

Story 1820 (1970 Tape 16)

Narrator: Same unidentified
old man who told
UW 1817

Location: Karaağaç village
Karacabey kaza,
Bursa Province

Date: 1970

To Each According to His Need

Two unemployed and impoverished men once met accidentally along the road. One was a Bektâşi¹ and the other was an elderly imam.² After they had talked about their problems for a few minutes, the imam said, "By Allah, men of our ages without any money lead very difficult lives. But what can we do about it?"

"I do not know, Hoca³ Efendi,"⁴ answered the Bektâşi.

¹Member of a dervish order founded by Hacı Bektaş Veli in the mid-thirteenth century. A large and very influential religious organization during Ottoman times, the Bektâşis in folk tradition are relegated to a stereotype of irreverence, impiety, and cynicism. They are the Devil's advocates in Turkish folktales, but folk audiences savor their improprieties for their "forbidden-fruit" quality.

²The imam is the prayer leader in a mosque.

³Technically, a hoca is a preacher, but a hoca may also conduct the prayer service, thus serving the rôle of imam.

⁴A term of respect, like sir, but usually following a male name. In recent times the status of the term efendi has been so eroded that it is applied only to children and servants, not, as formerly, to distinguished men.

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After thinking for a few minutes, the imam said, "It has been reported that our padishah has sometimes given money to poor people. Let us go and see if we too can benefit from his generosity."

The two men then became friends and traveled together to the government palace. There they received permission from the sentinels to enter into the presence of the padishah, and so the two of them went upstairs to the throne room. Outside the door of the throne room, however, both men lost their nerve. The imam kept trying to push the Bektāşi into the room first, and the Bektāşi kept trying to force the imam to enter first. Finally the imam gathered his courage, entered the room, and said "Selamünaleyküm, Your Majesty."

"Aleykümselam,⁵ father," responded the padishah. "Why have you come here?"

"We are here because we need your assistance. Can you help us a little? We are now so old that we cannot get jobs, and as a result of that we need some help."

⁵Greetings exchanged between Moslems not well acquainted: "Peace be unto you" / "And may peace be unto you too."

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"Very well, father. Let me ask you some questions.
Do you smoke?"

I don't."

"Do you drink rakı?"⁶ asked the padishah

I don't."

"For how many women do you need money?"

for any," answered the imam.

The padishah then took a mecidiye⁷ from his purse and placed it upon the imam's palm. The imam thanked him and left the room.

in the hallway the Bektāşi asked, "What has he given to you, and what did you say to him in order to get it?"

gave me a mecidiye after asking me several questions. He asked me if I smoked. He asked me if I drank rakı. He asked me how much money women cost me.

"Very well," said the Bektāşi. He then entered the

⁶An anise-flavored distilled liquor, common in the Balkans and the Middle East. Like all other alcoholic beverages, it is forbidden for Moslems to drink it.

⁷A small silver coin issued during the reign of Sultan Abdul Mecit (1839-1861) and consequently named after him.

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throne room and said, "Selamünaleyküm, Your Majesty."

"Aleykümselam, father. What is your problem?"

"In my old age I have become very poor. Can you give me any help?"

"Do you smoke?"

"Of course," answered the dervish

"Do you drink rakı?"

"Certainly."

"To how many women do you give money?"

"A few."

Upon receiving this information, the padishah gave the Bektaşî six golden liras. The Bektaşî said, "May you live long, Efendi!" and then he left the room.

When the imam saw the Bektaşî leaving the throne room with the gold coins in his hand, he said, "What? Six golden liras for you but only a silver mecidiye for me? That is not fair!" Reentering the throne room, the imam said, "Your Majesty, there is something wrong here!"

"What is it?"

"You gave me only a mecidiye, but gave the Bektaşî six golden liras. That is not fair!"

The padishah responded, "When I asked you if you

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smoked, you said, 'No, I don't.' When I asked you if you drank rakı, you said, 'No, I don't.' When I asked you how many women you visited, you said, 'Not any.' Isn't that so? Well, then, a silver mecidiye a day is enough for you. The Bektaşî's expenses are much greater than yours. I gave each of you enough to meet your expenses. There is nothing wrong about that. Now go your way!"

Yonder there is a sakal,⁸

But here you have a small masal.⁹

8-9 Sakal means beard; masal means folktale. In Turkish folktales a rimed couplet is sometimes used as a terminal narrative device. A beard is a symbol of status or wisdom. It is impossible to know whether the narrator was referring to a specific beard in the audience or whether he simply needed a word to rime with masal.