

Story 1227 (1990 Tape 11)

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Nasreddin Hoca Exchanges Sign Language with a Scientist

One day some foreign scientists came to the village where Nasreddin Hoca lived. The villagers were unable to understand what the scientists were trying to tell them with their drawings and signs. Finally one of the villagers spoke up to his neighbors and said, "If there is anyone in our village who can deal with these scientists, that person must be Nasreddin Hoca!"

Quite agitated, several of the villagers ran to Nasreddin Hoca and exclaimed, "Oh, Hoca! Please come and help us! Some foreign scientists have arrived, and these fellows keep trying to explain something to us by drawing pictures on the ground, but none of us can understand them! Please come and help us!"

Trying to stop this clamor of voices, Nasreddin Hoca answered, "Friends, quiet down! I shall come right away and try to find out what all of this is about." He then went to the public square of the village and greeted the foreign scientists.

One of the scientists drew a circle on the ground, and then he pointed first at the villagers and then at the other

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scientists clustered around him. Nasreddin Hoca drew a line across the circle, dividing the circle into two halves. He pointed first at the scientists and then at his fellow villagers. The scientist, seemingly very pleased, nodded in agreement. He then drew a vertical line through the middle of the circle, perpendicular to the one that the Hoca had drawn. Nasreddin Hoca gazed at the circle, now divided into four parts, and shook his head, as if he were questioning the wisdom of what the scientist had done. He then filled the circle with horizontal lines and vertical lines. Having done this, he pointed first at the foreign scientists and then at the group of villagers. Very pleased with this response, the scientists rushed to the Hoca, embraced him, and patted him on the back.

The villagers were very curious about all this, for they still did not understand anything that had been going on. They asked the leading scientist what he and the Hoca had said to each other.

The scientist explained this to them: "I drew a circle which represented the world in which we all live. Being a very learned man, the Hoca drew a line across the middle of the circle to indicate the Equator, which divides the world at its center, and by doing this he was indicating that some people live on one end of the world and some on the other. Then I

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drew a vertical line to show longitude, saying that the borders of countries are usually designated according to their longitude. The Hoca then drew several more vertical lines and an equal number of lines across the circle parallel to the Equator. By that he meant that the borders of all the countries of the world are marked by lines of longitude and latitude. This hoca of yours is certainly a very learned man!"

After the foreign scientists had departed, the villagers were still not satisfied that they knew what had happened. They asked Nasreddin Hoca, "Hoca, what did that scientist say to you?"

Without any hesitation the Hoca answered this question "The scientist drew on the ground a circle to represent a tray of baklava,¹ and he pointed out that we should eat it all together. I divided the tray into two parts, indicating that they should have one half of it and we should have the other half. The scientist clearly did not assent to this, and so he drew a vertical line, dividing the tray into four parts apparently thinking there would be difficulty dividing the baklava. I then divided the tray into many parts by drawing a

¹A very popular confection made with many layers of extremely thin pastry saturated with honey. The honey is poured into the pan after the pastry has been baked, and it rises into the pastry by means of wicking action.

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number of lines both crosswise and up and down. I was showing him that only by making so many pieces of baklava would it be possible to give some to each of so many people."