

Story 1420 (1989 Tape 7) Narrator: Memduh Ün

Location: Konya, Konya
Province

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The Bektāṣi's¹ Belated Gesture Toward Ramazan²

Once a Bektāṣi was drinking an alcoholic beverage during Ramazan. The police caught him profaning the holy month of Ramazan in this way, but inasmuch as he took an oath not to do so again, they released him without punishing him in any way.

¹Member of a dervish order of that same name, founded by Hacı Bektaş Veli (d. 1516). The Bektāṣi 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 Bektāṣis in Turkey in 1950.

As a folk type, the Bektāṣi is cynical in attitude and frequently irreverent in behavior. The Bektāṣi 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 a month during which faithful Moslems fast. Between sunrise and sunset nothing--not even a drop of water--passes their lips. They do, however, break the fast after sunset and eat plentifully during the night. Stores are not open at night, and so most families stock supplies ahead.

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After a while, however, the same policeman again observed this Bektaşî drinking alcohol. They said to him, "Oh, friend, you took an oath not to drink any more alcohol. What happened to your oath?"

The Bektaşî responded, "I am a very poor man. I drink whatever I can find to drink, whether it is alcohol or an oath."³

³This is a special kind of fıkra known as nükte. A nükte usually ends with a play on words. In the Turkish, one may say take an oath quite literally: ant / oath /, etmek / do or make /; but just as often one may use the figurative expression ant içmek / drink an oath /.