

Story 748 1985 Tape 1)

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Location: Çivril, a kaza town  
of Denizli Province

Date: January 1985

Nasreddin Hoca Counts Donkeys

One day Nasreddin Hoca set out on a journey to bring back a load of grain with his donkeys. He had a total of ten donkeys, and so, as he went along, he rode on one and led the other behind him. Somewhere along his way, the Hoca stopped for a while to let the donkeys graze. <sup>grazing?</sup> When he was ready to start again, he mounted one donkey after having tied the others in a line behind that lead donkey. To be sure that he had all his donkeys, Hoca decided to count them before his caravan moved a single step. When he counted them, he was surprised to discover that he had only nine donkeys. He thought, "There should be ten donkeys. What could have happened to the other one?"

Very much disturbed over what seemed to be the loss of a valuable donkey, Nasreddin dismounted and looked around to see if there might be a stray donkey somewhere. There was none. Standing there among them, he counted his donkeys again and was relieved to find that he had ten again. "That is fine," he said. "Now I can continue my journey."

As he rode along, however, he could not help being

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somewhat apprehensive about just what had happened temporarily to that one donkey that had disappeared. He couldn't help counting them once more--just to be sure. When he did so, the number of donkeys he counted was nine. "Only a few minutes ago there were ten!" he said. He quickly dismounted to count his animals again, and this time there were ten. This went on several times more during his trip. He became thoroughly perplexed over the matter.

Finally the Hoca saw a man approaching him, and he decided to ask that man to count his donkeys. The man was willing to do this, and after counting the animals, the man announced, "Hoca, you have exactly ten donkeys."

"How can this be?" asked the Hoca. "Sometimes I have nine donkeys and sometimes ten. When I am riding along, I have only nine donkeys, but when I dismount to count them, that lost one returns and I have ten. There must be some kind of number magic<sup>1</sup> in all this."

Realizing what had happened, the man said, "Hoca, permit me to ask you a question: Did you always count the donkey on which you were riding?"

<sup>1</sup>Numerology was once believed in widely, throughout much of the world, in fact. Various forms of divination or prophecy by means of numbers still exist in Turkey. Remil atmak means to foretell the future by numbers. There is no such divination practiced in this tale, but the association of numbers with the occult is clear.