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Location: Derinkuyu, kaza town
of Nevşehir Province

Date: March 27, 1988

Nasreddin Hoca and Tamerlane's Elephants

During the invasion of Tamerlane, he and his forces occupied a number of Turkish cities and towns. One of the places that they occupied was the city of Akşehir, near which Nasreddin Hoca lived at the time.

In order to meet the great expenses of his military campaign, Tamerlane ordered each village in the occupied area to feed and take care of one or more of his elephants.¹ This was really a very oppressive decision for most villages, for the huge animals consumed a great amount of food. Villagers fed the elephants all of the oats and other grain that they had, but the elephants required more and more food.

As it happened, the village where Nasreddin Hoca lived was assigned three elephants, and the burden of feeding them soon impoverished that village. One day three of the elders of the village called upon Nasreddin Hoca. They said to him, "Hoca, something must be done to relieve us from the burden of caring for three elephants. We cannot afford to continue doing

¹Among the many invasions of Asia Minor, that by Tamerlane was distinguished by the military use of elephants, perhaps the major factor in his defeat of the Ottoman forces.

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this, and we should request that two of the elephants be sent somewhere else." After talking over this problem, they decided to send to Tamerlane a delegation of three to ask for this relief. The Hoca was one of the three villagers selected

On the agreed-upon day the three village representatives set forth for Tamerlane's headquarters. As they were about to be shown into the presence of Tamerlane, Nasreddin Hoca glanced around and discovered that his companions had deserted him and were nowhere to be seen. By then it was too late for the Hoca to turn back. He had to face the great Tamerlane all alone

Tamerlane asked the Hoca, "What is the reason for your coming to see me?"

Nasreddin Hoca answered, "Your Majesty, I have come to express the gratitude of the people of my village for the honor you have conferred upon us by permitting us to care for three of your elephants. If you could spare another three elephants for us, our gratitude would be doubled!"