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"Do Not Do Anything Without Considering Its End"

One day Nasreddin Hoca's wife went to a bath. She sat down by a trough,¹ but when she was getting ready to wash herself, a bath attendant came to her and asked her to move. The bath attendant said to her, "Move along from here! The wife of merchant Hasan Ağa is going to wash here."

When Nasreddin Hoca's wife heard this, she got up from where she was and moved, and found another place for herself. She prepared to take her bath by another trough, but when she started to wash herself, some other bath attendants came along and said to her, "Mehmet Ağa's daughter is going to wash here. Will you please find another place for yourself?"

Nasreddin Hoca's wife got up from that place and went to still another place and sat down. When she was about ready to start washing there, she was again called to get up and go elsewhere. "Ahmet Ağa's wife wants to wash here. Will you please get up and find some other place." The poor woman realized that she would not be able to wash herself anywhere in the bath, and so she took her belongings and went home

Nasreddin Hoca that day decided to ask his wife how she felt, but when he looked at her face, he saw that she was sulking and looked very angry. He passed a few jokes at her, but she didn't respond and continued to sulk.

After a time, she began to talk. She said to Hoca, "From tomorrow on, I want you to be a merchant."

"Please don't say that," said the Hoca. "How can I be a merchant? You cannot be a merchant simply by word of mouth. You need cash to become a merchant."

¹In a Turkish hamam (bath) there are, besides steam rooms, individual places where there is a tub or trough. Beside these troughs there will be hot and cold water taps.

"I don't care how you become one," said the wife. "If you can't be a merchant, I shall divorce you!"

Hoca was quite concerned by this. He said to his wife, "Please give me twenty-four hours to think about it."

Hoca went to bed that night, but he couldn't sleep. He kept thinking all of the time. He realized that he could not possibly be a merchant just by his wife's saying so. He finally remembered that he had a donkey that he could possibly sell to raise some money with which to open a shop. In the morning Nasreddin Hoca took his donkey to the market place and sold it there for twenty liras. As there were many empty shops in those days, he rented a shop for twenty liras a month. But as the Hoca gave all of the money that he had for the rent, he had no capital left with which to buy merchandise. Hoca didn't mind that, however. He opened his shop in the morning and closed it in the evening, although there was absolutely no business in it. His wife, on the other hand, was very proud that her husband had, after all, become a merchant. Whenever she went to the bath she washed wherever she pleased.

This empty business of Hoca's went on for some time. One day Tamerlane came to take part in the Friday noon service² in the Mosque of Akşehir. After the service was over, Tamerlane decided to inspect the market. During his walk through the market place, he saw that Nasreddin Hoca was just sitting and doing nothing in his shop. He asked Hoca, "What are you selling?"

²Until the time of the Atatürk reforms, Friday was the sabbath in Turkey. The Friday noon service at the mosques was the one at which almost everyone was present, and political leaders often made quite a show of their attendance at that time. They would attend with a procession, wearing their finest clothes, and often would distribute money or goods to the poor along the way. Whether or not Tamerlane attended Moslem services is a moot point, but to the peasant mind it seems quite logical that he would.

"I am selling wisdom, your majesty," answered Hoca.

"How much do you charge for it?" asked Tamerlane.

Pointing at an earthenware pot near him, Nasreddin Hoca said, "One pot full of wisdom is worth one gold lira."

Tamerlane then said, "All right; sell me some."

Nasreddin Hoca said, "The wisdom that I give you is this: Don't do anything without considering its end."

Tamerlane said, "Well, Hoca, this piece of wisdom cost me a lot. Do you think it is worth it?"

Nasreddin Hoca said, "Of course it is, your majesty. It is even cheaper than it should be. You will realize its value afterwards

One day, a little while after this, Tamerlane's vezirs plotted to assassinate him. They wanted to get rid of him and then make someone else their leader. But who could kill Tamerlane? They thought that perhaps Tamerlane's private barber could do it most easily. They then decided to make the barber the grand vezir if he could do this job for them. They called the barber to them and explained to him what it was that was to be done. They promised to make him the grand vezir if he would cut Tamerlane's throat while he was shaving him. "Can you do this?" they asked him.

"Of course I can do that," said the barber

"Well, the day you do it, you will become grand vezir."

A little while later Tamerlane called his barber to him in order to be shaved. In the room where Tamerlane met such people, he had framed and placed on the wall the words which Nasreddin Hoca had sold to him: "Don't do anything without considering its end." Tamerlane had liked this expression, and he had made a habit of reading it aloud whenever he was about to do anything. When

the barber was shaving him, he was just at the point where he was going to cut Tamerlane's throat. Tamerlane's eye at that moment caught the writing on the wall, and, as it was custom, he read it aloud. He said, "Do not do anything without considering its end."

When the barber heard this, he thought that the ruler was speaking to him. He suddenly felt that Tamerlane knew all along that he was going to cut his throat. He was terrified. He dropped the razor from his hand and fell to the feet of the great despot, saying, "Your majesty, it is not my fault! I was entrusted by your vezirs to do this terrible thing. I was told by them to cut your throat, but you knew this all of the time."

After this confession, Tamerlane had the barber and his fellow conspirators punished. He then had Nasreddin Hoca brought to his presence and he said to him, "The wisdom that you sold me was really very cheap. As a matter of fact, it saved my life today. Then turning to his attendants he said, "Give the Hoca another piece of gold. I have decided to make this wise man the Müdür³ of a nahiye.⁴

³The müdür has the lowest administrative rank in the Turkish civil service. He is the highest administrative officer in a nahiye, a large village or town at the center of several lesser villages. He is appointed by the ministry of the Interior.

⁴The nahiye is the administrative unit between the village and the kaza, or small city comparable in size and political importance to a county seat in America.