

Story 1494 (Dictated)

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A Tale about a Nasreddin Hoca Tale

When Koca Ragıp Paşa¹ was the Ottoman ambassador in Moscow, he became quite a good friend of the czar. One day he told a Nasreddin Hoca story to the czar. The Russian ruler was so pleased with the story that he invited Koca Ragıp Paşa to dinner that night. There the czar requested that he tell the same story to all of the dinner guests. For some time after that, the czar invited the ambassador to dinner every night in order to hear another Nasreddin Hoca story.

In this way Nasreddin Hoca stories had an effect on the relationship between two countries. I heard this from a Turkish diplomat who, in turn, had heard it from his grandfather. I heard this story from a diplomat in London in 1937, but he could not remember which of the stories it was which first impressed the czar so favorably. I do not know that, either, of course, but I can well imagine that it could have been the story which I want to tell you now.

Aleaddin Keykubat² once went to Akşehir. The notable men

¹Ragıp Mehmet Paşa, Koca (1699-1763) was a prominent Ottoman statesman and author.

of the last Selcuk sultans of the first half of the

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were very anxious about his visit, and they hardly knew what to do. They knew that the ones he wished to be hanged were in fact hanged; they knew that those he wanted slain were actually slain. They didn't want to get very close to him

fear they might do something that might displease him. In their confusion over what to do about this, they decided to appeal to Nasreddin Hoca for help.

Several prominent citizens of Akşehir went to Nasreddin Hoca and explained the situation to him. They pleaded with him to join them when they met Alaeddin Keykubat. But the Hoca said, "I do not care to get close to such important people. They begged him for his help, and he finally agreed to give it.

When the citizens of Akşehir gathered to meet Keykubat Sultan, Nasreddin Hoca was among them. The Hoca was a judge in a religious court, and he was considered to be a great expert on Moslem canonical law,³ and to symbolize this, he wore a huge turban.⁴ He was thin and not very strong, for he was

poor to eat very well. His face was marked by deep wrinkles thirteenth century. There were, however, three Selcuk sultans of that name and time: Alaeddin Keykubat I, II, and III.

³Nasreddin Hoca was credited with having played many roles. That of judge appears in only a small percentage of the countless tales about him.

⁴Before the fez became the most prestigious male headgear, sultans, viziers, and scholars wore turbans. Scholars usually wore turbans of modest size, but sultans shown in miniatures and other portraits often wore turbans of voluminous dimensions.

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even when he smiled.

After Keykubat had arrived in Akşehir and had been greeted by the people, he noticed Nasreddin Hoca and was amazed by the size of his turban. Pointing at the Hoca, he asked, "Who is that man with that extremely large turban?"

His attendants answered, "He is a distinguished and well-known judge of Moslem law."

Calling the Hoca to him, Keykubat asked him, "Why are you wearing a turban of that size?"

The Hoca answered, "I am sorry to be wearing such a small turban in your presence. I have sent a camel driver to bring my larger, formal turban."

The sultan was very amused by this remark, and it was not long before a friendship developed between him and Nasreddin Hoca. The Hoca very carefully implied to the padishah the foolishness of his great conceit and the uselessness of his pretensions. Alaeddin Keykubat must have accepted this suggestion in good will, for he continued to invite the Hoca to his palace time after time.

It is my opinion that this could have been the story told to the czar by Koca Ragıp. In telling you about it, I am trying to point out that Nasreddin Hoca stories have been known over the world.