One day the Hodja chanced to be in Tamerlane's court when the despot's tax collector came to report on his receipts. The figures in impressive columns covered page after page of parchment, and the collector's voice droned endlessly through a recital of the sums. But, in the end, Tamerlane was not satisfied. It seems that first this account and then that one had been misrepresented. In short, the tax collector had revealed himself as a scamp and a cheat.

"So that is the way you manage your post as tax collector?" raged the testy ruler. "Well, sir, I cannot swallow such outrageous lies. But"—and his eyes glinted—"you will swallow them. Begin at once!"

"Begin what, sire?" questioned the tax collector, puzzled and frightened.

"Begin to swallow your own accounts. Quickly, now. I have other business at hand." And the lordly Tamerlane watched with increasing amusement as the wretched collector choked and gagged on the sheets of parchment. At length he had chewed and swallowed them all, and his heroic effort was rewarded on the instant by Tamerlane, who declared him no longer tax collector.
"Instead," declared Tamerlane, smiling broadly, "I appoint you, Nasreddin Hodja, to be my tax collector."

Appalled, the Hodja considered his sad plight. There was little doubt about the matter: no report could please Tamerlane. On the other hand, was it necessary to suffer such abuse for one's bookkeeping, however faulty? Suddenly the Hodja had a fine idea. This business might be managed, after all... Gravely he thanked Tamerlane for his fine evidence of trust in a simple Hodja's judgment, and excused himself from the ruler's presence, to prepare himself for his new office.

Every morning during the following month, Nasreddin Hodja watched with tender concern as his wife rolled fine, fresh dough to paper thinness (yufka) and baked it to form platelike pastries. Then he took the pastries to one side and on them he recorded the tax receipts of the preceding day. With painstaking care he stacked the pastries in a special cupboard where they would be protected from prying eye and tampering touch.

Finally came the day of reckoning. Taking a large wheelbarrow loaded with the precious pastries, the Hodja trundled off to Tamerlane's court, and was admitted to the ruler's presence with his curious burden.

"Ah, there you are!" exclaimed Tamerlane, slapping his hands on his knees in great satisfaction. And, "Yes, yes," he murmured as he accepted the two large leather sacks containing the taxes collected. "But where are your accounts?"
"Right here, sire," replied the Hodja, gesturing toward the load in the wheelbarrow.

Tamerlane stared in disbelief. Then, "Bring me one of those things," he demanded.

Promptly the Hodja presented him with one of the pastries, covered from end to end with finely penned figures. As Tamerlane studied the inscriptions, a smile began to spread across his face. "And what, may I ask, was your purpose in keeping your records on pastry?"

"Only, sire, that either one of us might be able to swallow the reports of my labors," answered the Hodja.