

Story 1089 1976 Tape 28)

Narrator: Ali Çiftçi, farmer, 60

Location: Çıkırıkçı village,
Sarıkaya kaza, Yozgat
Province

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Behlül Dane¹ Sells Heaven

One day Behlül Dane was playing in the street with the other children.² As Lady Zübeyde³ passed by, she asked him, "What are you doing, my brother-in-law?"

"I am building a heaven, my sister-in-law," he said

"Will you sell it to me?"

"Yes."

"How much do you want for it?" Zübeyde asked.

"One kuruş."⁴

¹ Behlül Dane is largely a legendary figure in the Moslem past of the Abbassid Period. Whether there is any historicity to this figure is questionable, though until the 18th century there was a grave at Baghdad that was supposedly his. He was said to be the mad half-brother of Harun Reşit (Haroun al-Raschid), greatest of the Abbassid caliphs, who flourished around 800. There was method in his alleged "madness," for his antic behavior was a "cover" for his role as satirist and critic of worldliness of the powerful and wealthy--notably the caliph himself. At times he was, like the Jewish schlemihl, a saintly fool.

² Saying "other children," the narrator makes it sound as if Behlül Dane were a child. He was not, but because he often seemed to be a simpleton, and because he often did play hobby-horse and other games with children, he is likened to a child.

³ The narrator called her Zübeyde hanım.

⁴ The kuruş is 1/100 of a Turkish lira. Until the mid-1960s the kuruş was in circulation, but soon after that time, inflation made it meaningless and therefore useless. By 1988 the lira had been devaluated to the level where its exchange rate with the American dollar was almost 2,000 to 1. With the lira worth only 1/2000 of a dollar or 1/20 of a cent, the kuruş became worth only 1/200 of a U.S. cent. Kuruş coins of any denomination became collectors' items.

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Zübeyde paid him the one kuruş and went on her way. She said nothing about this incident when she got home, but that night Harun Reşit saw Lady Zübeyde in heaven. In the morning Harun Reşit said to her, "What have you been doing? I saw you in heaven last night

"I haven't been doing anything unusual.

"Think again," said Harun Reşit

After thinking for a minute, she said, "Well, yesterday I saw your vagabond brother playing with the children. When I asked him what he was doing, he said, 'I am building a heaven. I asked him whether he would sell it to me, and he said, 'Yes.' I asked him how much it would cost, and he said, 'One kuruş.' So, I bought it.

"I shall have to go and buy one from him too," said Harun Reşit. Later that day he was walking down the same street that Zübeyde had passed along and he also saw Behlül Dane playing there with the children. He called to his brother and said, "What are you doing?

"I am building a heaven."

"Will you sell it to me?"

"Yes."

"How much do you want for it?"

"I want 1,000 liras for

"What?" demanded Harun Reşit. "How is it that you

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sold one to my wife for one kuruş but you want 1,000 liras from me?"

"She bought it without having seen it, but you are buying one after you have seen one like it," said Behlül Dane.

Harun Reşit was angered by this, and after refusing to pay that amount, he walked away.