

Story 1338 (1988 Tape 14)

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A Bektāṣī¹ Brings Rain

In most villages of Anatolia it rains very little during the summer. From beginning to end, that season is usually dry. When the drought becomes very severe, villagers often call in rainmakers, people whose prayers have been known to bring rain. Rainmaking is usually carried on in high places, the tops of hills or even mountains. When they go to such a height to pray for rain, people often take along a cow or a sheep to be sacrificed on that site

In the village that I am going to tell you about, the people had suffered greatly because of drought. Toward the middle of the summer they decided to pray for rain. They

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

As a folk type the Bektāṣī is cynical in attitude and frequently irreverent in behavior. The Bektāṣī 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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located a hoca² who had a reputation of being a good rainmaker. Led by this hoca, the villagers took with them to the hilltop an animal to be sacrificed. After they had slaughtered the animal in the proper way, they cooked and ate its flesh. Then the hoca recited all of the prayers he knew to be effective for producing rain. When he had finished praying, the villagers sat looking from left to right in order to see from which direction the clouds would come. They waited for several hours, but no clouds appeared. "When will it rain, hoca? We have not seen a single cloud yet."

Up
The famous ~~rainmaking~~ hoca answered, "We must have made some mistake in our proceedings, for the prayers I have recited usually produce rain. Is there anyone left back home in your village?"

"No," they answered

"Go back and look again to see if anyone failed to come here. There may be there some beloved servant of Allah for whom Allah might send rain."

Returning to their village, the peasants searched every

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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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house to see if they could find anyone who had been left behind. Still they could not find a single individual there. Then someone remembered a Bektaşî who lived just outside the village because the people did not want him to come any closer to them. The person who recalled the dervish asked, "Should we not have taken the Bektaşî with us to the hilltop?"

Another person retorted, "Leave the Bektaşî out of this! He could not be a beloved servant of Allah. He neither performs his prayers regularly at the mosque nor fasts during the holy month

"Who knows?" responded the first man. "He may still be the beloved servant of Allah." They therefore decided to go to the Bektaşî. Going to the outskirts of the village, they found the dervish lying outside his tent, sleeping in the sun

After being awakened, the Bektaşî asked, "What do you of me?"

"We went to the hilltop, made a sacrifice, and had a famous rainmaking hoca pray for rain. But although the hoca used all of his best prayers, there has not yet been a drop of rain. Then the hoca suggested that we might have forgotten to take with us some beloved servant of Allah. But when we came back and searched the village carefully, we found no one there. We now want to take you with us to the hilltop.

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"Are you all crazy?" asked the Bektaşî. "I am no beloved servant of Allah!"

"The hoca said that there was probably some such person behind, and you are the only person who wasn't there on the hilltop.

"If you want rain, I can bring it to you without going to the hilltop.

"Are you just teasing us?" the villagers asked.

"No, I am not. I shall bring rain here within just a few minutes." Then, taking some garments out of his bundle of clothes, he put them in a basin, poured some water upon them, started washing them. When he had finished washing these clothes, he hung them on the edge of his tent to dry. Immediately, clouds gathered overhead, and it began to rain.

/In some variants of this tale, the Bektaşî explains, "He did it just to spite me!" However, most Turkish audiences either know the tale and/or know of the sacrilegious behavior of Bektaşîs, and are thus able to infer this message.7