

Story #164 (Tape #2, Summer 1970)

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Location: Yukarı Kise Köy, Gúvem nahíye
Kızılcahamam kaza, Ankara
vîlayet

Date: July 1970

Nasreddin Hoca Exchanges Sign Language with an Iranian Scholar

The late Nasreddin Hoca, whose fame is obvious and whose name is known all over the world, was one day asked the following question by a group of people: "A great scholar has appeared in Iran who claims he is more learned than you. If you don't mind, we shall examine your learning."

Nasreddin Hoca accepted the challenge. The so-called scholar of Iran had in fact, been brought there. A banquet honoring the Hoca was held. They served the Hoca eggs, cheese, tea, and so forth. The Hoca ate some of these and put the left-overs in his pocket. After dinner, the Hoca left the table and joined the assembly where the Iranian scholar had been brought. The Hoca was seated with his face toward the door. As soon as he saw the Iranian coming through the door, the Hoca stood up in respect to him. The Iranian gestured for the Hoca to sit down again. As soon as he had gestured this, he started questioning the Hoca with signs

The Iranian lifted his hand and let his five fingers point downward.

The Hoca answered this question by lifting his hand with his fingers pointing upward.

The Iranian repeated the same gesture, which the Hoca answered by repeating his gesture of the upturned fingers.

The Iranian produced from his pocket an egg, and the Hoca took from his pocket a piece of cheese.

Then the Iranian held his hand with five fingers down again, and the Hoca moved his hand upward and with the five fingers up, upon which gesture the Iranian acknowledged his defeat

They led the Iranian to another room and kept the Hoca there. No one had understood anything of what had happened, and the people left the assembly without understanding it at all.

The examiners asked the Iranian this question: "You said you were defeated. But what was it you asked the Hoca?"

"When I entered the room, he showed me respect, and I signaled him to sit down. My second question was, 'What happens when the rain falls from the sky?' He explained, by gesture, that plants grow from the earth. To this I said, 'Not only do plants grow, but chickens eat them and lay eggs.' To this the Hoca replied, 'Yes, chickens lay eggs, and animals graze on the grass, giving milk and butter and cheese, don't they?' To this I said finally, added the Iranian, 'I would press [hold] you down.' But the Hoca replied, 'But I would lift you up into the air.' This is why I accepted defeat."

The examiners came to the Hoca and asked the same questions of the Hoca, whose answers were the same as the Iranian's.