

Story 1090 (1988 Tape 3)

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in 40s

Location: Ortahisar village, Ürgüp kaza, Nevşehir Province --Taped at Lubbock, Texas

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The Bektâşi¹ as Rainmaker

There was once a great drought in Central Anatolia. On a very hot summer day the residents of a certain village went to one of their fields to pray for rain.

As they were praying for rain, a Bektâşi came along the road and saw them there. The Bektâşi called to them: "What is the matter with you people? What are you doing out there?"

Annoyed by what they thought was a foolish question, the villagers answered, "Can't you see what we are doing? We are praying for rain

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

As a folk type the Bektâşi is cynical in attitude and frequently irreverent in behavior. The Bektâşi 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.

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Bektaşi turned his head first to the right side and then to the left side. Then he said, "You can stop praying! Just give me some food to eat. If you do that it will rain."

Some of the villagers grew angry at him and asked, "Who are you, anyway? How could you cause it to rain?"

others took a different attitude. "What harm would there be in our giving him some food to eat? He is probably very hungry. What would we lose by feeding him?"

Bektaşi said at this point, "You can beat me if there is no rain after I have eaten the food."

Two or three of the villagers went to their homes and got some food for the Bektaşi. They brought him several kinds of food, including böreks² and çöreks³

Bektaşi sat down at once and ate all of the food that the villagers had brought to him. After that, he washed his hands and his face and dried them on his handkerchief. He then spread his handkerchief over a bush to dry. Within just a few minutes the sky filled with clouds, and it began to rain very heavily.

²A type of small pastry stuffed with cheese, meat, or other filling. The pastry consists of many layers of extremely thin dough.

³A type of shortbread made in the form of a ring.

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When they saw the rain falling, the villagers were delighted. They said to the Bektaşî, "What an honest man you are! What a virtuous man you are!"

The Bektaşî answered, "I may be honest, but I am not virtuous." Then, pointing up to the sky, he said, "He and I don't get along together very well. He sent down this rain only to prevent my handkerchief from drying! He doesn't care a bit about your dry fields and your thirsty animals!"