Story 1227 (1990 Tape 11   Narrator: Zeynep Günal, c. 24

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Nasreddin Hoca Exchanges Sign Language with a Scientist

One day some foreign scientists came to the village where Nasreddin Hoca lived. The villagers were unable to understand what the scientists were trying to tell them with their drawings and signs. Finally one of the villagers spoke up to his neighbors and said, "If there is anyone in our village who can deal with these scientists, that person must be Nasreddin Hoca!"

Quite agitated, several of the villagers ran to Nasreddin Hoca and exclaimed, "Oh, Hoca! Please come and help us! Some foreign scientists have arrived, and these fellows keep trying to explain something to us by drawing pictures on the ground, but none of us can understand them! Please come and help us!"

Trying to stop this clamor of voices, Nasreddin Hoca answered, "Friends, quiet down! I shall come right away and try to find out what all of this is about." He then went to the public square of the village and greeted the foreign scientists.

One of the scientists drew a circle on the ground, and then he pointed first at the villagers and then at the other

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scientists clustered around him. Nasreddin Hoca drew a line
across the circle, dividing the circle into two halves. He
pointed first at the scientists and then at his fellow
villagers. The scientist, seemingly very pleased, nodded in
agreement. He then drew a vertical line through the middle
of the circle, perpendicular to the one that the Hoca had
drawn. Nasreddin Hoca gazed at the circle, now divided into
four parts, and shook his head, as if he were questioning the
wisdom of what the scientist had done. He then filled the
circle with horizontal lines and vertical lines. Having done
this, he pointed first at the foreign scientists and then at
the group of villagers. Very pleased with this response, the
scientists rushed to the Hoca, embraced him, and patted him
on the back

The villagers were very curious about all this, for they
still did not understand anything that had been going on.
They asked the leading scientist what he and the Hoca had said
to each other

The scientist explained this to them: "I drew a circle
which represented the world in which we all live. Being a very
learned man, the Hoca drew a line across the middle of the
circle to indicate the Equator, which divides the world at its
center, and by doing this he was indicating that some people
live on one end of the world and some on the other. Then I

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drew a vertical line to show longitude, saying that the
borders of countries are usually designated according to their
longitude. The Hoca then drew several more vertical lines and
an equal number of lines across the circle parallel to the
Equator. By that he meant that the borders of all the coun-
tries of the world are marked by lines of longitude and lati-
tude. This hoca of yours is certainly a very learned man!"

After the foreign scientists had departed, the villagers
were still not satisfied that they knew what had happened.
They asked Nasreddin Hoca, "Hoca, what did that scientist say
to you?"

Without any hesitation the Hoca answered this question
"The scientist drew on the ground a circle to represent a tray
of baklava[1] and he pointed out that we should eat it all
together. I divided the tray into two parts, indicating that
they should have one half of it and we should have the other
half. The scientist clearly did not assent to this, and so he
drew a vertical line, dividing the tray into four parts,
apparently thinking there would be difficulty dividing the
baklava. I then divided the tray into many parts by drawing a

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[1]A very popular confection made with many layers of
extremely thin pastry saturated with honey. The honey is poured
into the pan after the pastry has been baked, and it rises
into the pastry by means of wicking action.

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number of lines both crosswise and up and down. I was showing

him that only by making so many pieces of baklava would it be

possible to give some to each of so many people."