

Story #389 (Tape #3, 1972)

Narrator: Mehmet Bulut, 74, with the assistance of an anonymous bystander who retells the tale in a more coherent manner

Location: Çarıkköy, Uşak merkez kaza, Province of Uşak

Date: Although this is on a tape with material collected in early 1972, the narrator says it is December 1971; it was all part of the same trip, anyway.

Behlül Dane Sympathizes with the Imam Over the  
Great Difficulty of His Job

One day Behlül Dane went to the mosque for prayers. He discovered that the imam presiding over the worship of the congregation was not thinking of God but of his own personal concerns. The imam was planning to do some shopping after the service, and he was wondering where he would tie his donkey at the market.

Distracted from his prayers by such thoughts of the imam, Behlül Dane shouted "God is the greatest One!"<sup>2</sup> He still could not concentrate

<sup>1</sup> Behlül Dane can read the minds of others. Here the thoughts of the imam are imposed upon him, in a sense. The leader of the prayer is the spiritual leader of the congregation, and his exhorting the worshippers to pray should make them conscious of the presence of God, aware of the image of God. Because he is attuned to the imam's mind, filled with secular thoughts, he has the image of God blocked, and so he calls to God to recapture his image.

<sup>2</sup> Allah-u Ekber---God is great, the only One.

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on his prayers, however, and so he called out again, "God is the greatest One!" By this time the members of the congregation were casting angry looks at Behlül, thinking him insane.<sup>3</sup> But once more Behlül called out God's name before he could concentrate sufficiently to finish his prayers.

After the service was over, Behlül tried to explain his problem to the rest of the congregation. "I had to call upon God three times before I could concentrate properly on God and worship correctly. I had supposed imams could always do this at the first attempt, but now I know how difficult it has become in our time even to be a village imam!"

<sup>3</sup> If someone profanes the religious service in the mosque, all of the long prayers offered up to that point are nullified, and the worshippers have to start over their series of gestures and recitations.

<sup>4</sup> This is, of course, a piece of broad irony. Had the imam kept his mind on God the first time he had uttered his name, the prayers of the congregation would have communicated with God.