

Story #298 (Tape #10, Summer 1970)

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The Hoca and the Kurd Who Had the Last Laugh

A man once was hired to serve as imam to a Kurdish village. There was in that village a Kurd who never went to the mosque to pray. "Haso [Kurdish dialect for Hasan]," the man said, "if you go to the mosque for forty days in a row, I'll give you forty sheep."

"All right. I'll do it," said Haso. He went to the mosque for forty days in a row, and then he came and said to the man, "O Hoca Efendi, I've now been going to the mosque for forty days. Now let me have those sheep."

imam said, "I said that to make you a religious man and go to the mosque regularly. How could I possibly find forty sheep?"

"To tell you the truth, hoca, I guessed you wouldn't be able to give me the forty sheep, so I went to the mosque without taking any ablution."*

*This involves a universal element of humor: the hidden element that is "one up" on the trickster or "wise guy." A Chinese cook in a lumber camp, after being the victim of many rough practical jokes, was finally told, "We accept you, Ching, and won't play any more tricks on you." "Okay. Me no pee in soup any more."

Haso's attendance at the mosque without previous ablutions nullified the hoca's and others' prayers. He was unclean, in a religious sense, haram.

The humor here belongs to Ethnic and Minority Group jokes. Because they are largely nomadic or seminomadic, the Kurds are stereotyped as (1) dirty people, and (2) lukewarm Moslems. Nomads (Kurds, Yürüks, et al.) do not, of course, have mosques available much of the time.