

Story 1992 (1992 Tape 9)

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North Cyprus Turkish
Republic

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Bekri Mustafa¹ Sends Message to Heaven

Bekri Mustafa was a notorious drinker, but when the sultan forbade the drinking of alcohol, he felt threatened. He knew that if he continued to drink in Istanbul, he would be reported to the sultan, who would have him executed. He continued drinking, but he did so as he wandered aimlessly around the countryside.

One day he came to a Gypsy village where a funeral was about to be held, but the funeral could not begin until the mourners had located someone who could conduct the burial service. Because Bekri Mustafa was always well dressed, the Gypsies thought that he must be a hoca.² As soon as they saw him, the villagers shouted, “Hey, hoca,

¹A drunkard who reputedly lived during the reign of Sultan Murat IV (1623-1640). Although he is a comic figure, he is also considered a ne'er-do-well in the Muslim context, where the use of alcohol is forbidden. Bekri Mustafa not only names the man but has also become a generic term for drunkard. There are numerous oral tales about his tipsy antics.

²A hoca is the preacher and 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.

Story 1992

come here! We have been waiting for you! Come and direct the funeral service of this dead man.”

Bekri Mustafa answered, “I am not a hoca, and so I cannot help you in this matter.”

The villagers replied, “Your clothes and your manner seem to be like those of a hoca, and we think that you can help us.”

Bekri Mustafa realized that he was not going to be able to convince the villagers that he was not a hoca, and so he agreed to conduct the funeral ceremony. As the corpse was about to be lowered into the grave, Bekri Mustafa leaned over and whispered something in its ear.

All of the other attendants and mourners observed him do this, and they were curious about it. One of the attendants asked him, “Hoca, what did you say to the dead man?”

“I told him to tell them in the next world that Bekri Mustafa had conducted your funeral. Having that information, those in the other world will know how badly things have degenerated in this world.”