

Story #320 (Tape #5, 1971)

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of Istanbul University

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Malazgirt

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How Behlül Dane Trained Harun Resid's Son

Behlül Dane was celebrated as an educator. One day Harun Resid said to him, "When I die, my son Memun will succeed me to the throne. I want you, therefore, to train him in the ways of the court. I entrust him to you."

Behlül agreed to undertake this assignment, and he took the caliph's son with him to his cottage, which was one of his few earthly possessions. He was a man who had no fear at all of what the future might have in store for him, and he feared nothing or no one.¹ He was, however, very wise.

Behlül made Harun's son walk for four whole hours. The boy was unaccustomed to walking, for in the palace he had been carried everywhere, even to the bathroom, and he soon grew tired and his feet became swollen. After a while he could no longer. Then Behlül gave him a beating on the soles of

¹Allahsız, literally, godless, is the word that the narrator uses here; it can also mean, fearless, indifferent, detached, cold, and it is in the latter sense that it is used here.

sore and swollen feet.²

Crying, the caliph's son set out on the road back to the palace, although he had no idea of how to get there. He started asking directions, and by this time people recognized him and took him to the palace. He was immediately put to bed and attended by physicians who treated his swollen feet. Harun Reşid never reprimanded Behlül, completely overlooking this misdemeanor.

However, the caliph could not help bringing up the matter of Behlül's strange treatment of his son. One day he asked Behlül, rather reproachfully, "Brother, the caliph called Behlül 'brother'), I asked you to educate Memun in the ways of the court, and you made him walk for four hours. Afterwards, you gave the child a beating at the falaka. Why is this so?"

"Well," replied Behlül, "I did exactly what you wanted me to do. I trained your son in the ways of the court. When he becomes a caliph, a man will come to him and say, 'I walked for ten hours to claim my rights. I made your son walk for four hours so that he will understand how tiresome it is to walk for ten hours and won't be unjust to such a man. When he gets angry at a man he may order him to be whipped for 500 times. No man can stand to be whipped 500 or 1000 times. I therefore gave your son a whipping myself so that he will know how it

²Beating the soles of the feet, a standard punishment for school children, was done with the use of the falaka, a stick with thongs that bound together the feet of the victim. The narrator later mentions the falaka.

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feels to be whipped and won't be cruel to others. I've taught him what a ruler ought to know. Therefore, why are you reprimanding me?"