

Nasreddin Hoca, Tamerlane, and the Five Eggs

During the invasion of Turkey by Tamerlane, the great despot came to Akşehir where Nasreddin Hoca lived. As Tamerlane entered the city, he saw Nasreddin Hoca sitting by the side of the road watching the procession; the Hoca was wearing a blanket wrapped around his head as a turban, and this called Tamerlane's attention to him. Tamerlane ordered that the man be brought before him.

"Who are you?" he asked Hoca.

"I am the god of the earth," answered Hoca.

"Since you are the god of the earth, perhaps you can enlarge the eyes of one of my attendants. He has very small eyes."

"I wonder," answered Hoca, "whether I did not make it plain to you or whether you just did not understand me. I am not the god of the heavens who can do such things. If you want something done above the waist, ask him; anything below the waist is my sphere."¹

Tamerlane talked more with Nasreddin Hoca and was pleased with his wit. He sent him away, but next day he ordered him brought back for his amusement. One of the emperor's wives had cooked five eggs, and he invited Hoca to join them in the meal. He said to Nasreddin Hoca, "I want you to divide these five eggs fairly among the three of us."

Without hesitating, Hoca took the five eggs and said, "Here is one for you, your majesty, and since you have two below your waist, that makes a total of three eggs for you. This one is mine, and that makes three for me, too. And the other three for your wife, for she has none below the waist."

¹The teller felt that "god of earth" referred to the feet. Feet are unmentionable among Moslems and so this was a circumlocution.