

## Besa (Albanian)

*Besa* is an Albanian essential term derived from the Pagan Illyrian word “**Be-ja**” (Albanian: Oath, *Bëj be-* to make an oath). *Besa* means “the given word.” It is the word voluntarily given to a person in a specific situation with the moral condition and certainty that this promise must be kept and fulfilled despite changes and difficulties. The “given word” could be a) an obligation for something (confidentiality, fidelity and secrecy), b) a warrant or pledge (for life, property, protection) or c) the embodiment of the last wish of a dead person (*amaneti*).

As a written word the term “*besa*” is documented for the first time in the “*Statutes of Scutari*” (XIV Century) in the form of the verb “*besare*.” *Besa* as a notion is also included in the Albanian Customary Law and especially in the codified Kanun of Lek Dukagjini (XV Century). As a philosophical concept, “*besa*” is most frequently used in the philosophical writings and poetry of the Albanian-American philosopher **Isuf Luzaj**.

In Old Albanian Literature (by Buzuku, Bardhi, Budi, Bogdani, etc.), the concept is used with the same meaning as the Latin term “*fides*” to denote “*faith and religion.*” For example, **Franciscus Blancus** (Frang Bardhi) in his “*Dictionarvm Latino Epiroticvm, Romae, Typis Sac. Congr. de. Propag. Fide. 1635*” translates the word “*Fides Christi*” as “*faith of Christ*” (Albanian: feja e Krishtit). *Besa* represents the moral basis of Albanians without taking into account their religion. One of the main mottos of Albanian Renaissance was “*With Besa-Besë*” (‘*Me Besa-Besë*’).<sup>1</sup> For an Albanian, keeping of *besa* is a sign of virtue and a high moral standard which reflects his manhood, honor, prestige, and is one of the most respectful features of Albanian collectivity. Opposed to this, when someone has broken *besa* he is considered a lower man, a coward or someone who has fallen into a deep moral abyss and will be despised by his own community. This is the reason why there are many Albanian proverbs and legends with *besa* as a leitmotiv, for example: “*Besa e burrit, pesha e gurit*” (The man’s *besa*, the stone weight), “*Besa e shqiptarit si purteka e arit*” (The Albanian’s *besa* more worthy than the gold) or “*The Legend of Rozafa Castle*” & “*Constantin and Doruntine*” as the most popular.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “with besa-besë” was used during Albania Renaissance and means unity of every individual with each-other without distinction of religion, region. It signifies the idea to fight for the country and gain the Independence from the Ottoman Empire. During this time Albanians organized two Leagues: The “League of Prizren and League of Peja” using the motto “With Besa-Besë.”