

Story #269 Tape #15, Summer 1970)

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about 65

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Throucheat
Behlül Dane, Friend of the Seven

Throucheat

Once upon a time there was a famous caliph at Baghdad named Harun Reşid. This caliph had a brother Behlül Dane, who was called deli [mad], but the truth is that he was not deli but veli [saint]. Disguising his real identity, he used to wear bits of bones, rags, and feathers, and thus he pretended he was mad.

One day he built a little shack for himself outside the city of Baghdad. Digging up five or six human skulls from a graveyard, he strung them on a rope and hung them in front of his shack. People passing by wondered what he meant by this, and they asked, "Behlül, what are those skulls for? What are you going to do with them?"

"They are for sale," he replied

"Nonsense!" they said. "What do you mean by saying they are for sale? Who would buy them?"

"There are those who will buy them, all right.

People saw Behlül selling skulls there and elsewhere. They reported this to his brother, Harun Reşid, saying, "Your brother is selling human skulls in such-and-such a street at

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such-and-such a part of the city. When we asked him what he was doing with those skulls, he said he was selling them."

Upon hearing this, Harun Reşid became very angry at his brother. He entered a carriage and was taken to his brother's shack. "Selâmünaleyküm," he said.

"Aleyküm selâm, brother," replied Behlül.

"What are those?" asked Reşid.

you not see what they are?" replied Behlül.

"What are you going to do with these skulls?" asked Harun Reşid

"They are for sale," said Behlül.

they worth anything?"

course they are," said Behlül. "Those who know their value will buy them. Those who do not will just ask and pass by."

"Well, how much is this one?" asked Harun Reşid, pointing at one of the skulls.

"That one is worth five mecidiye,* five silver mecidiye."

"And this one?"

"This one is worth two mecidiye. And that one next to it is worth one."

"Why are they priced differently?" asked Harun Reşid.

"Well, they are all different. This one is the skull of

*mecidiye---a silver coin of the Ottoman era worth 20 piastres, or about 1/5 of a lira.

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a learned man. This one was the skull of a tyrant. And this one was the skull of an ignorant man. That is why they are sold at different prices," said Behlül.

Growing furious at this explanation, Harun Reşid lifted his hand to strike Behlül, but at that point, he suddenly discovered himself in Magrib.** He discovered that he was in a forest filled with wild animals. While trying to escape from the attacks of these animals, he had his clothes torn ragged. Running this way and that way, he was soon so exhausted that he could hardly walk. He finally found himself walking on a plain where he met The Seven.***

June within June

"Selâmúnaleyküm," he greeted them.

"Aleykümselâm," they replied. "who are you? What are you doing in this forest which is filled with ferocious animals where are you from? Where are you going?"

"I am the Padishah of Baghdad, the Caliph of Baghdad, Harun Reşid," he replied.

They looked at one another and asked, one to another, where that city might be. But none was able to tell where

**Magrib in the folk imagination is a land in the distant West; its counterpart in the distant East is called Maşrike. There is a folk expression Maqripten Maşrike kadar -- all the way from West to East. Quite appropriately, Magrip is also the name for Morocco, farthest west of all Moslem lands.

***The Seven [Yediler] are among the ruling spiritual groups in Bektâşi mysticism, close to the top of the hierarchies. Confer The Three [Üçler], The Twelve [Onikiler], and The Forty [Kırklar], hierarchies of spirits, usually thought to belong to living men. See Walker and Uysal, Tales Alive in Turkey, p. 286.

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Baghdad was. One of them finally suggested, "Why do we not our friend Behlül Dane?"

At that very moment Harun Reşid suddenly realized he was standing facing Behlül, his brother. He then realized that Behlül belonged to a very high religious status. He stroked his brother's back and said, "Brother, as you see, I am ruined. I saw what you are capable of doing.**** You have reached a high level of spiritual development." Harun Reşid then transportation back to his home.

****Behlül has the power of displacing time. All of Harun Reşid's experience in the forest, his meeting The Seven and talking with them, happened in a fraction of a second as he stood facing Behlül Dane. This is related to the expression time within time [Zaman zaman içinde] with which so many Turkish fairy tales begin. The expression signals to the listener that what follows is "out of this world," out of time and place.