

Story 873 (1964 Tape 2)

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The (Bektaşî) and the Destroyed Dome of the Bath

One day a Bektaşî entered a public bath. As he was undressing to wash himself, he realized that nowhere in his clothes did he have the forty paras² to pay for his use of the bath as he left. What could he do to avoid this disgrace? He was quite at a loss for a solution at first. Then he prayed, "O God, throw down to me a forty-para piece. Either throw down a forty-para piece or knock down the dome of this

¹ A Bektaşî is a member of a dervish order of the same name. In pre-Republican days the Bektaşî order was a very powerful organization both religiously and politically. Along with all other dervish orders, it was outlawed during the Kemalist Reforms of the 1920's. The Bektaşî character was known for its unorthodox Moslem attitude, its seeming irreverence, and its independence. One must know this to appreciate the humor--often ironic--of Bektaşî tales.

² The monetary denominations mentioned in this tale need some explanation. The para was 1/40 of a kuruş, and there were 100 kuruş to the lira. These were until relatively recently meaningful monetary units. Now, however, in the late 1980's, the lira is worth only 1/750 of a U.S. dollar, making both kuruş and para meaningless. Actually, the para lost all meaning earlier in the century, and the narrator is apparently unaware of its original value or he would have referred to the bath price as a kuruş instead of as forty paras.

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bath." Right then there was a shattering noise, and the main dome of the bath collapsed. The Bektaşi threw two dippers³ of water over himself, washing hastily, dressed himself, left the bath.

As the Betaşi walked away, he saw a beggar by the side of the road. This beggar kept saying, over and over, "O God, throw down 1,000 liras to me.

The Bektaşi walked up to him, slapped him on the back of the neck, and said, "You scoundrel! He pulled down the dome of the bath to avoid giving me forty paras. You will have the entire dome of heaven pulled down on us for 1,000 liras! Is that your intention?"

³ Traditional Turkish baths do not have showerheads. Bathers rinse the soap off themselves by throwing dipperfuls of warm water over their bodies. The bath dipper is not like an American dipper; rather, it is a small saucepan (called tas) without a handle.