

Story #165 (Tape #2, Summer 1970) Narrator: Hacı Gönen
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Behlül Dane and the Three Worshippers in the Mosque

The younger brother of Harun Reşid was Bir Dane*, His Highness. Bir was placed on the throne of their father. One day while Bir Dane was visiting the palace library, he noticed in a book the following line: "A subject [kul]** cannot be a sultan. I am a kul, and therefore I cannot be a sultan." Immediately after that, he ordered his people to assemble before the palace. He addressed them, "O people, listen to me. You made me a ruler in succession to my father and I have served as your king until now, but I do not want this profession [occupation]. I shall cease being padişah, and I am taking off my uniform." He took off his clothes.

The people wondered why he behaved so, thinking he was out of his mind. asked him, "Why do you leave your throne?" for they could not understand this

Bir Dane put on an old cloak and said to the people, "I return my authority to you." He took a willow branch in his hand and mounted on it as mounted a horse and went to where some children were playing.

The people concluded that Behlül had lost his mind, and they put Harun Reşid, his brother, on the throne as padişah instead of him. Behlül was playing hobby-horse in the streets when Harun was made padişah.

*Turkish peasants often call Behlül Dane Behlül Bir Dane. This comes about because dane and tane are spelled alike, d/t being the same letter in voiced and voiceless forms. Bir tane means one each or one unit, which suggests, figuratively, unique, one of a kind. The name then means Behlül the Unique or --Singular, or --Matchless. The epithet often appears alone, without Behlül, and becomes a substantive: The Unique One.

**Kul, or human being, means a servant or slave of God, a creature of God.

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[Here, Ahmet Uysal asked, "Which was younger?"

The narrator answered, "Bir Dane was younger."]

Harun Reşid could not understand why his brother behaved in that way. He instructed his advisors to watch him closely and find out if he was really mad or not.

One day, someone was looking for a wise man. He was advised to go to Behlül Bir Dane. The man found Bir Dane while he was playing a horse game with children, riding a hobby-horse [stick horse, in Turkish]. The man said, "Son, I have come to see you."

He could hardly stop his horse, he was so taken with the game. "Let me hear what your problem is, Father," Bir Dane said.

"I want to consult you about something, son," the stranger said. "There are three women who wish to marry me. One is a virgin; one is a widow; one is a divorcée. Which one of these should I marry?"

Bir Dane answered this way: "The virgin is your kismet, but it is God's order for you to marry the widow. If you marry the divorcée, the horse will fart and defecate barley--that is, she will behave like a horse to you" [that is, a divorcée is likely to be a bad wife; they have problems].

His Highness Bir Dane was being closely watched by palace men, and everything that he did was recorded in books. One day the vizier said to the padişah, "Let us assign a duty to Bir Dane and pay him a salary."

"Very well. Call him and do as you like. I shall not interfere in it."

They said, "Oh, Bir Dane, we shall assign you a duty and pay you a salary. What is your opinion of that?"

"Let me consider it and return to tell you."

He went out, and they thought he would go and consult someone. He went into a lavatory and spent some time there and came out. They asked him,

"What did you do?"

"I consulted someone, but they would not approve of it."

"What did they say?"

"It won't work. I do not want it."

The viziers asked the men who had escorted Bir Dane to the lavatory whom he had consulted.

"He did not go anywhere. He just entered the lavatory.

"Was there anyone in the lavatory?"

"No, there was not."

They said to Bir Dane, "Whom did you consult in the lavatory?"

"I consulted the excrement in the lavatory."

"What did the excrement say? [The informant first said küspe, the polite word meaning the pulp of grapes after they are squeezed.]

"Well, I asked the excrement the following question: 'They want to pay me such and such a salary. Shall I accept it?'

"'Look at me,' the excrement said. 'In the beginning I was made of such beautiful, colorful and tasty vegetables and exquisite foods. People used to eat me with Bismillah. When I was thrown inside, and when their bodies were nourished with my food, they discharged my pulp out here. When people see me now, they hate the sight of me and spit on me. When they pay you a salary, you will enter into the body of human society and your end will be the same. Therefore, you should not accept it.'"

One day, Harun Reşid was going to have a Mevlüt* reading. People were invited. Foods were cooked. The padişah told Behlül Bir Dane, "You go to the mosque and bring back the people whom you find praying there."

*Mevlüt or Mevlid is a great religious poem about the birth, life, miracles, visions, and sayings of Mohammed. It was written by Süleyman Chelebi, imam of the Ulucami or Great Mosque of Bursa; it was his only literary work. Mevlüt is the most popular memorial piece in Turkey, chanted at funeral services and at memorial services. Survivors of the dead may have Mevlüt chanted at a mosque, or elsewhere. At such occasions, the people attending the service are treated to cold sherbet, candy, and other sweets. The person who arranges for such a service pays all expenses, including honoraria for the musicians. See F. Lyman MacCallum, The Mevlidi Sherif (1943), which

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When he reached the mosque, he saw that most of the people were quickly leaving, but he found three men still remained. He told them that Harun Reşid wanted them at the palace. Much food was cooked and the banquet tables were all set, but only three people could be found for the feast.

"What is this?" asked the padişah. "What instructions did I give you?"

"Well, I brought only the three men I could find praying in the mosque."

"Were there but three?"

"I could find only three people praying in the mosque." [The narrator commented here, "Well, this was one of the miracles of Bir Dane, because, as far as he was concerned, only three people among many were really praying in the mosque. The others were there for hypocritical reasons. There are many such miracles of Bir Dane, but I do not want to hold you up."

contains an English translation. The best life of Süleyman Chelebi (d. 1422) can be found in Ahmet Atesh's edition of the work (1954).