

Story 1383 (1989 Tape 5)

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The Bektaşî¹ Challenges Allah

Although alcohol is forbidden by Islam, Bektaşîs have long had a reputation of being drinkers of rakı,² One day a Bektaşî went to a tavern to buy some rakı, but he was so poor that he could not afford to buy a regular-sized bottle of this liquor. Instead, he was able to purchase only half of a small bottle of it.

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 1920's. 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.

²Anise-flavored distilled liquor, known as arak in Arab lands and uzu in the Balkans. Despite the fact that

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As he was walking home with his purchase, a terrible hailstorm began to fall from the sky. A large hailstone struck his rakı bottle and broke it. All of the liquor it contained was lost, and the dervish had no money to buy any more.

The Bektaşî was furious at Allah for having done this. As he passed a shoemaker's shop, he grabbed the heavy iron last used to shape shoes. Raising the last toward the sky, he shouted, "Come on! Let us see if you can break this! Even my old mother could break a glass bottle!"

alcohol is forbidden by Islam, rakı remains a popular drink throughout the Middle East and especially 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."