

Story #494 (Tape #72 1961-1962)

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Location: Kaza town of Ünye, Province of Ordu, but narrator spent most of his life at kaza town of Kula, Province of Manisa

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The Bektashi and the Hoca

One day a Bektashi was sitting under a huge sycamore tree, near a fountain, eating bread and cheese and drinking rakı. It was just a few days before Ramazan, and the kadı of that place had forbidden the drinking of all alcoholic beverages. He had had criers announce that anyone who disobeyed this rule would be thrown into jail.

A hoca, going to preach in a village mosque, happened along and saw the Bektashi. "Selâmünaleyküm," he said.

"Aleykümselâm," answered the Bektashi.

Seeing the Bektashi drinking rakı, the hoca asked, "Aren't you ashamed of drinking rakı on such a blessed day?"

"Sit down, hoca," said the Bektashi. The hoca was rather tired from walking, and the place was cool and inviting, and so he accepted the Bektashi's suggestion and sat down. He took bread and olives from his bag and began to eat. The Bektashi addressed him, saying, "Hoca, look at this natural beauty given to us by God. If we people do not benefit from the wealth of such beauty, given to us by God,

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then tomorrow in the next world it may accuse us of ingratitude. God will demand their right from us. Look at this beautiful tree its cool shade, and that fine fountain. Shouldn't one drink this excellent raki in such beautiful surroundings?

"What you say may be true," answered the hoca, "but the Ramazan is very close. Won't it be better to do this after Ramazan?"

"Ah, hoca, the Ramazan comes every year, again and again, but once we go, we shall never return. Come--have a drink!"

The hoca could not resist the temptation, and so he took a swallow of raki. But once he had taken a swallow, he wanted another, and so he began to drink with the Bektashi. At night when the night watchman saw them there, quite drunk, he arrested them and took them before the kadi.

The kadi was surprised to see a hoca, wearing his large turban and black gown, brought before him in the company of a Bektashi. Addressing the Bektashi, he said, "What is your name?"

"Yorgi,"² answered the Bektashi.

"You are not one of the faithful anyway, then," said the kadi.

¹Throughout Turkey this is a common rationalization used by those who do not observe the restrictions of Ramazan.

²A non-Turkish name, variant of George. In taking this name, the Bektashi is suggesting that he is a Russian, a Georgian, a Greek-- a Christian or Christian sympathizer, at any rate.

Turning to the hoca, he said, "But you, you shameless fellow! Aren't you embarrassed for your turban and your gown? I am told that you preach in mosques. How could you do such a disgraceful thing on such a blessed day? The Bektashi observes neither prayers nor fasting and is more Christian than Moslem. But you--why did you do this?"

Then the kadı ordered the hoca carried to jail and the Bektashi released. "You are not a true Moslem, and your customs are different from ours. It may not be a sin for you to drink raki."

As the Bektashi was leaving the court, he felt sorry for the hoca. He asked the guard if he might speak to the kadı again, and when he had been granted permission, he said to the kadı, "Kadı, efendi, would you like to convert an unbeliever to Islam?"

"Of course I would," answered the kadı.

"Then I should like to become a regular Moslem," said the Bektashi, "but I have one condition: you will set the hoca free."

The kadı thought about this proposal for a minute, and he came to the conclusion that converting a Christian to Islam was a greater act of piety than imprisoning a sinner. "All right, I shall set the hoca free, but now repeat after me, 'There is only one God and Mohammed is his prophet.'"

After the Bektashi had repeated this, he left the court with the hoca. As they were walking down the street, the Bektashi said,

"How wonderful religion can be!"

The hoca was ashamed of his disgrace and angry at the Bektashi.

"How can a person like you say that?" he demanded. "What do you mean?"

"Well, first I became a Christian and saved myself," said the Bektashi, "and then I became a Moslem and saved you."