

Story 1419 (1989 Tape 7)

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A Bektaşî¹ Quip to Excuse Use of Alcohol

There was once a Bektaşî who was drinking alcohol during Ramazan.² He was observed by the police doing this, and as a result, he was arrested. However, when he took an oath that he would not drink any more alcohol during the holy season, he was released.

Some time later the same policemen caught the same Bektaşî drinking alcohol again. They said to him, "Oh, friend, you took an oath not to drink any more alcohol during Ramazan.

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.

²Ramazan is the ninth and holy month of the Islamic calendar, the month during which devout Moslems fast completely from sunrise to sunset. Although alcohol is forbidden for Moslems at any time, it is triply forbidden during Ramazan, for use of it

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What happened to your oath?"

The Bektaşi responded, "Oh, I am a very poor man, and I drink whatever I can find, whether it is an oath or alcohol "³

breaks the fast and also profanes the sacred season.

³This anecdote is a nükte, for it ends with a play on words. The Turkish idiom for take an oath is drink an oath.