

Story 1246 (1988 Tape 1)

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Location: Derinkuyu, kaza town of  
Nevşehir Province

Date: March 27, 1988

Posthumous Advice from Nasreddin Hoca

One day Nasreddin Hoca was up in a tree cutting off dead branches to be used for firewood. A stranger who was passing by noticed that the Hoca was sitting upon the very branch he was cutting off with his saw. The stranger shouted up at the Hoca, "Stop! Stop! You are cutting off the branch upon which you are sitting! Stop doing that or you will fall!"

Nasreddin Hoca paid no attention at all to this warning. He continued to saw away at the same branch. After a couple of minutes, the branch creaked and cracked and then separated from the tree, throwing Hoca to the ground. Surprised at this turn of events, he thought about the matter for a minute and then reached the conclusion that the stranger who had warned him was able to predict the future. Jumping up, the Hoca began running after the man until he had overtaken him. He said to the stranger, "If you knew when I was going to fall out of that tree, then you probably also know when I am going to die."

The stranger tried to explain that his awareness that the Hoca would fall was not a matter of prophecy or fortune-telling, but he was unable to persuade the Hoca of this fact. When the stranger realized the uselessness of any further explanation,

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he said, "Very well, then, I shall tell you when you will die. When you go to the mill for flour, load the bags on your donkey and start home. If your donkey brays three times before you reach home, then you will die."

One day shortly after that, the Hoca did have to go to the mill to have some wheat ground. When the flour was ready, he loaded it on his donkey and started home. When his donkey brayed, the Hoca thought that he might not have long to live. When it brayed twice, he was sure that he did not have long to live. And after it brayed a third time, he fell down and said, "I am dead!"

After a while some villagers came along and saw the Hoca lying there with no signs of life. They placed him in a coffin<sup>1</sup> and started carrying him to the cemetery. When they reached a fork in the road, the bearers of the coffin disagreed on which branch led to the cemetery. Growing annoyed with their argument, the Hoca said, "When I was alive, we always used to that branch," pointing to the road to the right.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Until very recent times very few Turks were actually buried in coffins, but they were carried to the cemetery in coffins. Behind many a village mosque there was kept the community coffin used for this purpose. Because it had a handle on each corner, it was often referred to as "the four-armed one."

<sup>2</sup>Many variants of this tale have an additional episode that occurs after the Hoca has been left alone in the cemetery. See ATON variants titled "How to Behave in Heaven."