

## Elements of the Bektashi Order

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### Abstract

All this analysis is based on documented data as well as record data from conversation with dervishes during the time this research paper is realized in protection of the dissertation topic. This text is focused on the theme of Albanians' religious beliefs, mainly the Bektashi faith. The Bektashi faith is considered equally with other religions and Albania is the Bektashi World Headquarters. Bektashi is often described as the right religion for Albanians, as a bridge between Christians and Muslims. One of the religious communities in Albania is Bektashi, which has its own history in the Albanian land that should be called the Torch Land of this belief. Haji Bektash Veli, the founder of Bektashism, predicted that the fire of this belief would flicker strongly during the history of humanity but would never be extinguished. Today, the Bektashi community of Albania has its statute, and the first article states: "The Bektashi community is an independent, non-political community consisting of the Bektashi clergy of all levels, and the faith in their belief and worshipping of the Creator find inspiration in the doctrine, traditions, rituals and holy religious, moral and philosophical rules of Bektashism."

**Keywords:** dervish, bektashi, tekke, elements, practices

### 1. Introduction

This mystical school of Islam was established by the Sufi mystic Haji Bektash Veli. From the time he was little, Haji Bektash displayed qualities seldom found in children, and when he reached the age of maturity, he began his spiritual studies with the eminent Sufi mystics of his region. After some time, the saintly master Ahmad Yasawi directed Haji Bektash to go to Anatolia and propagate spiritual awareness. In 1282 CE he established a Sufi center, a tekke in the small central Anatolian town of Karahuyuk, a town that now bears his name, Hacibektas. From here Haji Bektash Veli sent his missionaries far and wide, so that Bektashi path expanded to throughout Anatolia and the Balkans, gathering countless clergymen and adherents.

As the Bektashi order spread throughout the lands of the nascent Ottoman Empire there was a need to reform its organization and regulation. This task was entrusted to Balim Sultan, who is commonly called the order's Pir-i Thani or the "Second Founder". It was him who gave the Bektashi order the structure, rituals and litanies by which it is recognizable today. Balim Sultan gave the order a well-defined organizational structure, which encompassed the laity "ashiks", initiates "muhib", "dervish", "father" (*Alb. baba*), "grandfather" (*Alb. gjysh; Turkish dede*), "great dede" (*Alb. kryegjysh; Turkish dedebaba*) who heads the Headquarters.

He saw to it that the widely-dispersed Bektashi tekkes were regulated through dedeliks (*Alb. gjyshat*) that were to oversee different geographical regions. Unique among Sufi brotherhoods, Balim Sultan also instituted the practice of celibacy, a path many Bektashi dervishes have chosen. Although for nearly four centuries the leader (*called dedebaba*) of the Bektashi order had sat in the mother tekke in Hacibektas, in 1930 the sacred seat of the dedebaba was moved to Tirana, Albania, where it has been located ever since. The current head of the Bektashi World Community is Haji Dedebaba Edmond Brahimaj, a man whose efforts and tremendous organizational skills have greatly enhanced the spiritual influence of the community.

Bektashis are to love their neighbours as they would their own selves, whether they be Muslims, Christians, Jewish or something else, they treat all with respect, thereby presenting themselves as one with all upright people. Bektashi tekkes and turbes were not only places of prayer and supplication for Muslims, but they were visited by Christians as well. These places were generally known as centres of harmonious spiritual and charitable activities. One can look at the example of

the pilgrimage up Mount Tomorr in Albania, where thousands of people come every late August regardless of race, region, religion, and nationality.

## 2. Literature Review

The Bektashi order is hierarchical in character. In this hierarchy, based on the pyramid stands ashik. Ashik means someone who loves the Bektashi religion. It refers to him who is attracted and feels some loyalty to Bektashi principles and activities, but has not yet received a nasip or has not entered into the order. This is the moment when ashik are in the process of drawing from the order. They visit tekke, talk to father and their regular members, listen to Bektashi music, and sing at the feasts of this faith.

Muhibs in the initial sense it is not different from the ashik and it means someone who loves or friend spiritually connected. The technical use of this word refers to someone who has passed through the rite of acceptance, has received nasip and is worthy to sit at the religious ceremonies of the order. The ceremony under which someone becomes a muhib is called Ikrarayini ceremony of declaration of faith or Aynicem, gathering ceremony (Birge, J.K., 2008: 186- 188).

Dervishes, this position requires a greater devotion to religious life. After attending the necessary ceremonies, the dervish can wear the taj (Alb. taxh) or hat of the order and tekke becomes his home where he serves until the end of his life. A Muhib, before becoming dervish, has served 10-15 years in tekke. In fact there is no any determined time when muhib may be ready to become dervish. This is determined by the ability to approach his teacher (Birge, J.K., 2008: 189). Following this period, if the baba of tekke determines the muhib spiritually fit, aceremony can be performed that can raise him to the rank of dervish, (women cannot be dressed as dervishes, but nothing stops her in gaining an even higher spiritual rank). At that point, the newly elevated dervish must decide to undertake a life of celibacy or marriage. Needless to say those who choose celibacy gain a much more esteemed rank in eyes of the community in recognition of their commitment and sacrifice.

The Bektashi clergy attire is a symbol, an inherited gift from ancient times, after the Prophet Adam. This habiliment is honored and sanctified by all the prophets. Also Prophet Muhammad himself it was communicated this holy habiliment from angel Gabriel in Mirage's night. And the Prophet Muhammad entrusted this to Ali the Great in a special ceremony. After Great Ali, he was held by Imam Hasan, Imam Husain and all the Imams, hand in hand, until to the one who arrived at the Pir Haji Bektash Holy. According to Bektashi norms, the religious attire is eternal and invariable. This attire is an indication of dogma, not a sign of youth and belonging to a discipline. The religious attire summarizes mainly Taxh (taj), Hirka and Lintel (Kallajxhi, Xh., 1964: 36). As for Taxh, the Albanian Bektashi dervishes wear the taxh with 12 pairs. These are called terke, a name of Arab origin that namely, "leaves", because the taxh symbolizes abandonment from the vices and all the wickedness of the people's world.

Hirka is the body cover from neck to ankle. It symbolizes the removal of dirty clothing of this world and wearing the white garment of moral purity. For this reason, the traditionally used hirka is always white because it has the meaning of generosity and purity. Hirka also symbolizes the first mantle of Adam's prophet, and in this case, has the meaning of covering mistakes and human vices. (Kallajxhi, Xh., 1964: 37).

Babas (*fathers*) are all those dervishes elected from Bektashi people by the circle of a tekke and are decreed by dede (grandfather) and dedebaba (great dede). Babas lead the tekkes and enjoy the right to perform the delivery ceremonies for Muhibs and Dervishes (Kallajxhi, Xh., 1964: 35). A worthy dervish can raise in standing and becomes baba, taking over the direction of the tekke and becoming a friend, religious cleric and counselor inside the Bektashi order (Birge, J.K., 2008, 190). Also in Article 46 of the Statute of the Bektashi community in 1924, "In every tekke, baba is the one who leads, the dervishes are his employees".

Dede (*grandfather*), are the fathers who see the last Bektashi delivery ceremony and head the dedeliiks, which are the centers of the entire district's Tekke (Kallajxhi, Xh., 1964: 36).

Dedebaba (*great baba*), is the highest spiritual authority of Bektashism, who heads the Headquarters and represents the morality of Bektashi element. (Ibidem)

### 3. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative methodology. Data were collected through the instrument of in-depth qualitative interview with dervishes during the working time. In addition, the research uses the technique of text analysis and the content analysis of the documents, the statutes of the Bektashi community and the various books that complement this work.

### 4. Main Elements

#### 4.1 Conversation

The Turkish word "muhabet" comes from the Arabic word which means "love", "affection", "connection" and "friendship". In Albanian, the muhabet (eng. conversation) has got a different meaning of "discussion", surely as a result of what this term implied for the Albanian dervishes who used it, because the conversation in the Albanian Bektashis was a gathering "friendly" during which it was discussed, talked, sang, but especially during which the baba or a dervish explained to believers the doctrine of the order (Rossi, E., 1942: 72-73).

This table talk was therefore of special importance. In every tekke it was assigned the room of conversation (hall of conversation). Such meetings could be made every week, every two weeks or every month, according to population opportunities (especially in the function of field work). So frequency was not constant. The number of participants varied according to tekkes. Men and women were present without distinction and without separation. During the meeting it was customary to drink brandy (Alb. raki). Most of the time, baba recited or sang, then explained to them by teaching to believers Bektashi dogmas.

As for drinks, alcohol in general was not forbidden, including drinking in tekke, as alcohol consumption was part of the conversation sessions. Most of the Bektashi believers remain muhibs which frequented the tekke for conversation, for ceremonies and celebrations that marked the life of the community. The life of the Bektashis in tekke and Bektashi wealth has been transmitted in the queue of the people. Nefeses are singing in every case: during the ceremonies, during the concerts for ashik (Melikoff, I., 2010: 18). Nefeses for Bektashi traditions are present in every significant case of life. Throughout the various religious ceremonies they try to recall the events of the afterlife through songs and dances. But it is pleasing that in the Bektashi conversations every muhib brings with it ashiks and talibs to learn and clarify the way of Bektashism, for embedded to them the love for this Islamic sect and consequently to prepare the talib to see erkan (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 98).

Tekke or the assembly where they gather and talks, there are these separate divisions, but similar to that of Pirevi, with no changes such as: Meydan or the place of mystical pray, chimney coffee paved with hassock where it usually takes place in Bektashis conversation, hashef or kitchens where food is prepared, the guesthouse of the clerics and muhibs sleeping, bakery, slaughterhouse where sacrificial animal meat is cut, stables for keeping livestock and any other (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 99).

#### 4.2 Practices

Outside the ritual we have just described, Albanian Bektashis observed in their lives some practices that were removed from the strict Muslim observation. Unlike the practice of the five daily prayers of the Sunni Muslims, they did only two prayers a day:

*"Once at dawn of the day and once at night, in these prayers, prayed to God to make progress, peace and brotherhood in the world and in the people."*

These prayers were made without turning to Mecca, and ablution was practiced only once in a lifetime when entered in the tariqat. Women who had the grade of muhib attended the meetings with men, which provoked many criticisms and accusations of bad habits over the Bektashi during the times.

In the statute of 1924 signify that a woman could become muhib only if she was married. Bektashis also had some special nutritional practices from those of Sunni Muslims: they eat pork meat, but did not touch snakes, turtles, dogs, and especially rabbits. As for beverages, alcohol in general was not forbidden, including drinking in tekke because it was part of the conversation sessions.

The practice of numerous pilgrimages are realized by Bektashis in holy places not only in Mecca, but also in Karbala and in Albanian cities, such as Mount Tomorr, etc.

#### 4.3 Dervishes moral reports

Dervishes are believers, are capable of interpreting reality and occurrences from human life. They appreciate their human and whatever work and profession of their. Among them are individuals who deal with trade, with agriculture and different crafts. Among them are writers, intellectuals belonging to educational and cultural fields. For dervishes as a special religious social category it is characteristic that they mostly care for the moral image and faithfully respect the tekkes norms.

Dervishes are known as charitable people. Everyone who knocks at the shelter of dervishes in tekke to find food or refuge is sure to encounter a good hospitality and no one asks for name and surname, nor to what religious belief belongs.

One of the greatest Sufi Iranian poets, Farid ud-Din Attar, in his work *Pand-nama* or "Book of Counsels.", in chapter XIII, for the life and work of dervishes writes:

*If you have mind and knowledge,*

*Be Dervish and with them associate.*

All dedes, babas and dervishes, as well as in the middle of the night to come in Tirana, will address to the Bektashi World Headquarters, because the tekkes are everywhere home of the clerics and believers. It is haram and unlike for clerics to sit in the club and sleep in hotels, being surrounded there by many servile, making wasteful spending because it is sweat of people. Him cleric who violates these rules will be judged at the Supreme Council (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 22).

Dervishes are dedicated and are devoted with a chaste soul and clean to their faith. Many are dervishes who have left great works in Bektashism and humanity. Dervish Ali Mehmet, a man educated in religious schools that he had since the Ottoman Empire, who has served in the tekkes of Frasher and Pristina. He had gained the trust and hearts of people, he knew to keep his figure of a believer and exalt his moral figure. This magical force of this dervish attracted people. Dervish knew to keep the people connected around Bektashism even when the religion was persecuted (Artistic, social, religious magazine "Wisdom" "Alb. Urtësia", No. 43, 2005:20). The dervish figure was very important, they honor the village chambers. In joys, family celebration they added the joy, in misfortune they diminished the soreness (Ibidem). These calming elements for humanity show the great and white soul, the wisdom, maturity, and the justice that characterize dervishes.

#### 5. Tolerance of Bektashism

The presence of such moral norms, such as love, brotherhood, unity, wisdom, tolerance and others, Bektashism did not regard them as a necessity within a religion, but between Albanian Muslims and Christians, by playing a soft and conciliatory role in conflicts between religions.

In the book, "Through the ramifications of Albanian culture," contemporary sociologist Zyhdri Dervishi claims that the Bektashis become more acceptable not only because they are more flexible, more liberal and tolerant in preaching and realizing the rules of religious rituals, but also because they manifest the most prominent altruism spirit (2013:111-112).

The contribution of the Bektashis is big in the history of our nation: As Roberto Morozzo della Rocca says, in the book "Nation and Religion in Albania 1920-1944", consolidated the symbiosis of Albanians with Bektashi faith. Religion in Albania was not a criterion for dividing people. Religious beliefs have not stimulated them in war against each other.

In the period 1887-1910, the Bektashi tekkes turned into illegal schools and assisted by patriots, babas and dervishes for spreading the primer, newspapers and journals and also different books in Albanian language. This is shown by many babas and dervishes activities. Particular is the mission of baba Meleq Staravecka (Shëmbërdenj), in distributing books in Albanian language throughout Albania and the Balkans (Çuni, N., 2006:28).

Bektashism spread rapidly in our lands from the beginning of the 16th century, when they started to rise and tekkes. However, persistent conflicts had with the Ottoman theocratic power since the Bektashists constantly preached: "people regardless of religious affiliation, are equal before the God, people have the right to have their own homeland and to cultivate their spoken and written language", rights which were not suitable for the invaders (Sula, Z; Lila, Q; Biçaku, A., 2005:45). Bektashism managed to overcome these difficulties.

A spokesman for Bektashism wrote:

*"We do not want fanaticism and religious disagreement. Our doctrine teaches us love for all, brotherhood and unity" (Sula, Z; Lila, Q; Biçaku, A., 2005:47).*

*"We all have a God religion and mother of that Albania" (Ibidem).*

All these sermons aim at the presence of moral norms as love and tolerance, which Bektashism sees as a necessity not only within religious beliefs, but between Muslims and Christians.

## 6. Conclusions

Bektashism has played and plays an important role in Albania, with social and national influence. Bektashism in Albania has marked and continues to mark important successes in all directions. With the wisdom and spirit of tolerance, it has contributed to the creation of a warm climate of cooperation with other religions, targeting a unique front, in the struggle against the evils that stain the society. One of the motives which has followed the Bektashis is the fact that have adapted with time but always by removing people from evil and to purify their spiritual world with those values that ennoble human.

Bektashis are to love their neighbors as they would their own selves, whether they be Muslims, Christians etc., they treat all with respect, thereby presenting themselves as one with all upright people. Bektashi tekkes and turbes were not only places of prayer and supplication for Muslims, but they were visited by Christians as well.

Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj, the leader of the Bektashi community said: "The door of Bektashi tekke is open to all regardless of religion, nation, gender, language, etc.

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