

Story 1911 (1995 Tape 4)

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The Yoghurt Lake

One day Nasreddin Hoca¹ was sitting at the water's edge of a large lake. He had a bowl in one hand, and from that bowl he was dipping up yoghurt and throwing it into the lake.

A man passing by saw him doing this but did not understand why he was doing it. He asked, "Nasreddin Hoca, what are you doing there by the lake?"

"I am culturing² the lake to turn it into yoghurt."

¹A hoca is the preacher and religious leader of a Muslim community. In the pre-Republican era in Turkey the hoca was also the community's teacher, for education then was the responsibility of the clergy. Separation of "church" and state in the Republic required that teachers be people with secular rather than religious training. Nasreddin Hoca belonged to the earlier period. For centuries he has been Turkey's most beloved comic folk character.

²Turkish people are great consumers of yoghurt (yoğurt). Although it can be purchased at almost every grocery store or dairy, it is more often homemade. Into warm milk are stirred a few spoonfuls of yoghurt "germ," after which the mixture is allowed to "make" --often overnight. Instead of buying yoghurt "germ" for this comestible, most housewives simply use a small amount of the previous batch, set aside and saved for

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The man said, "This is amazing! You are a hoca and an educated man. Don't you realize that you cannot possibly turn the whole lake into yoghurt?"

"Of course," responded Nasreddin Hoca. "But just think how nice it would be if it did happen!"

just that purpose. Here the Hoca is using that technique in an effort to fertilize the entire lake. (On the American frontier, where grocery stores were few and far between, housewives saved a scrap of unbaked bread dough to use (instead of commercial yeast) as a "starting" agent to cause their next batch of dough to "rise."