

Story 832 (1974 Tape 1

Narrator: Unidentified very old man

Location: Olgunlar village, kaza of Rafayık or Refahiye, Erzincan Province

Date: August 1974

Behlül Dane¹ Borne Down by Weight of Others' Sins

Harun Reşit had the reputation of being a very well-informed man, but he was also a tyrant. One day his brother Behlül asked him, "Will you let me conduct the ritual prayer service in the mosque today?"

Harun Reşit said, "No."

Behlül Dane then went to their mother and said, "Mother, please tell Harun Reşit that I want to conduct the ritual worship in the mosque today."

Their mother went to Harun Reşit and said, "My son, I shall not absolve you for your indebtedness for my milk and many other things if you do not permit your brother to conduct

¹Supposedly the halfwitted half-brother of the great Abbasid Caliph Harun Reşit, Behlül Dane was a pious and ascetic saint who played an antic role in order to criticize the great and powerful--in this case the Caliph, the leader of all Islam. To a degree he is like Shakespeare's wise fool and like the schlemiel of Jewish tradition.

the prayer service in the mosque today."²

Harun Reşit said, "All right, Mother. For your sake I shall allow him to do it."

Behlül went to the mosque and served as imam,³ directing the worship. He began in the traditional manner by saying "There is only one God and his name is Allah." But he was suddenly so burdened down with weight that his legs would hold him, and he could hardly raise his hands to his head.

After the service Behlül Dane went to his mother and said, "Mother, my brother is such a saint that I was hardly able to direct the prayer service in front of him." That is the kind

²This involves the Moslem concept of helâl vs. haram-- the former what is lawful, proper, and blessed; the latter what is not lawful or proper, and hence cursed. Any debt or obligation which the creditor has not forgiven, absolved, and thus made helâl is held against one on Judgment Day as haram-- something evil which one must suffer for. People leaving on a hazardous trip make all their friends' debts to them helâl, and their friends reciprocate. A mother can always bring her offspring (no matter how old they may be) to terms immediately by threatening not to absolve them of their indebtedness to her for the milk with which she nursed them. Everyone dreads the possibility of going before God on Judgment Day as a sinner so foul that even his mother has not forgiven his indebtedness to her. Here even the leader of all Islam capitulates immediately when his mother threatens not to make her milk of many years ago helâl to him.

³The imam is the prayer leader in a mosque.

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of person Harun Reşit was.

NOTE: The venerable narrator is badly confused here. In hundreds of tales Behlül is the saint and Harun Reşit the worldly man of power and pleasure. This tale is supposed to end with Behlül's being borne down by the sins of all the other members of the congregation, including his brother. Behlül, with his ability to read the minds of others, realizes that the members of the congregation are just going through the motions of the service and not really praying. They are, in effect, leaving their burdens for the prayer leader to carry, and the weight is enormous. See ATON for the traditional rendering of this tale.