

Story 1869 (1995 Tape 5)

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Determining Prayer Time

One day a Bektaşî¹ went to visit a hoca² who was a friend of his. The two men talked with each other at length during this visit. At one point in their conversation, the Bektaşî said, "It is easy for us here in Turkey to know when it is time to have our five daily prayer services, because we can judge the time quite accurately by observing the position of the sun in the sky. But if we lived near the North Pole

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 secretly admired, by Turkish audiences.

²A hoca is a preacher and the religious leader of a community. In pre-Republican times the hoca was also the community teacher. Separation of church and state in the Republic required that teachers be people of secular rather than of religious training.

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or the South Pole we could not decide upon prayer times that easily, for in those places there are six months of daylight and six months without any sunlight. If we lived in one of those places, how could we know when prayer time had arrived?”

The hoca replied, “Well, if you were living in one of those distant places, you would simply look at your watch to determine when each prayer service was to begin.”