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Nasreddin Hoca and Tamerlane's Elephant

When Tamerlane invaded Anatolia, he sent to each of the occupied villages an elephant.¹ These elephants were not gifts. He sent them to the villages to be fed and cared for by the local people. Such very large animals ate a great amount of food, tending them soon became a great burden to the villagers.

One of those elephants had been sent to Nasreddin Hoca's village. The people there felt so overburdened by supporting their elephant that they decided to complain to Tamerlane about it. They held a meeting and decided to go in a body to complain to Tamerlane, and they elected Nasreddin Hoca to be their spokesman on that occasion.

They all set out together for Tamerlane's headquarters, as they approached his camp, they began, one after another, to drop out of the procession.² As a result, Nasreddin Hoca was all alone when he was shown into the presence of Tamerlane.

¹Tamerlane's Central Asian army was equipped with elephants, a most startling and unnerving fact. Some historians credit Tamerlane's defeat of the Ottoman army, near Ankara, to the effect of his elephant power. Not surprisingly, this new military weapon captured not only the Ottoman army but also the Turkish folk imagination.

²Tamerlane was a fierce and ruthless despot who had slaughtered tens of thousands of people during his march westward to

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When that conqueror asked him what he wanted, Nasreddin Hoca said, "Your Majesty, we are having a problem with the elephant you left in our village. She is very lonely, and we wish to request that you send us also a mate for her." In this way he repaid his fellow villagers for having deserted him.

the edge of Europe. People were, quite understandably, terrified by him.