

Story 1534 (1992 Tape 1

Narrator: Mustafa Aytekin, 30

Location: Derinkuyu, a kaza town in Nevşehir Province

Date: 1992

Nasreddin Hoca¹ Punishes Severely a Thieving Fox

Once during the month of Ramazan² Nasreddin went looking for a job as imam.³ He looked for such a job for some going from village to village, but he was unable to find a position. One evening he reached still another village feeling very tired and discouraged. He noticed that the people of that village were quite agitated about something. They were rushing here and there and talking excitedly to one another. The Hoca asked one of these villagers, "Why is everyone rushing around in this way?"

¹A hoca is a preacher and the religious leader of a community. In pre-Republican times the hoca was also the community leader. Separation of church and state in the Republic required that teachers be people of secular rather than of religious training. Nasreddin Hoca is Turkey's most popular comic folk character.

²The Moslem holy month, the ninth month on the Moslem lunar calendar. It is a period of intensive religious pre-occupation during which the devout do not eat a morsel or drink a drop of water between sunrise and sunset.

³The imam is the prayer leader at mosque prayer services. Rural communities too small to be able to afford a full-time imam often try to hire one for the month of Ramazan. This once afforded at least temporary work for unemployed imams and hocas. When there were not available such professional clerical personnel, sometimes even theology students were hired.

Story 1534

The man answered, "Oh, Hoca Efendi,⁴ we have had a serious problem here for many years. A fox has been coming to our poultry coops and killing our fowl, but until now we never been able to catch him. Now at last we have captured him, but we cannot agree upon the kind of punishment that would be appropriate for such a criminal."

When Nasreddin Hoca heard that, he said, "Oh, friend that is not a difficult problem. Bring that fox to me. I know the best punishment that can be given to him."

The villagers brought the fox, tied up very tightly, to the Hoca. They all stood around him watching with great curiosity to see what he would do to the fox. Nasreddin Hoca first opened up his traveling bag. Then he took from it his clerical gown and his turban.⁵ He first draped the gown around the animal's body, and then he placed the turban upon its head. Finally, the Hoca cut the ropes that were binding the fox. As

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 devaluated in the twentieth century that it now is used only for servants and children. ■

⁵During much of the period of the Ottoman Empire, the turban was worn by important public figures (sultans, viziers) and by intellectuals and religious leaders.

Story 1534

soon as the fox had been released, it ran off with great speed.

villagers became very upset about what they had just seen happen. They said, "Oh, Hoca, what an inappropriate thing you have done. It has taken us years to catch that thieving fox, and now you have allowed it to escape! Why did you do such a thing?"

Nasreddin Hoca answered the village people in this way: "Don't be disturbed about this. Wearing my robe and my turban, that fox will be driven away from every village he enters. He will, therefore, soon die of starvation!"