

Story 1250 (1988 Tape 1

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Training Nasreddin Hoca's Donkey to Do Without Food

At the beginning of one summer Nasreddin Hoca decided to buy a donkey to work in his fields, to go back and forth to and from market, and to carry out whatever needs he had for a beast of burden.

The donkey served all of these purposes during that summer, and the Hoca was pleased with its work. When winter came, however, he had much less work for the donkey to do. Because the Hoca was short of money, he wondered if he might not reduce the cost of maintaining his donkey. He thought that if he gradually reduced the amount of food that the donkey ate, it might eventually be able to live on little or even nothing. Day by day he reduced the amount of food he gave the donkey until it had been cut by a quarter. By the end of several more days it had been cut by one half. Some time later, the Hoca offered the donkey only a handful of oats for its daily portion of food, but the donkey refused to eat even that small amount. The Hoca was now convinced that the donkey had grown accustomed to living on nothing. But two days

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later, when he went to the stable, he found his donkey dead.¹

¹This is a poorly told variant of this anecdote. It lacks the traditional "snapper" at the end. Usually the Hoca gives the ending dramatic effect by saying, "What a pity! Just when I had trained my donkey to live on nothing, it had to die!" Very often the Hoca does not wish to give the donkey absolutely nothing. He feeds the donkey a mixture of grain and sawdust, gradually reducing the proportion of grain and increasing the proportion of sawdust until, he thinks, he has trained the donkey to live entirely on sawdust.