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BABA REXHEB (1901-1995) AND BABA ARSHI (1906-2015): BEKTASHI BABAS FOR THE AMERICAN BEKTASHI TEKKE

**Baba Recep (1901-1995) ve Baba Arşı (1906-2015):
Amerikan Bektaşî Tekkesindeki Bektaşî Babaları**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe two leaders of the Albanian-American Bektashi Tekke who led the tekke at different times but who both were successful. Baba Rexheb and Baba Arshi were very different in background and training. I catalogue their differences and consider their success as leaders in terms of recent research on leadership. I knew both babas for many years at the tekke so the methodology is participant observation. Baba Rexheb had the traditional background of an Ottoman dervish and scholar. He entered the tekke in Albania where he studied and learned Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish. He founded the Michigan Bektashi tekke in 1954 and led it to his passing in 1995. Since Islam is a minority religion in America and there had never been a Bektashi tekke before, establishing a tekke was a true challenge. In contrast Baba Arshi was a simple dervish whose only education was in the tekke in Albania doing manual work. Baba Arshi led the Michigan tekke much later when it needed to be sustained, beginning in 2004 to his passing 2015. Recent research on leadership in America has focused on “emotional intelligence” leading to “resonant leaders” who know their limitations, have empathy, evaluate social situations, build teams well, and use multiple styles. Another source of research is the “Tao of leadership” that builds on a 6th century BC Chinese text. Here the wise leader teaches by example, not exhortation, by offering opportunities, not obligations. Bektashi leadership, as demonstrated by Baba Rexheb and Baba Arshi, also teaches by example, not by sermons. The Babas never criticized, never judged, were always inclusive. My findings are that Baba Rexheb and Baba Arshi as successful Bektashi leaders showed both “resonant leadership” and the “Tao of leadership” in the Bektashi tekke in America.

Keywords: Baba Rexheb, Baba Arshi, Bektashi tekke, America, leadership, resonant leadership, Tao of leadership, Bektashi leadership

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, farklı zamanlarda Arnavut-Amerikan Bektaşî Tekke’inde şeyhlik yapan iki başarılı Bektaşî babasını tanıtmaktır. Recep Baba ve Arşı Baba birbirlerinden farklı bir eğitime ve arka plana sahipti. Bu çalışmada onların birbirlerinden farklı olan yönleri tespit edilecek ve liderlik konusundaki son araştırmalar bağlamında onların lider olarak başarıları üzerinde durulacaktır. Her iki babayı da uzun yıllar boyunca tekkede tanıma imkanı buldum; dolayısıyla çalışmamda kendi gözlemlerimden yararlandım. Recep Baba, eski usulle yetişmiş, geleneksel Osmanlı dervişi ve âlimi idi. Tekkeye, Arapça, Farsça ve Osmanlıca Türkçesi

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öğrendiği Arnavutluk'ta girmişti. 1954 yılında Michigan'daki Bektaşî tekkesini kurdu ve 1995 yılındaki ölümüne kadar bu tekkeyi yönetti. İslam, Amerika'da bir azınlık dini olduğundan ve daha önce Amerika'da bir Bektaşî tekkesi bulunmadığından onun bu girişimi, gerçek bir meydan okuma olarak kabul edilebilir. Buna karşılık Arşî Baba, yalnızca Arnavutluk'taki tekke de eğitim almış, el işleriyle uğraşan sade bir dervişti. Arşî Baba, Michigan'daki Bektaşî tekkesini 2004 yılından 2015 yılındaki ölümüne kadar yönetti. Amerika'da liderlik üzerine yapılan son araştırmalar kendi sınırlarını bilen, empati sahibi, sosyal durumları değerlendiren, iyi takımlar kuran ve farklı yöntemler kullanan “rezonant [uyumlu] liderliğe” yol açan “duygusal zeka” üzerine odaklanmıştır. Başka bir araştırma kaynağı, M.Ö. 6. yüzyılda Çin metinleri üzerine inşa edilen “Tao Liderliği” anlayışıdır. Bu anlayışa göre bilge lider, uyarı ya da nasihat yoluyla değil örnekler üzerinden gider; zorlama yoluyla değil fırsatlar sunarak öğretir. Recep Baba ve Arşî Baba örneklerinde gösterileceği gibi, Bektaşî liderliği de sözel olarak uyarıda bulunma/ anlatma üzerinden değil, bizzat örnekler üzerinden öğretmeyi tercih eder. Sözü edilen her iki baba da asla eleştirmeyen, yargılamayan daima kucaklayıcı kişilerdi. Edindiğim bulgulara göre Amerika'daki Bektaşî tekkesinde, başarılı Bektaşî babaları olarak liderlik yapan Recep Baba ve Arşî Baba, hem “rezonant liderlik” hem de “Tao liderliği” özellikleri taşımaktadırlar.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Recep Baba, Arşî Baba, Bektaşî tekkesi, Amerika, liderlik, rezonant liderlik, Tao liderliği, Bektaşî liderliği

1. Introduction

We live in troubled times across the world. Bektashism has always had much to offer people in such times. It offers broad perspectives for people to pull themselves out of their immediate circumstances and to appreciate Creation and the wonders of al-Haqq. At the same time Bektashism reminds us how to interact with our fellows--*eline, beline, diline sahip ol*.

In America we are in a situation where the national leader is truly ignorant of Islam. We have freedom of religion in America, but freedom from ignorance is more difficult. In the past we had national leaders who were knowledgeable of different religions. For example, Thomas Jefferson, our third president from 1801-1809, owned a translation of the Qur'an, and Keith Ellison, our first Muslim Congressman took his oath of office on this translation of the Qur'an in 2007. At the Albanian-American Bektashi Tekke in Michigan we have signed letters of support from earlier presidents including one from President Barak Obama on 18 June 2014, commending us for the 60th anniversary of our Bektashi tekke.

In this paper however, I will consider local leadership at the Albanian-American Bektashi Tekke. I will focus on two Bektashi babas of the Bektashi tekke in Michigan: Baba Rexheb who founded our tekke in 1954, and Baba Arshi who served as a dervish for decades and then as *baba i nderit*,

an honorary baba, until his passing in 2015. I was fortunate to study with Baba Rexheb for many years, from 1968 to his passing in 1995. We studied together in Turkish, but the Bektashi community in America is made up of Albanian immigrants who insisted that I learn Albanian. So through the years I also studied and learned Albanian as well.

Bektashis were important in Albanian history. Such great scholars as Naim Frashëri and Şemseddin Sami Frashëri were Albanian Bektashis who were well known for furthering a writing system for Albanian. Şemseddin Sami Bey was also well known in Turkish history as the author of the Ottoman Encyclopedia, *Kamus al-Alam* (1899). When Bektashism was outlawed in Turkey in 1925, the Dede Baba, Salih Dede, who himself was Albanian, was invited to Albania and moved there in 1929. John Kingsley Birge, who wrote a main book on Bektashism in English, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, visited Bektashis in Albania in 1933.²

Baba Rexheb and Baba Arshi were both from southern Albania, the main Bektashi lands there. They were very different in many aspects and yet they were both most effective. In this paper I will catalogue their differences in the context of the times and constraints of being Bektashi leaders in America. No one could have expected there to be a Bektashi tekke in America. Nor did they expect Dervish Arshi to be able to take over as he did for many years after Baba Rexheb. I will show what qualities both babas brought to the fore to make the tekke grow and continue under them in the difficult environment of modern America.

In organizing this paper I will first bring out challenges to founding a Bektashi tekke in mid-20th century America and ongoing concerns. I will present the background and qualities that Baba Rexheb brought to leading this tekke. Then I will present the background and qualities of Baba Arshi and why people did not at first consider him as a successor. Then I will step back and describe recent research on leadership in America. How do Bektashism and the attributes of these two babas relate to this research? Finally I will briefly present the current situation of the Bektashi tekke in America today.

2. Challenges to Founding a Bektashi Tekke in America and Ongoing Concerns

America was not an easy country in which to found a Bektashi tekke. Islam is a minority religion. Today about 1% of the population of America is estimated to be Muslim or 3.3 million people³ and when the tekke was founded in the mid-twentieth century, Muslims were an even smaller percent of the total population. Muslims are also the most varied of American religions groups. The largest numbers are made up of fairly equal percentages of Arab-Americans, South Asian-Americans, and African-Americans. The African-Americans often tell you that they are not “converts” but “reverts” since from 10% to 30% of the people taken as slaves from West Africa were of Muslim origin. Most of these three groups of Arab-Americans, South Asian-Americans, and African-Americans are Sunni Muslims.

There is no category of Alevis in the American census. As for the Shi’a, about 786,000 are estimated to be Shi’a and their oldest center is in Dearborn, Michigan.⁴ They are largely from south Lebanon and Iraq and as such are Arab-Americans. For Sufis, various Sufi leaders came to America in the twentieth century, but until recently they were not part of larger Muslim communities, apart from Baba Rexheb. However Baba Rexheb’s minority Balkan community of Albanians made his Bektashi group less likely to spread beyond its ethnic origins.

The first Albanian Muslim came to the Detroit region in 1905; Albanian Muslims came in numbers after the Greek invasion of southern Albania in 1913.⁵ They were bachelors and would earn money and travel back and forth from America to Albania. It was not until after World War II that Albanian Muslims came in greater numbers and brought families. They then founded an Albanian American Moslem Society in Detroit, secured an Albanian imam from Egypt in 1949, and rented what became a mosque.⁶

It is important to note that in America the government does not support religious institutions financially except that it considers them non-profit institutions and so does not charge them taxes. So all churches, synagogues, mosques and tekkes must find and buy their own property, and fund their clerics from their members themselves. This is not the way European countries do it or Turkey with Sunni Muslims and other Muslim countries where

the government supports the religious establishment financially. But whereas the American government does not support religious institutions financially, it also does not have a say in what the different religions preach.

It was challenging for Albanian Muslims to start new religious institutions, both a mosque and a tekke, after World War II in America. Many were trying to support themselves in a new land where they did not know the language or the customs. Dervish Rexheb came to Detroit in 1953, performed an Ashura ceremony, and 17 Albanian immigrants in Detroit then came together with the goal of founding the first Bektashi tekke in America. They pledged funds for this purpose. But rumors soon began that a tekke would take people away from the newly formed Albanian Detroit mosque. This came from Muslims who did not understand Bektashism because the mosque and tekke in Albania were not divisive. Then the immigrants who had gathered received letters from communist Albania telling them that their relatives in Albania would suffer if they supported a Bektashi tekke in America. This was more serious. So 10 of the 17 men pulled out, leaving only 7. But these 7 persisted. They found an 18-acre farm outside Detroit that belonged to a German-American family who was willing to sell. It looked positive. But then allegations came out in *Liria*, an Albanian-American newspaper published on the east coast of America, against Dervish Rexheb himself for his wartime activities. It turned out this newspaper was under orders from the communists in Europe. Albanians in Detroit resented these allegations and people wrote articles in his defense. Many Albanians in eastern America did not understand the complex situation of Albania during World War II. More people gathered around Dervish Rexheb, they purchased the German-American farm, and on 15 May 1954 the Bektashi Tekke in America opened.⁷ Dervish Rexheb received an *icazet* from Baba Sirri in Egypt to make him a baba.

Baba Rexheb's early concerns were to remind or educate anew people about their Bektashi customs and beliefs. There had been no dervishes and babas living in America and some immigrants had been away from their homeland for decades. Baba published four booklets called the "The Voice of Bektashism"⁸ in Albanian and English about Bektashism. But mostly it was the age-old way of educating a community through the holidays of Ashura and Nevruz and interaction. People loved to come to the tekke to talk with Baba. Lunch was the big meal of the day in the basement kitchen at the long table

and the doors of the tekke were always open. Families came on weekends when the children would play outside and adults would gather around Baba. The tekke grew in size and membership. New people became muhiban.

Over time people more people came to the tekke. In the 1960s Albanian immigrants came to the Detroit area from Macedonia who were Bektashis and they enriched the tekke. Although as with all immigrant groups, there were differences between those who had come from Albania and those who came from southern Macedonia near Lake Prespa, known as the Prespalilar.

At the height of anti-religious fervor in Stalinist Albania, when Albania declared itself the only atheist country in the world in 1967, Baba Rexheb wrote his book, *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizma* (Islamic Mysticism and Bektashism),⁹ a classic in Albanian on Islamic mysticism and Bektashism that included biographies and poetry of Albanian Bektashis hitherto unknown, along with the classic ones. As a scholar, Baba Rexheb had requested the books he needed from an Egyptian bookseller in Cairo. Baba established a remarkable library of books in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Albanian at the tekke.

As with all immigrant communities, there came to be generational differences with the young people who were more Americanized than their parents. Baba asked me as his student and an American to give the explanation in English at the public ceremonies of Ashura and Nevruz for the young people who did not understand Albanian anymore. The tekke reinforced the identity of the parents, but many of the young people did not know the homeland since they could not go back to visit Albania as it was a closed state. How to make Bektashism meaningful for each generation as they grew up in the American context was an ongoing concern.

Another ongoing concern was the training of a cleric to follow Baba Rexheb. Baba sent Dervish Bajram, a Kosovar Albanian who had come in 1960 and who was younger than Baba, back to Baba Qazim at the Bektashi tekke in Gjakova, Kosova, to become a Baba. He then returned to Michigan as Baba Bajram. He was beloved in the community but unfortunately died of a heart attack in 1973. Others came from Egypt, but they got involved in politics and therefore could not become successors. So Baba Rexheb continued to lead the tekke he had founded.

3. Baba Rexheb's Background and Qualities He Brought to Leading the Tekke

Baba Rexheb came from the traditional background of a Bektashi baba. His maternal uncle, Selim Baba Elbasani, prayed for his birth and named him before he was born in a chronogram. Baba Rexheb was born in 1901 in Gjirokaster, or Ergeri as it is known in Turkish, in southern Albania which was then still part of the Ottoman Empire. He was part of a chain or *silsile* of Bektashi babas. He went to an Ottoman *ibtida'i* or elementary school, but then the Greeks invaded his city so he went to a Greek middle school. After this the Italians invaded so he went to an Italian high school. At age sixteen he entered the Bektashi tekke where he studied Arabic, Persian, and the full Islamic curriculum. He passed exams with the ulema in the city. He became a dervish at age twenty and took the vow of celibacy at age twenty-one. Bektashis can be married or celibate but the celibate ones are more respected in the Balkans.

He served his murshid, Selim Baba, at the Tekke i Zallit outside Gjirokaster for many years as head dervish. This involved managing large lands, working with the shepherds who took care of the sheep and other animals, and overseeing supplies for the large tekke. Dervish Rexheb also attended important Bektashi meetings, and dealt with the constant stream of guests to the tekke. He basically ran the tekke under Selim Baba who was very old by then.

Through the 1930s, the political situation in Albania took a turn for the worse. Italy invaded and occupied Albania in 1939. The Italians thought they could use an old abbot like Selim Baba and tried to get him to encourage Albanians go with them to invade Greece. To their surprise, Selim Baba refused, saying "As we do like being occupied, we will not occupy another country." World War II in the Balkans became a series of civil wars with nationalists against communists. Selim Baba ordered Dervish Rexheb to go to the villages and speak out against the communists, describing them as *Din yok, vatan yok*. When the communists in Albania won the civil war, Dervish Rexheb was a target of the communists. His murshid ordered him to leave, although he did not want to. Dervish Rexheb escaped across Albania to the north and took the last boat to Italy in 1944.

Dervish Rexheb spent four years in displaced persons camps in Italy. At first there was hope that Albanians would be able to return, but the commu-

nists secured their power. Then he planned to go to the United States, but since there was no Bektashi tekke in America, there was no one to sponsor him as a cleric. He had to wait as an ordinary citizen. So he went to the Bektashi tekke in the Mokattam in Cairo where Albanians could go without a visa. There he waited four more years until his visa to America finally came through. His time in Egypt was the first time he had to read and reflect in many years. He would need this quiet time.¹⁰

As described, Dervish Rexheb came to Michigan in 1953. The early weeks and months were difficult. He lived a month each with different families until the German-American farm was purchased. Then the work of a farm began. The tekke had an apple orchard and fruit trees, fields of corn and soybeans, a large vegetable garden, and later thousands of chickens.

Harder than physical work was the political work. Baba had to reassure the Albanian Muslims who were Sunni that the tekke would not take away members from the mosque. He always invited the Sunni Imam to Bektashi holidays. He worked to reassure Albanians of different political persuasions that although he had been a nationalist, a Ballist during the war, he was not against people of other parties. He had a Royalist chant the main Ashura prayer at holidays for years. As for people who had withdrawn their support, or even spoken out against him, he quietly let it be known that they were welcome at the tekke. He invited one man in particular to the tekke and served him corn bread that he himself had made. Corn bread is the simplest food there is in Albania; it symbolized that we are all on common ground. The fact that Baba himself had made it was especially touching to the man. Baba never spoke critically of others.

Baba's reasoned judgment and quiet authority became known. I watched when two men who had been partners in a restaurant but were splitting up came to the tekke to find an equitable division. One brought an American attorney. The attorney asked me who Baba was. I tried to explain. Baba took each man separately into the tekke to hear what each thought would be fair. Then Baba decided and it was done. There was no need for the attorney.

Baba did not talk a lot. He listened. He had a powerful sense of humor and on rare occasions would display this in verbal jousts. I remember one such encounter at lunch with Zoti Ago, a confident older man educated in Vienna

who liked to tease. One day during lunch Zoti Ago who was from a different region of Albania, accused Baba of speaking an Albanian dialect that was urban and full of Greek. Indeed Baba's region is close to the Greek border. This was an insult in that it imputed that Baba was less Albanian and less Muslim than Zoti Ago. Baba's response in Turkish was immediate. *Kafirin mali helal*. (The property of the unbelievers is permitted.) I gasped. He had answered Zoti Ago and beaten him on both fronts. Baba had portrayed the people of his region as victors and the Greek language as the spoils of war which were therefore permitted to be appropriated.

Then Baba asked me if I knew where that saying came from. I said I understood *helal* and *haram*, "permitted" and "forbidden." No, he said. It is from the great 14th century Persian poet Hafiz who was accused of taking a line from the 7th century Yazid. He had taken it, but he responded in Persian with the equivalent of 'the property of unbelievers is permitted.'¹¹ Both were Muslims but Yazid was a Sunni and Hafiz was Shi'i. "So there is a lot Greek in your Albanian," I said to Baba. He nodded. But Zoti Ago admitted defeat. Baba had bested him. But he would only do this with someone like Zoti Ago who could take it. The whole joust had been translated and all at the table had enjoyed it.

People often came to the tekke requesting prayers. This was an important part of Baba's service. But in certain areas he was most practical. If people came asking for prayers to have children, he would ask if they had been to the doctor and done what the doctor had said. Only then would he pray for children for them. When the baby was born, if it was a girl, it would be named Dhurata, meaning "Gift" in Albanian. If it were a boy, it would be given a religious name like Husein or Hassan. Baba always insisted it was God working through him. He always went to the hospital to help people in difficult times there. His very presence was calming.

4. Baba Arshi's Background and Qualities He Brought to Leading the Tekke

Arshi Bazaj was born in 1906 in the village of Shkozë, in the region of Laberi in southwest Albania near the city of Vlora. At age 13 he took deathly ill so much so that they took him to the hospital in Vlora. The Italian doctors did not expect him to survive. Finally someone suggested they seek out Baba

Bektash, the Bektashi baba at the Tekke of Golimbas. The Baba prayed for him and as he began to recover, the Baba announced, “He is no longer for you, he is for me, for God.”

Thereafter Arshi Bazaj went to the Tekke of Golimbas. He became a dervish at the age of 18 and served for years at the Tekke of Golimbas. During the civil war he was on the side of the nationalists, the Ballists. The communists wanted to kill him so in 1944 he was forced to leave Albania. He escaped to Greece and went to the Durballi Sulltan Tekke in Farsala in eastern Greece where he served under Baba Sait for ten years. There he learned how to run a tractor from an old Greek man.

In Durballi the tekke had a lot of land and sheep. But Dervish Arshi would fight with the locals because they were stealing the land and the sheep of the tekke. This made Dervish Arshi very nervous and upset. In 1954 Baba Sait wrote in Turkish to Baba Rexheb, telling him that he had a dervish there and asking for his help. He explained that they did not know what to do with him there. He, Baba Sait, was getting old and no one could leave this dervish alone there.

Baba Rexheb understood and wrote Baba Sait to tell him that first he would have to send the dervish to a refugee camp. Then Baba Rexheb could process the papers to get him to come to America. Dervish Arshi stayed two years in the refugee camp in Greece. Then he came to the US from the refugee camp in Greece with UN national papers for people who do not have a passport. He came to Michigan in the winter of the mid-1950s; he remembered the snow outside on his arrival.

When Dervish Arshi first came to the tekke in Michigan, they had a large apple orchard, cherry and pear trees, fields with soybeans and corn, and animals. Dervish Arshi worked with the tractor in the fields. It was difficult outside work with long hours. There was a fruit and vegetable stand out front on Northline Road to sell the produce. Then the tekke started a chicken farm to generate income. They had several thousand chickens in the barn. They would sell the eggs across the neighborhood for over twenty years.

Every morning Dervish would make coffee for Baba Rexheb. Baba Rexheb liked American coffee. Dervish would then make Turkish coffee for himself. In the mornings he worked outdoors. He enjoyed it and came to love the

tractor there. People would see him on the large red American tractor with his white tac on his head. He would plow the long furrows and do many hours of work. He took care of all the sheep and other animals. He was also a skilled gardener and made sure there was plenty of water for all the crops. The apple trees had to be sprayed multiple times each year. Later in the day when guests came, Dervish Arshi would serve everyone. He would make coffee for all the guests and bring in chocolate or other food. He always served Baba Rexheb.

Dervish Arshi went on haj twice. The first time he went in the 1960s. They stole his bag and his money in Mecca. Baba Rexheb wired \$1000 so he could return. The second time he went on haj was in 1979.

My young son would always come to the tekke with me and he would end up following Dervish Arshi around. One time I came to tekke without my son. "Where is Pasha?" Dervish asked. My son was known as Pasha at the tekke. I told him he was at camp. "Camp? You sent Pasha to camp?" inquired Dervish in Albanian. I tried to explain to Dervish that summer camp in America was different than refugee camp in Greece. I told him it was a place where Pasha would sleep outdoors and learn to make fires and cook outside. Dervish looked at me again. "You would teach Pasha to be a *haydut*?" That is, an outlaw. Clearly I had not explained summer camp to Dervish. At the same time, we would talk politics together and Dervish Arshi always voted each year. He was a proud American citizen.

Dervish quietly knew everyone and their children and cared deeply about them. He watched as children grew up so when Nancy Adam, the daughter of Zoti Qani who had found the land for the tekke, was in a critical car accident in the fall of 1977, Dervish Arshi followed the news closely. The doctors at the University of Michigan Hospital said Nancy had a blood clot forming on the brain. They said she would not survive. But Dervish Arshi did not accept this. "She is a daughter of this tekke. She will live," Dervish announced. He sacrificed a lamb. After the kurban, the blood clot began to dissolve. The doctors were shocked at the miraculous change. One man noted, "He is a strong dervish."

Besides farming work, and serving Baba and guests, Dervish Arshi helped in the construction of the türbe for Baba Rexheb with Zoti Asllan. This was built out behind the tekke. It gave Baba Rexheb peace of mind to know

that he would be buried behind the tekke so the tekke would become sacred ground and could never be sold.

Although Dervish Arshi was an integral part of the tekke, people did not notice him so much because they focused on Baba Rexheb. In a sense Dervish was in Baba's shadow which is where he wanted to be, always serving him. So when Baba Rexheb passed away in 1995, Dervish Arshi immediately became the *türbedar*, the keeper of the türbe and conducted people to Baba's tomb.

The Bektashi Headquarters in Tirana had sent a young man to take over who was not qualified. He stayed seven years before our Bektashi community in Michigan got rid of him. Then the Bektashi Headquarters in Tirana sent another Bektashi Baba who had served in Germany. He did not last either.

Finally we realized we did not need anyone from the Headquarters in Tirana. The Bektashi tekke in America is independent of the Bektashi Headquarters in Albania. Baba Rexheb had earlier made sure of this. It was Dervish Arshi whom we needed and we already had him. He became *baba i nderit*, that is, a baba of honor. He served the Bektashi Tekke in Michigan as its baba faithfully until his own passing in December of 2015.

5. Leadership in America, in Recent Research, in Bektashism, and by Babas

In this section I will consider leadership in America, in two areas of recent research, in Bektashism, and then apply it to the two babas. In America we realize that we were most fortunate to have had remarkable leaders at important times in our history. At the time of our revolution and the writing of our Constitution in the 1770s through the 1780s, there were people like Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Washington, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Franklin. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was crucial and his assassination was a great loss to the nation. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, and Eleanor Roosevelt were most important.

Leadership has been an ongoing area of research for social scientists and psychologists in America. In the past twenty-five years, perspectives have changed from questions of biases, and cultural and gender differences, to concern with what is termed "emotional intelligence." The business community has been the focus of much of the research with training programs and MBA

programs that emphasize leadership and how to empower teamwork. In major studies of competences of high performing executives, they were found to differ from their less successful colleagues not in IQ or in cognitive or technical knowledge, but rather in competences termed “emotional intelligence.”¹² The higher the executive, the more these particular competences mattered. “Emotional intelligence,” or “resonant leadership” as it is also called, includes both personal and social competences. The personal competences include self-awareness such as knowing one’s strengths and limitations; and self-management such as emotional self-control, adaptability, and initiative. Social competences include social awareness such as empathy, organizational awareness, and service; and relationship awareness such as inspiring leadership, developing others, dealing with conflicts, building bonds and teamwork.¹³

Those with resonant leadership are able to use variable styles of leadership depending on the situation, and move between the styles at will. Resonant styles include: visionary, coaching, affiliate, and democratic as opposed to commanding styles. Such leaders only use commanding styles sparingly. A remarkable example of this was Louis Gerstner who took over IBM in 1992. IBM is an American multinational company that made hardware and software, and at the time was known for its large-scale mainframe computing business. It has long done much research, has more patents than any other corporation, and conducted the basic research for computers in the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1990s it was in 140 countries and had 270,000 employees. When Gerstner took over however, IBM had let other PC companies take over the field and was only weeks from bankruptcy. What was Gerstner going to do?

What is most interesting is that Gerstner was not a technocrat. That is, his background was not at IBM like previous leaders, nor did he have an IT background. In terms of personal competence, he was most aware of this limitation and therefore turned down the offer to take over IBM several times before he accepted the challenge. What he did have as a personal strength was much management experience in leading other major companies, along with adaptability. The leadership styles he used were first democratic in that he sought out input from those he deemed in the know at IBM--his skill in judging who these were was based on keen social awareness. Then he diagnosed IBM’s major problems as being imprisoned in its own success to the point that it had

ignored the changing market place, competitors, and even the needs of its own customers. But to make the necessary changes he would have to change the culture at IBM, a huge company used to its ways. He needed to make IBM work like a team instead of separate geographic and product units. The financial crisis of the company woke people up. He used visionary leadership with his emails that made the situation clear. He used commanding style in cutting workforce, and changing titles and how bonuses were given out. And he constantly worked to build affiliate style among the entire company, appealing to their pride in their company which was strong. In 1993 IBM lost \$8 billion, but the following years it made a profit, and came back much stronger. Instead of dividing it into smaller separate companies as many had recommended, he strengthened its mainframe and middle-ware business, and built on the strength its size allowed which was integration, research, and service to a new degree. Truly this was resonant leadership.¹⁴

A very different sort of leadership research is a book by John Heider on the Tao of leadership.¹⁵ This study came out the decade before the work on resonant leadership and has been widely read. It is based on Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*. Lao Tzu was presumed to be a contemporary of Confucius. The *Tao Te Ching* is a classical Chinese book from the 6th century BC whose title can be translated as "The Book of the Way and of Virtue." Heider translates it as "The Book of How Things Happen or Work." The book is central to Chinese philosophy and religion, including Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. It was written as addressing political leaders of ancient China. What Heider did was seek out passages on leadership and compile them into a single short book in English. I will extract what I consider major points from this book.

The book brings out characteristics of the leader and leadership, namely "the leader teaches by example rather than by lecturing others in how they ought to be."¹⁶ A wise leader does not make a show of holiness because when you reinforce appearances, people scramble to please.¹⁷ A wise leader does not pretend to be special. "Enlightened leadership is service. By being selfless, the leader enhances the self. The wise leader has the wisdom to be of service and be open."¹⁸ Further a wise leader does not intervene unnecessarily, does not use too much force, but rather stands back.¹⁹ The leader's stillness overcomes the group's agitation. The leader's consciousness is the primary tool. "Good leadership consists in doing less and being more."²⁰

Power comes through cooperation. Leaders are exhorted to run the group delicately, like cooking small fish. “The leader can act as a warrior or as a healer. As a warrior the leader acts with power and decision. Most of the time however, the leader acts as a healer and is in an open, receptive, and nourishing state.”²¹ “The leader who understands how process unfolds uses as little force as possible and runs the group without pressing people. Group members challenge the ego of one who leads egocentrically.”²² Leadership is not a matter of winning. The qualities of leadership are those that sustain life--compassion for all creatures, material simplicity, a sense of equality or modesty. These are the opposite of egocentric behaviors.²³ The greatest leader offers opportunities, not obligations.²⁴

Finally then, what qualities does Bektashism value in its leaders? Bektashi clerics take vows of poverty, modesty and doing away with ego--the “death before dying.” While a murshid expects utter obedience, the murshid--talib relationship is one based on powerful trust. In all my years of study with Baba Rexheb, I could not recall him ever criticizing me. He was always there for me. As Baba said in Arabic, ‘the murshid is to his student as the Prophet to his community.’ Certainly the Prophet cared deeply for his community.

How did the qualities that Baba Rexheb and Baba Arshi learned from their murshids translate into leading a tekke in America? Immigrant communities are full of tensions. People have come at different times and in different circumstances, and some do well in the new land whereas others do not. Jealousies develop. Albanian communities are further divided by region and family. Baba Rexheb had to work at making the religious aspects meaningful in the American context where there were not many Muslims and essentially no other Sufis.

Baba Rexheb recognized early that he could not be seen to favor any group. When he came to Detroit, he asked to be taken to the coffeehouse. Then whoever took him to their home, he would go with them. No one could say he was playing favorites. He knew he needed to be inclusive. He built on Bektashi values of never criticizing anyone. The meaning of the *hırka*, the long vest that Bektashis wear, is to cover the sins of others. A murshid does not criticise a talib but is patient. He never lectured. The talib must come and ask questions and then the murshid responds. People were drawn to Baba for conversation.

Baba never forced people to learn about Bektashism, but at holidays he explained things in ways that made them want to learn. He wrote the booklets and then the large book on Islamic mysticism and Bektashism. He also translated the long work by Fuzuli into Albanian on the suffering of the prophets and Imam Husein. Baba was a scholar, but he was accessible to the largely working class community of Albanian immigrants who settled in the Detroit area. People were proud of his learning. He never acted above people. But the worry was constant--where would we find a successor? Bektashism in Turkey had been made illegal since 1925. The Bektashis remaining in Albania after World War II had been killed or put in hard-labor camps.²⁵ Those in Egypt had been expelled.

When Dervish Arshi took over after the negative experiences of several people sent by the Bektashi Headquarters in Tirana, we were relieved. He was a good dervish and had been devoted to Baba Rexheb for years. We knew Dervish Arshi and he knew us. He had been taking us all to the türbe ever since Baba Rexheb had passed away. He did not try to act like Baba Rexheb. He was no scholar. He had virtually no education outside the tekke. He only spoke Albanian, not Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Greek, and Italian as Baba Rexheb had. Someone decided he should be an honorary baba. Why not? He was performing the roles of a baba for us. We needed someone in charge that the community respected. So he became Baba Arshi.

Baba Arshi had the Bektashi values of humility. He never pretended to be anyone he was not. He never criticized anyone. He was inclusive. He took time and listened to people. He was loving and he prayed from the heart. People liked to come to the tekke to be with him. We all knew he had devoted his life to Baba, his *hizmet* or service was undeniable. He was a model for us all. The holidays of Nevruz and Ashura went on. Baba Arshi could not have founded a tekke, but at a critical time, he kept it going.

If I look at the research on emotional intelligence or resonant leadership, both Bektashi Babas had it. They cultivated personal self-knowledge in knowing their limitations, and self management in being adaptable and flexible. They also had social awareness in their empathy and service; and relationship-awareness in building bonds and inspiring people to work together. They worked to do away with ego in "death before dying" and not criticizing or judging others. As for the Tao of leadership, this is very Bektashi in multiple

ways. From the emphasis on leading by example and not lecturing, to not interfering, and serving, these are major Bektashi tenets. Leading by being and by not imposing, by being selfless, and not imposing ego--this is very Bektashi in spirit.

Finally, although Baba Rexheb and Baba Arshi were very different in formal education, they were both good Bektashis. The community could appreciate that and that is what we needed in the end. Baba Rexheb had made clear what a Bektashi community needed in a leader was a caring person of good Bektashi values. Those sent initially from Albania lacked these values. Baba Arshi fulfilled them.

6. What Sustains the Bektashi Tekke in America Today

While Baba Arshi was still with us, a young man, Dervish Eliton Pashaj came in 2011. He was from the same region of Albania as Dervish Arshi, from southwest Albania near Vlora. But he had also studied in Turkey at Uludağ University in Bursa so he knew both Albanian and Turkish. He studied Islamic Arts which he later was able to put to the benefit of the tekke in America.

At first the community in Michigan had trouble trusting anyone who came from Albania, so they held back from Dervish Eliton. He was a young man. But what soon became clear to the whole community was the respect and dignity with which he treated Baba Arshi. Dervish Eliton was sincere, quiet, and hard-working.

Besides assisting Baba Arshi, one of the first things Dervish Eliton did was work on the main guest room of the tekke. When Baba Rexheb had first built it, comfort and peacefulness had been the only criteria for the decor. Dervish Eliton had a more discerning eye and was trained in Islamic arts. He modified the main guest room to look more like a Balkan or Middle Eastern guest room. He set up glass cases with items from Baba Rexheb so people could see them. He got a large oriental rug for the middle of the room. He had a portrait painted of Baba Arshi praying and displayed it on the wall of the guest room.

Meanwhile Baba Arshi was getting older. Dervish Eliton took care of him as the trips to the hospital became more frequent. In late December 2015, Baba Arshi passed on at a most advanced age. We were not ready for this loss. But we were thankful to have Dervish Eliton with us. He had trained under Baba Arshi and people respected him at the tekke.

After reassuring people, Dervish Eliton's next main project was making the türbe more secure and beautiful. First he was concerned that it be safe from moisture and the elements. He had the walls and foundation made stronger. He got Mexican workmen who worked through the heat of the summer. In time he ordered beautiful Iznik tiles for the interior walls, carnation and tulip designs in blues and reds that transformed the interior of Baba Rexheb's area. He placed the smaller candles outside where more people could light them. Baba Arshi's tomb was done beautifully and placed to the right in the vestibule where all could pray by it on the way to that of Baba Rexheb. It was just where Baba Arshi wanted to be.

Most recently Dervish Eliton has brought some of the türbe tiles onto the guest room walls. They are beautiful and along with the new displays of the history of the tekke, help keep the memory of Baba Rexheb always with us, along with his loyal Dervish, Baba Arshi. He is also working with the younger members of the community. He has many qualities of resonant leadership through Bektashi values.

Endnotes

- 1 In Albanian the order of titles is Baba Rexheb and Baba Arshi, different from the Turkish which would be Rexheb Baba and Arshi Baba. Since these are Albanian babas in Albanian communities, I use the Albanian order in the title. Notice also the Albanian spelling "Rexheb" for the Turkish "Recep."
- 2 John Kingsley Birge. (1937). *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, London: Luzac, pp. 70-73, 85-86. Unfortunately Birge did not spend much time in Albania and only visited Kruje in the north. If he had traveled to the main Bektashi lands in the south, he would have learned much more.
- 3 Besheer Mohamed. (6 January 2016). "A new estimate of the U.S. Muslim population." (www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/06/a-new-estimate)
- 4 "Shi'a Islam in the Americas," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia_Islam_in_the_Americas
- 5 Frances Trix. (2001). *The Albanians in Michigan*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, p. 8.
- 6 Ibid. pp. 21-22.
- 7 Frances Trix. (2009). *The Sufi Journey of Baba Rexheb*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology with University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 128-135.
- 8 Baba Rexheb. (1955). *Zeri Bektashizmes*, "The Voice of Bektashism" 4 booklets, Detroit, Michigan.
- 9 Baba Rexheb. (1970). *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizma*, "Islamic Mysticism and Bektashism." New York: Waldon Books.
- 10 Frances Trix. (2009). *The Sufi Journey of Baba Rexheb*. pp. 97-117.
- 11 Frances Trix. (1993). *Spiritual Discourse: Learning with an Islamic Master*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 90-92.
- 12 Goleman, Daniel, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee. (2002). *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, p. 249-251.
- 13 Ibid. p. 39.
- 14 See Louis Gerster's own account of his time at IBM in Louis V. Gerstner. (2002). *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance: Inside IBM's Historic Turnaround*. New York: Harper Collins. The analysis of his leadership as resonant is my own.

- 15 Heider, John. (1997). *The Tao of Leadership: Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching Adapted for a New Age*. Atlanta, GA: Humanics New Age (initially published, 1985).
- 16 Ibid. p. 3.
- 17 Ibid. p. 5.
- 18 Ibid. pp. 12-13.
- 19 Ibid. p. 127.
- 20 Ibid. p. 113.
- 21 Ibid. p. 55.
- 22 Ibid. p. 59.
- 23 Ibid. p. 133.
- 24 Ibid. p. 135.
- 25 See my article, Frances Trix. (1995). "The Resurfacing of Islam in Albania," *The East European Quarterly*, vol. XXVIII, number 4, January, 533-549, in which I list what happened to Bektashis, according to Baba Bajram Mahmutaj, who himself was in prison and at hard labor for 32 years.

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