

Story 1310 (1988 Tape 8)

Narrator: Nuray Akbulut, high school student

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A ¹Bektaşî Definition of Prayer

There once was a Bektaşî who attended a prayer service at a mosque. He performed the rekats² led by the imam³ and then afterwards made his personal communication with Allah.⁴ He said, "O Allah, provide me with enough money to buy a

¹Member of a dervish order of that same name, founded by Hacı Bektaş Veli (d. 1516). The Bektaşî dervishes are often said to be Shi'ite more than Sunnite. Thus their religious position is equivocal in predominantly Sunnite Turkey. Throughout their history they have often been deeply involved in Turkish politics. They had a serious setback in 1826 when the Janissary Corps, with which they were allied, was destroyed. Along with other dervish orders, they were outlawed during the Kemalist Reforms of the 1920s. It was estimated that there were still 30,000 Bektaşîs in Turkey in 1950.

As a folk type the Bektaşî is cynical in attitude and frequently irreverent in behavior. The Bektaşî often drinks alcohol, refuses to fast, scoffs at orthodox Moslem clergymen, and is critical of the Deity. Despite his outrageousness, he is enjoyed, perhaps even admired secretly, by Turkish audiences.

²A rekat is a series of physical movements and gestures performed during prayer. The number of rekats performed varies with the particular services of which they are part. At a service at which a dozen or more rekats are required, there is a considerable amount of energy expended.

³An imam is the prayer leader in a mosque.

⁴A Moslem prayer service is divided into two parts: the farz, which includes the rekats and is mandatory; and the

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bottle of rakı." ⁵

Another man in the mosque was heard to say, "O Allah, give me religious faith!"

The imam overheard both these remarks. He said, "Just listen to what these fellows are saying!" Then turning to the Bektaşî, he asked, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"What is wrong with what I said? Doesn't everyone pray for something he does not have?"

optional individual and personal communications between the worshiper and Allah.

⁵Anise-flavored distilled liquor, known as arak in Arab lands and buzu in the Balkans. Despite the fact that alcohol is forbidden by Islam, rakı remains a popular drink throughout the Middle East and especially in Turkey, where it is the national liquor. Mixed with water it turns white, and its color plus its potency have earned it the name "Lion's Milk."