

Story 979 (1985 Tape 3)

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Behlül Dane Builds Heavens and Time-within-Time

One day Behlül was sitting in the garden building toy houses with stones, the way children often do. Harun's wife¹ passed by while he was doing this. Noticing Behlül there, she asked, "What are you doing, Ağa?"²

Behlül answered, "I am constructing a heaven."

woman felt very sorry for him. She thought to herself, "Oh, he is so very poor! He does not have any money,

¹The Harun referred to is, of course, the great Harun Reşit (Haroun al-Raschid), the greatest of the Abbasid Caliphs, who flourished around 800. Many know him now more for his fictional role in The Arabian Nights than for his religious and political roles. The madcap Behlül Dane was supposedly his half brother, though there is no real evidence for this. His wife's name was Zübeyde.

²Ağa refers to a rural landowner, often powerful, often wealthy. By extension it is used as a courteous epithet for distinguished men in all walks of life. It usually follows the given name: Hasan Ağa. It is used by Zübeyde as a kindness to Behlül, who, though an instrument of Allah, plays the fool and seems a most pathetic figure.

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and he cannot ask for any. I'll give him a few kuruş."³

actually gave him 100 liras as a gift, but she asked him, "Can you sell me a heaven for that amount?"

"Yes--take one," he said.

Harun's wife then returned to the palace. When she went to bed that night, she had a dream. In her dream she saw herself in heaven, and she enjoyed this greatly all night long. The following morning she awakened her husband, Harun, with great excitement. She said, "Wake up! Wake up! Yesterday your brother was building heavens. I bought one from him, all night long I dreamed that I was in such a heaven.

It was beautiful! I was so comfortable and happy there! You must also buy such a heaven!"

Early that same day Harun went to his brother and said,

"Selâmunaleyküm."

"Aleykümselâm."⁴

³A kuruş is 1/100 of a lira. Once a respectable monetary unit, it has been reduced to insignificance (and no longer used) now that the lira (in the 1980s) has been devalued to 1/700 or 1/800 of a U.S. dollar. A few kuruş is an expression not to be taken literally; it means a small amount of money. At that time 100 liras would be a small amount of money only to such a fabulously rich person as the wife of the leader of the entire Moslem world!

⁴The traditional exchange between Moslems, especially Moslems who are strangers to each other: May peace be unto you/And may peace be unto you too.

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"What are you doing there, Brother?" asked Harun.

"I am constructing heavens," said Behlül.

"Will you sell one of them to me?" asked Harun. "How much do you want for one of your heavens?"

Behlül answered, "Yes, I can sell one to you. It will cost you 1,000 liras."

Surprised, Harun asked, "Have you also started a large business enterprise? Yesterday you sold one of these to my wife for only 100 liras, but today you are asking me for 1,000 for one! Why is that?"

"That is because your wife bought a heaven on faith without knowing a thing about it. But now you know in advance what kind of heaven you are buying. That is the reason that am charging you more."

In those days 1,000 liras was a great amount of money and Harun became ^{angry} furious that his brother would ask for so much. Before Harun could say anything or do anything about it however, Behlül touched him lightly with his stick, and Harun suddenly found himself in a very desolate place. He was quite bewildered.⁵

⁵This is an instance of time-within-time (Zaman, zaman içinde) a trance state in which one experiences many strange and lengthy adventures in just a few seconds. The adventures may seem to take many years in the internal calendar, but in the outer world they are as a moment. Such moments of "frozen time" occur fairly frequently in Turkish folktales. In this and other Behlül tales Behlül projects Harun's mind into such

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Harun looked to the right and then he looked to the left, but nowhere could he see any living creature. After a while he saw a small light, barely visible, as if it were a great distance away. He began to walk toward that light. When he finally reached it, he found there a man sitting beside the road. Harun said, "Selâmunaleyküm."

"Aleykümselâm."

Harun then asked, "What is the name of this place?"

The man did not answer that question but asked, "Brother, where did you come from?"

Harun said, "I am Harun Reşit, and I came from Medina."⁶ He then proceeded to tell the man a great many things about himself, but the man continued to act as if he had never heard either about Harun or about his country.

The man said, "Brother, I have never heard of you or your country before now. I have a brother who is older than I. Let us go and consult him, for perhaps he will recognize your name or the name of your country."

They traveled together to the home of the man's older

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a time warp in order (1) to protect himself from the wrath of his powerful brother, and (2) to teach Harun some lesson.

⁶Harun Reşit ruled at Baghdad, but Islam was said to have been established at Medina, to which Mohammed had fled from Mecca.

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brother. When they arrived there, Harun was surprised to discover that this older brother looked much younger than the first man he had met. They asked this youthful older brother about Harun and Medina, but this second brother said, "I really do not know anything about either of them. I have never heard either of those names before. But we have a brother even older than I am. Let us go and ask him."

three of them traveled together to visit the oldest of the brothers. This third brother was said to be the oldest, but, strangely, he seemed to Harun to be the youngest. Harun was quite amazed at that. This third brother lived in a two-storey house, the second floor of which was forty steps above the first. Harun said to this third brother, "I wish to ask you a question before I tell you the problem about which we have come to consult you. I should like to know whom you call 'older brother' in this country."

third brother answered Harun's question. He said, "We call the first-born the older brother and the last-born the younger brother."

Harun asked further, "How is it, then, that they call you 'older brother' when you actually appear to be the youngest?"

"I shall now show you my secret," said the third brother. "Listen carefully and watch me very closely." He then struck his foot against the floor sharply.

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Soon a woman entered the room hurriedly. She said, "Yes? What are your orders?"

third brother said to her, "Bring me a watermelon, but do not cut it. I want to examine it before it is cut." The woman descended the forty steps and returned again with the same speed. The third brother examined the melon which she had brought and said, "Oh, no. This is not a good melon. Bring me a different one." The woman ran down the steps again and quickly returned with another melon. But the third brother rejected that melon too and sent her back for a third melon. Without any complaint of any kind, the woman went and brought a third melon. The third brother then said to Harun, "If I told her that I did not like this watermelon, she would go and bring still another one. This is the reason I have remained young and shall continue/stay young. If you have a bad wife, she will age you quickly." (Nowadays wives are different. You cannot ask that kind of thing of them. They would yell at you or hurt your feelings. "Do you understand now? This is the reason why I have stayed so young."

Harun said, "Yes, I understand that now. But here is the question that we really came to ask you: I am from Medina. Have you ever heard of my country before?"

third brother said, "No, I haven't. However, we have

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a very wise hoca⁷ here. He leads us in the prayer service every Friday noon.⁸ We shall ask him about this. He will undoubtedly have heard of your country."

The following day was Friday, and all four of them went to the noon service at the mosque. When Harun saw the hoca he was astounded. He could not believe his eyes! The hoca none other than his brother, Behlül Dane! Behlül then touched Harun with his stick again, and Harun was back in his own country again.

This is the account that I have heard about this matter. course, only Allah knows the truth about such things

⁷A Moslem priest.

⁸Although the official Sabbath in Turkey may be Sunday, Friday is still the actual Sabbath for faithful Moslems, as it has traditionally been. The Friday noon service is the religious high point of the week.