

Story 2114 (Miscellaneous
Tape 16, Item 1--1971)

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of Erzurum Province

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Behlül Dane¹ as Marriage Counselor

A long while ago there was a great caliph named Harun Reşit. He had a much younger brother named Behlül Dane. (Dane means unique. Although some people thought that Behlül Dane was mad, he was in fact both sane and very intelligent.

One day a young man of Baghdad went to the mosque and spoke to the imam.² He said, "O imam efendi,³ I want to get married, but before doing so, I need some advice.

¹Behlül Dane is largely a legendary figure in the Muslim past of the Abbasid period (750-1258). Whether there is any historicity to this figure is questionable, though until the 18th century there was a grave near Baghdad that was supposedly his. He was said to be a mad half brother of Harun Reşit (Haroun al-Raschid), greatest of the Abbasid 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 schlemiel, a saintly fool.

²The mosque official who conducts the prayer services.

³In earlier times the word efendi was a term of respect used in speaking to distinguished men. By the mid-20th century, however, its prestige had eroded so much that it was used only while speaking to children and servants.

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I have the opportunity to marry a young virgin, a divorced woman, or a widow. Which should I choose?"

"Don't ask me such a question," answered the imam. "Go and ask Behlül Dane, a very wise young man, to help you make this decision."

The young man searched for Behlül Dane, and he finally found him in a field playing with some children. Behlül Dane was at the time riding on a hobbyhorse, a wooden stake which he pretended was a live animal. The young man asked him the same question he had asked the imam: "Which of three women should I marry--a young virgin, a divorcée, or a widow?"

Behlül Dane smiled at this stranger and gave him an answer to his question. He said, "If you choose a virgin, only you will control your married life. If you choose a widow, she will surely want some control of your married life. If you marry a divorcée, she in time may kick you too."

The young man could not understand what Behlül Dane was trying to tell him. He returned to the mosque and said to the imam, "Imam efendi, are you out of your mind? Why did you send me to a mere child for advice? He uttered

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only nonsense. I couldn't understand a word of it." He then repeated to the imam what Behlül Dane had said.

The imam at once explained the meaning of Behlül Dane's comments. "If you marry a young virgin, you will control life in your new home. If you ask for her opinion about something you are thinking of buying, she will respond, 'You are the master of this house. I shall be pleased with whatever you buy.' If you marry a widow, she may have ideas different from yours. She may say, 'You know little about what you are planning to purchase. Give me the necessary money, and I shall go out and buy it.' If you marry a divorced woman, she may behave in the same manner that destroyed her first marriage."

You may repeat such wise words day and night to an ignorant person without having any effect upon the listener. One cannot be helped by words he does not comprehend.