

Story 817 (1974 Tape 18)

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Behlül Dane¹ and the Drought

Once during the reign of Harun Reşit there was a severe drought in the whole area around Baghdad. It was just like the drought we had here in 1970. One day while the Caliph and his brother, Behlül Dane, were riding their horses around the countryside observing the damage caused by this drought, Behlül Dane said, "See how yellow those reeds have become of the drought."

Harun Reşit said, "Brother, you must really be crazy! Reeds always stand in the water, and they get what water they need that way. They do not need any rain."

Behlül Dane made no response to this remark of his brother. He just rode along beside him in silence.

As they were riding along, they saw a stream. Harun Reşit rode his horse over to the stream to let it drink

¹In the folk tradition Behlül Dane was the mad half-brother of Harun Reşit, the greatest of the Abbasid Caliphs, who flourished around 800. There is little or no evidence for the existence of such a relative of the caliph, but he is alive and well in folklore. A pious and austere saint who openly criticized the worldliness and hedonism of his brother and the latter's court, Behlül only seemed to be a fool to the roisterers who did not wish to hear his message. The present Behlül anecdote is atypical in that it is not sternly moralistic.

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When he noticed that Behlül was sitting on his own horse and holding the reins tightly, he said, "Brother, let the horse have its head. Let go of the reins so that it can reach down and drink."

Behlül Dane said, "He is standing in the water, and his legs are in the water. He can get all he wants that way."

"Yes, you really are crazy," said Harun Reşit.

"Well, reeds stand in the water and don't need any water on their tops. You laughed at me when I thought they did. Now the horse's legs are in the water. Let him get what water he needs through his legs."