthy, including the all too worldly and free-living Caliph.

²A thin, slightly convex, round piece of sheet iron heated on the top of the stove and used to bake yufka, a thin, unleavened type of Turkish bread. Also saç.

Story 1027

asked the first man, 'Are you poor or rich?'

"'I am rich,' he said.

"They said, 'Very well. What you must do here is climb onto that sac, tell us what you have eaten today, and then climb down.'

"The rich man climbed upon the sac and said, 'This morning I ate cheese, bread, and yoğurt for breakfast, and I drank tea as I ate them. For lunch I ate roasted meat. In the evening I ate boiled meat and yoğurt, and I drank milk with them.' By the time the rich man had completed listing all that he had eaten that day, he was completely consumed by the intense heat, and he died

"They then turned to the second man and asked, 'Are you poor or rich?'

"'I am poor, friends,' he said.

"'Very well. Climb onto the hot sac, tell us what you have eaten today, and then climb down.

"Climbing up onto the hot sac, the poor man said, 'I ate some bread and drank some water today.' Then he climbed down, only slightly singed."

Behlül Dane said, "You understand how it was. By the time he had listed all he had eaten, the rich man was burned up. But the poor man who ate only bread and water

Story 1027

was saved. So, as far as I am concerned, poverty is better than wealth."

"Yes, it is better," said his guest, "but when you are poor, it is not easy to make a living."

"It may not be easy," said Behlül Dane, "but it is easier to struggle to make a living in this world than it is to burn in the hereafter."

The guest agreed with this and willingly accepted poverty as his lot in this world.