

Story 1468 (1989 Tape 8)

Narrator: Ramazan Avcı, 38,
barber, Kurdish

Location: Hıyarlık village,
Kahta kaza,
Adıyaman Province

Date: May 1989

Allah Belongs to Everyone

As we all know, Harun Reşit¹ was one of the most famous of all caliphs at the head of Islamic religion. This story is about a problem in Islamic law that occurred during his time. In Islamic law, people of any religion have the right to worship as freely as Moslems do. It is forbidden to abuse or insult any people just because they are not Moslem. They should be protected, and their property rights should be respected unless they cause harm to Moslems.

One day Caliph Harun Reşit announced that Moslems should stop making purchases of any kind in shops not owned by other Moslems. When the Caliph's brother, Behlül Dane, heard this announcement, he went to Harun Reşit and said, "Allow me to serve in your place as imam² today. Let me lead the congregation

¹Harun Reşit, who flourished during the years around 800, was by far the best-known caliph after the time of Mohammed's first four successors. According to legend, he had a half brother named Behlül Dane who was thought by some to be mad. There seems to be little historical documentation for such a brother, but there are a great many tales about the legendary Behlül and his supposed relationship to the Caliph. In these tales it is clear that Behlül is not really mad but has put on an antic disposition in order to get away with making frequent and severe criticism of the worldliness and moral lapses of Harun Reşit.

²The imam is the prayer leader during the five daily prayer sessions in the mosque.

Story

in prayer service today

The Caliph answered, "Oh, Behlül, I should not trust you with that responsibility, because you so often do strange things. On the other hand, I do not want to offend you, either. Therefore, go ahead and serve as imam today

"Don't worry about it, Brother. I shall behave and not do anything crazy today

When the time for the noon prayer service arrived, Behlül Dane stood before the worshipers, put his hands to his ears,³ and said, "Allah is omnipotent."⁴ But while he was reciting the El Ham,⁵ he deliberately made a mistake saying, "Elhamdülillahirabbülbimüslim.

The congregation apologized for that mistake by saying, "I declare that Allah is perfect."⁶ Behlül deliberately made the same mistake a second time, and again the congregation said, "I declare that Allah is perfect.

³At the beginning of a prayer service, Moslems make two gestures toward the Deity. One is to open their hands, palms upward, as if ready to accept whatever Allah sends. They also place their hands momentarily behind their ears, as if they are listening for something--again presumably from Allah. Varying interpretations are given to these gestures, however.

⁴The actual wording in the text is Allahüekber.

⁵This is a reference to the first chapter of the Koran.

⁶The actual wording in the text is süb-han-Allah.

Story 1468

When the prayer service was completed, Behlül said to the congregation, "Do not leave yet. I should like to ask you a question. Why did you say, 'Allah is perfect' after I had said, 'Elhamdülillahirabbül**bim**üslim'?"

A man from the congregation answered, "Ah, Behlül, you are always doing crazy things! There is no such word as you used in that prayer. You spoke incorrectly. You should have said, 'Elhamdülillahirabbül**ale**min'

"Aha!" said Behlül. "If that word ends with -alemin instead of -bimüslim, then it means that Allah belongs to everyone, not just to Moslems. Therefore, people should be free to shop at any stores they choose, not just shops owned by Moslems

When the Caliph Harun Reşit heard this, he realized the mistake he had made. He canceled his order that Moslems should buy only in Moslem shops.