Story 2094 (1988 Tape 17)  

**Narrator:** Ragıp Gümüş, 75  
**Location:** Aydın, capital of Aydın Province  
**Date:** January 21, 1988  

How a Bektaşı\(^1\) Appeared at a Public Bath

There was once a Bektaşı who used to go to a public bath occasionally, but he did not like to pay the fee for bathing there. He avoided paying the fee by creating an unpleasant scene which distracted the manager of that business from collecting the required charge.

One day the Bektaşı went to that bath and enjoyed the services that it provided. But when the time came for him to pay the bath fee, he caused a nasty disturbance. He shouted loudly, "Hey, children! Hey, workers! When I came here I had in my pocket a silver smoking pipe with an ebony mouthpiece. When I got dressed, I discovered that

---

\(^1\)Member of a dervish order of the same name, founded by Hacı Bektaş Veli in the Middle Ages. The Bektaşı 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 established that there were still 30,000 Bektaşıs in Turkey during the 1950s.

As a folk type the Bektaşi is cynical in attitude and frequently irreverent in behavior. The Bektaşi often
that pipe was no longer in my pocket. Has any one of you seen my pipe? Whoever stole my pipe should return it to me at once! Who stole it?"

One of the workers responded, "Nobody here has taken or even seen your pipe."

The Bektaşı said, "If none of you has taken it, then who did? It must have been one of you. You are the only people who are responsible for your customers' personal belongings while they are here."

The workers believed that the Bektaşı had had a pipe and so they searched carefully for it. They could not find it because there was no way in which anyone could find it. After the failure to locate the pipe, the manager of the bath said, "Our grandfather,² we have no interest in drinks alcohol, refuses to fast, scoffs at orthodox Muslim clergymen, and is critical of the Deity. Despite his outrageousness, he is enjoyed, perhaps even admired secretly, by Turkish audiences.

²Whether old or only middle-aged, dervishes are often shown respect with the term grandfather. Conversely, the dervish frequently calls men older than himself children. This practice is akin to the custom of referring to the Roman Catholic priest as father immediately after his graduation from a seminary.
your personal items, and I cannot believe that anyone has stolen your pipe. You must have dropped it somewhere here or there. But I promise you that if it should be found, I shall either take it to you or hold it here in safety until your next visit to this bath. Now go your way. I shall not charge you anything today.

The Bektaşi was gratified that his strategy had worked. Pleased that he had had a free bath, he went home happy and never again mentioned the pipe.

A few days later the Bektaşi returned to the same bath. After he had used the facilities of the bath for some time, he returned to the dressing room. There he again started wailing: "Hey, children, I came here with a set of 99 coral beads. While I was bathing, someone came here and stole my prayer beads from my pocket. Have you seen those coral beads? Apparently one of you stole them.

Ashamed of being accused of stealing the beads, the workers searched the entire bath very carefully. Of course, no prayer beads were found. Even though every worker took an oath that he had not taken or even seen any coral beads, the Bektaşi continued to blame them for his loss.
Story 2094

"Well, if none of you stole them, who did take them?"

Again the manager of the bath made an effort to end the embarrassing situation in which he found himself. He said, "Our grandfather, go home. We shall continue searching for your prayer beads, and when we find them, we shall either take them to you or lock them away safely until you can recover them the next time you come here."

The Bektashi did not complain any further about the loss of the beads. He was satisfied with having escaped the payment of the bath fee.

The Bektashi was so pleased with having cheated the bath in this way that he allowed only a few days to pass before returning to it. He used the same trick again. When he returned to the dressing room, he at once began to bellow, "Hey, boys, I had an ebony tobacco box in my coat pocket when I came to this bath, but it is no longer there. Whoever took that tobacco box from my coat should give it back to me at once!"

"No, our grandfather. We know nothing about your tobacco box," said the bath attendants.

But the Bektashi continued his complaint. "It was filled with fine tobacco, and that box itself was a gift.
to me from a dear friend.

Again the manager intervened. After speaking aside to his employees, he said, "Please, grandfather, go home without bothering to pay any fee. All of my men have sworn in the name of Allah that they have not seen your ebony tobacco box. If it should be found, we shall either take it to you or hold it here in safety until you return."

The Bektaşi praised himself for his shrewdness, but in fact he had not actually outwitted the bath manager. That man was well aware that the Bektaşi had never had any of the objects he had claimed to have lost. He understood perfectly that the Bektaşi's false accusations were means of avoiding payment of the bath fees.

When the Bektaşi came to the bath during the following week, the manager was prepared to handle the kind of problem which that patron had been causing. He intercepted the dervish even before he had gone to remove his clothes in the dressing room. He said, "Our grandfather, I want to talk with you. We both know that you have never lost anything in this bath, but you have claimed several losses in order to avoid paying the standard bath fees. I shall let you bathe here and have a glass of tea any time you
Story 2094

wish without charging you any fee, but for the love of Allah, please do not ever claim again that something of yours has been stolen here. If you will take an oath, sworn in the name of Allah, never again to claim that anything of yours was stolen here, I promise that I shall never charge you a fee

The Bektaşı was, of course, delighted with this arrangement. He said in the presence of the manager and several workers who had gathered around them, "I swear in the name of Allah that I shall never claim that any of my belongings has been stolen here."

Following this agreement, the Bektaşı cheerfully went to the dressing room. There he removed his clothes and placed them in a small cabinet and left his shoes before it. Then, wrapped in a large towel and wearing a pair of wooden bath clogs, he entered the hot room, planning to take a long and relaxing bath.

To his great surprise, however, when he afterwards returned to the dressing room, he discovered that the cabinet into which he had put his clothing was no longer there. Even his shoes were gone. He searched all around

Turkish baths often have rooms with different temperatures to suit the comfort of different customers.
the dressing area for the clothes cabinet and his shoes, but all of his efforts were in vain. Having taken an oath never again to say that anything had been stolen from him in that bath, the Bektasi became quite angry with himself. But he still did not surrender completely.

He went to the manager's office, and as he did so, he took along with him as witnesses several of the attendants. "My grandchildren," he said, "I took an oath never to claim that anything of mine had been taken from me while I was here. I intend to be faithful to that oath. But there is one piece of information which I want you to give me. Did I or did I not come here today wearing just a towel and a pair of bath clogs?"