Nasreddin Hoca and the Distant Light

Nasreddin Hoca was a wise as well as an intelligent man. He demonstrated his wisdom during the time he worked as a shadow judge in Akşehir.

For some time before he became a shadow judge, Nasreddin Hoca was unemployed. There were both a hoca and an imam in his village, and so there was no opportunity for him to work there. He went several times to the kadi of the town of Akşehir and said, Kadi Efendi, please find a job for me. I am bored by being idle, and I should like to be able to serve our people in some way."

Becoming tired of the Hoca's frequent visits, the kadi

1 A hoca is a preacher and the religious leader of a community. In pre-Republican times the hoca was also the community teacher. Separation of church and state in the Republic required that teachers be people of secular rather than of religious training.

2 The leader of the prayer service in a mosque.

3 A judge of canon law during the time of the Ottoman Empire. In folktales the kadi adjudicated any kind of case, not just those involving canon law.

4 A mild honorific, comparable to Sir, it usually follows a first name: Hasan Efendi. At one time it was used to show respect to distinguished people, but it has become so devalued in the twentieth century that it now is used for only servants and children.
day said to him, "I shall make you a shadow judge."

"What is that?" asked Nasreddin Hoca.

"I shall give you a room here next to my office. You will
the cases that come along during any of my absences. Or,
if I am here but have too many cases to handle, I may send
some of the cases to you, one at a time." And that was the way
in which Nasreddin Hoca became a shadow judge.

One day shortly after that, the kadi sent Nasreddin Hoca
his first case. It concerned a complaint lodged against an
aga5 by a shepherd who worked for him. This shepherd said,
"Hoca Efendi, allow me to kiss your hand. 6 I am in a very
difficult situation. I am the shepherd of such and such an aga,
for whom I have been working for several years. During that
time I have never failed to do my duty--not even once. I both
and tend my flock well. I am an honest person, and every-

5 An aga (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term aga is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called aga bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as aga bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

6 Kissing of the hands as a sign of respect is still fairly common in Turkey, especially in rural areas.
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one seems to like me. Even my ağa liked me until recently, now our friendship has been broken."

"Why is that?" asked Nasreddin Hoca.

"Well, this matter concerns the ağa's daughter, who is very beautiful. Although I have seen this girl coming and going for years, it was not until recently that I realized that I was in love with her. It then occurred to me that perhaps she was in love with me too. I dropped a hint to her about this, and she told me to ask the ağa to give her to me as my bride.

"It was very difficult for me to ask my ağa this question, and so I waited until a time when he seemed to be in a good mood. Then I said to him, 'My ağa, I am embarrassed to ask you this question, and I hope that you will forgive me for doing so. During the time that I have been eating your bread I have not been blind. Make me a part of your family by giving me your daughter as my bride.

"After I had finished saying that, the ağa began to laugh. Then he said to me, 'You are only a shepherd, hardly able to feed yourself. If you were to marry, how would you be able to feed your family?'

"I said, 'Well, you could regard me as one of your sons and give me a small piece of land and a few sheep and cows. That would be enough to enable me to feed a family.'
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"My ၾ ၾ ၾ was in a good mood that day, and he did not get angry at me. He said, 'All right, but I shall first test you to determine whether you really love my daughter.' I told him that I would do everything that he told me to do.

"He then said, 'Do you see that stream over there? Well, I want you to stand in that stream, naked from your belly on down, from now until daybreak tomorrow morning. During that time you are to eat and drink nothing, and you are not to get heat from any source. I'll be here at the window observing you all that time. If you can endure that much discomfort until daybreak, I shall give you my daughter.'

"I said, 'I shall do that

"It was a very cold day in winter, but I entered the stream and stood there as he had directed. Time passed very slowly, and the water seemed to be getting colder and colder. I kept thinking of being a bridegroom in the household of the ၾ ၾ ၾ, however, and this gave me courage to bear this ordeal. When daybreak finally arrived, I did not leave the stream at once, for I did not want the ၾ ၾ to accuse me of having left the stream before the time agreed upon. I remained there until the sun appeared in the sky. Then, getting out of the cold water, I went to the ၾ ၾ's house and knocked on the door. Although he had said that he would observe me throughout the time I was in the stream, he did not do so, for he was
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sleeping when I knocked on the door. When he finally came to
the door, he asked me, 'Well, did you stay in the stream until
daybreak?

"I answered, 'Weren't you observing me? I remained in
stream beyond daybreak until the sun had risen.

"Then the ağa asked, "While you were there, did you ever
look to the right or left?"

"'Yes, I did.'

"'Did you see any light on any of the surrounding hills?'

"'Yes, I saw a small light in the distance.

"Then you have failed to pass the task I set for you

"'Why do you say that?'

"'Because you warmed yourself with the heat of that light
you saw.

"I said, 'My ağa, have you gone mad? How could anyone warm
himself by looking at a distant light?' I then came to Kadı
Efendi to complain about such treatment. He then sent me to
you.

Nasreddin Hoca, the shadow judge, said, "Don't worry any
further about this. I shall find a way to solve your problem."

During the week that followed, Nasreddin Hoca invited all
of the local ağas to a feast in a lovely garden filled with
trees. Although they were surprised to receive such an invita-
tion from the Hoca, all of the ağas went to the feast. Although
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the Hoca was only a shadow judge, they thought it discreet to accept his invitation. The guests all sat talking in the garden as they waited for dinner to be served, but after this conversation had continued for a long while, one of the ağas asked, "Hoca, where is the food?"

"Please be patient," the Hoca said. "It will finish cooking and be ready soon."

The Hoca then left his guests and disappeared. After ağas had talked with each other for another hour, they decided to look for their host. Finally one of them located the Hoca in one corner of the garden, where he was standing beneath a tree and looking upward at something. He was looking at a cauldron suspended from a branch of that tree. They then noticed that on the ground, several meters below the cauldron, there was a candle burning.

They asked him, "What are you doing here, Hoca?"

"I am waiting for that cauldron of food to finish cooking."

"Are you crazy, Hoca?" they asked him. "How can a candle at that distance boil a huge cauldron full of food?"

Then Nasreddin Hoca called to his side the ağa who was the employer of the shepherd and asked him, "Ağa, don't you think that this candle will boil my cauldron of food?"

"Of course not! Who ever saw a candle boil a large
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cauldron full of food?" retorted the ağa.

"How much distance separates the candle from the cauldron?"
the Hoca asked.

least three or four meters."

"Then tell me something," said Nasreddin Hoca. "If a light
several kilometers away can warm a man standing naked in a cold
stream, why is it that a candle only three or four meters away
cannot cook a cauldron of food?"

ağa understood quite clearly the point that the Hoca
was making, and on the following day he gave his daughter as
a bride to the shepherd.