

Story 1256 (1988 Tape 1)

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Nasreddin Hoca, Tamerlane, and One-Legged Turkeys

During the time that Tamerlane and his large army occupied Turkey, the Turkish people were greatly oppressed by the need to feed so many troops. There were many demands made by the conqueror. The people of Akşehir thought that if they could do something to please Tamerlane, he might reduce his demands upon them. After discussing this matter for a while, they decided to send Tamerlane a large roasted turkey.¹

A large turkey was slaughtered and roasted. When it was thoroughly cooked, it was given to Nasreddin Hoca, who was often the messenger between the people of his village and Tamerlane. Taking the turkey, the Hoca started for Tamerlane's headquarters with it

Because the trip to Tamerlane's camp was some distance and because the turkey was quite heavy, Nasreddin Hoca grew hungry before he had arrived at his destination. As he grew hungrier, the roasted turkey began to smell more and more

¹Usually it is a goose that is presented to Tamerlane in variants of this tale. A turkey is an anachronism, for Tamerlane died in 1405, eighty-seven years before the discovery of America, the habitat of the fowl that was later named turkey.

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delicious to him. At last he was no longer able to resist the temptation, and he cut off and ate one of the legs of the turkey.

When he was admitted into the presence of the great conqueror, the Hoca presented Tamerlane with a one-legged roasted turkey. When the ruler noticed one leg was missing from the bird, he asked angrily, "Where is the other leg of this turkey?"

Stunned by this question, the Hoca gave the best answer he could manage in that situation. He said, "All turkeys in this area are one-legged turkeys."

Tamerlane answered, "Turkeys do not change from one area to another! Show me some living turkeys in this region." It was a very cold winter day, and when they found a flock of turkeys for Tamerlane to observe, they were all standing on one leg, as almost all birds do when they are cold.

Tamerlane's servants all said to him, "Look, master, all of those turkeys are indeed one-legged!"

But Tamerlane was not deceived. He picked up a large stick and threw it amidst the flock of turkeys. All of them ran off fearfully on both their legs. Turning to the Hoca, Tamerlane said, "You see! Each turkey has run away on two legs."

The Hoca responded, "If I were to strike you with a stick as large as that, you would probably run off as if you had four legs!"