

Story 1340 (1988 Tape 15)

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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 hoca¹ and an imam² in his village, and so there was no opportunity for him to work there. He went several times to the kadı³ of the town of Akşehir and said, "Kadı Efendi,⁴ 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 kadı

¹A 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.

²The leader of the prayer service in a mosque.

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

⁴A 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.

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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 kadı sent Nasreddin Hoca his first case. It concerned a complaint lodged against an ağa⁵ 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 ağa, 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-

⁵An ağa (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 ağa 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 ağa 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 ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

⁶Kissing 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 aḡa 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 aḡa, 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 aḡa 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 aḡa'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 invitation 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.