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Nasreddin Hoca and Tamerlane

When Tamerlane invaded Anatolia, he heard about a man who lived in Akşehir called Nasreddin Hoca. Tamerlane went to Akşehir, set up his camp there, and sent a platoon of soldiers to bring Hoca to his tent. The soldiers went to Hoca and said to him, "Come, Hoca. The emperor is here and he wants to see you."

The Hoca thought that the emperor killed everyone anyway, so there was no point in his hurrying. He stayed for a while longer at his home. When Tamerlane saw that Hoca had not come, he sent another platoon. Hoca said to them, "All right, I shall not be long."

But before Hoca arrived at his tent, Tamerlane became very impatient. He ordered his horse brought, mounted it, and set out for Nasreddin Hoca's village on the outskirts of Akşehir. In that village some of the peasants crowded around Tamerlane and some crowded around the house of Hoca saying, "Hoca, quick!" Nasreddin Hoca put on a gown and his turban and started to go in Tamerlane's direction. They met in the middle of the street, and Tamerlane's horse, frightened by the appearance of Hoca, jumped and threw the emperor off its back. Tamerlane was so angry that he ordered his men to catch Hoca and hang him.

After he had been seized by Tamerlane's men, Hoca asked them, "Where are you taking me?"

"To be hanged," they said.

"Go and tell that rascal," said Hoca, "that I want to know my offense."

The soldiers went to Tamerlane and told him what Nasreddin Hoca had said. Upon this, Tamerlane said, "Bring him here."

Nasreddin Hoca was brought before Tamerlane, and he said to the emperor, "What is the offense that causes me to hang?"

Story #54

luck -- bad

"You brought bad luck to me," said Tamerlane.

"Who has brought bad luck--you or I?" asked Hoca. "You are the bringer of bad luck, for I am about to be hanged. If I had been the bringer of bad luck, you would have fallen off your horse and died--and then there would have been reason to hang me."

Tamerlane saw the justice of his observation and decided to forgive him, but he said that he wanted to ask him a question. "Am I a tyrant or a learned man?" he asked Hoca.

"Your majesty," said Hoca, "you are neither a tyrant nor a learned man. It is we who have been such cruel tyrants that Allah has sent you to scourge us." *Tamerlane -- as scourge -- sent by Allah*

Tamerlane was again pleased with the answer he had received from Hoca, and so he said to him, "All right, you may go in peace."

Some days later, Tamerlane began to impose very heavy taxes on all the villagers. Very concerned with this situation, they came to Nasreddin Hoca and said to him, "Oh, Hoca, you have formed a friendship with Tamerlane. Go and beg him to reduce our taxes a little."

He went to Tamerlane who said to him, "Welcome, Hoca! I am pleased to see you again."

After they had talked a while, Hoca said to Tamerlane, "Your majesty, the people of my villages are very poor. Will you please reduce their taxes a little?"

After thinking a moment, Tamerlane said to Hoca, "Take this elephant¹ and let them feed it instead of paying taxes."

¹Tamerlane did use elephants in his campaigns. Legend says that his victory over the Ottoman forces just west of Ankara was facilitated by panic that spread among the Turks when they first saw these huge beasts.

In about fifteen days' time, the elephant had eaten all the crops of the villagers. They all came to Hoca and said, "Hoca Efendi, please take this elephant back to Tamerlane and let him impose whatever taxes he likes on us."

Hoca thought for a while about this difficult mission and then suggested that all of the village people go with him to see Tamerlane. They agreed to this proposal, and they all followed him as he approached the emperor's tent, but when Hoca was about to go through the entrance of the tent, he looked around and saw that all the villagers had deserted him for fear of the despot. He had to go before Tamerlane alone.

"What is the matter, Hoca?" asked Tamerlane.

"Your majesty," said Hoca, "I have come to tell you that the one elephant you gave us is not enough. We wish that you would give us a female elephant, too."

But Tamerlane had been informed about ^{how} the villagers had deserted Hoca, and he said, "I know what they have done to you, Hoca. If they had come with you to see me, I should have granted their request. But because they have played this trick on you, I am going to have them all impaled. Hoca, depart in peace."

Some time later when the fruit was getting ripe, Hoca said to his wife, "Let us go and gather some ripe figs and send them to the emperor as a gift."

They went to the orchard and began to gather figs, but soon his wife said, "Look, Hoca, the pears are also ripe. Let us gather some pears, too."

"No," answered Hoca, "you gather only what I tell you to gather. Pick only ripe figs."

A little while later his wife said, "Look, Hoca, apples and peaches

are also ripe. Shouldn't we gather some of them for the emperor, too?"

"No, no, woman," said Hoca, "you gather just what I tell you to gather."

They filled their basket with ripe figs, and Hoca took it to Tamerlane's tent and placed it before the emperor's seat. "Sit down, Hoca," said Tamerlane, opening the basket. He took out a fig and threw it into Hoca's face. He took out a second fig and threw it into Hoca's face. Then, one by one, all the figs were smashed against Hoca's face by Tamerlane.

After the basket was empty, Hoca said, "Thank you, oh my God!"

"Why did you say that?" Tamerlane asked him.

"Your majesty," answered Nasreddin Hoca, "if I had picked the fruit that my wife had suggested, I should have neither head nor eye left. I thanked God that I followed my own reason and gathered only soft, ripe figs to present to you."