

Story 827 (1974 Tape 18)

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Behlül Dane Respected as Great Human Being

In the time of Harun Reşit¹ there were rumors, gossip, and many stories about the Caliph himself, about his family, and about his court. People gossiped about the behavior of his wife when she was in the presence of men. She was quite outspoken in mixed company. She did not show the customary respect for men.

One day she was asked about this. A man said to her, "You are very outspoken in the presence of all men but Behlül Dane."² Why do you make that exception for him?"

¹ Harun Reşit was probably the greatest of the Abbasid Caliphs. He flourished around 800. Besides the historical data about Harun Reşit (Haroun al-Raschid), there is a great amount of material about him in the oral tradition. He also figures prominently in several of the tales of the Arabian Nights.

² Although Behlül Dane was thought by his contemporaries to be mad, he was, with Hamlet, "mad north-northwest." A pious and austere saint, he taught by means of his "antic disposition." In this respect he was like Shakespeare's wise fools and like the schlemiel of Jewish tradition. Much of his teaching and moralizing was aimed at the powerful and wealthy, in particular, the worldly Caliph. There is a tradition that Behlül was half-brother of Harun Reşit. While there is historical evidence to support the existence of such a person, there is little or none for his alleged relationship to Harun Reşit.

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"I consider him a great human being. That is why I have so much respect for him