

Story 1690 (Dictated)

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The Better Light

One night Nasreddin Hoca's neighbor noticed the Hoca¹ scrabbling around in the dirt near his doorstep in the bright light of the moon.

"Hoca Efendi,"² he asked, "are you looking for something?"

"Yes, yes!" said the Hoca, continuing his digging "I've lost my signet ring, and I'm trying to find it."

The neighbor was eager to help, so he knelt down and began digging, too, looking for the Hoca's ring. But no matter how hard or how long they dug, they couldn't find the ring.

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 public-school teachers be people of secular rather than religious training. Because both teachers and preachers are often the butts of humor, the pre-Republican hoca was vulnerable to more humorous thrusts than were most other people. Nasreddin Hoca is Turkey's most popular comic folk character. He was alternately simple and wise.

²A 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.

Story 1690

Finally the neighbor stopped digging and squatted on heels. "Hoca Efendi, are you sure you lost your ring here?"

"Out here?" said the Hoca. "Oh, no, my friend. I didn't lose it out here. I lost it in my coal cellar

"In your coal cellar!" said the neighbor. "Then why, Hoca Efendi, are you looking for it out here in your garden?"

The Hoca squatted on his heels and waved toward the moon. "Don't you see, my friend? It's so simple! The is much better out here!"