

Story 1561 (1992 Tape 2)

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Location: Derinkuyu, kaza town  
of Nevşehir Province

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The Learned Turban

One day while Nasreddin Hoca<sup>1</sup> was spending some time at a coffeehouse, a man rushed into the building and handed him a letter. The man said, "Oh, Hoca, please read this letter to me."

Nasreddin Hoca took the letter and turned it from front to back and then forward again; he lifted it, lowered it, and lifted it up again; he turned it around and around, first in one direction and then in the other. But all of this was wasted effort, for the Hoca simply did not know how to read. He finally said to the man, "I am sorry, but I am unable to read your letter."

The man was confused and then angry. He said, "How is that, Hoca? I am shocked that you cannot read my letter. Shame on you. You pretend to be a hoca, and you even wear that large turban."<sup>2</sup> Shame on you!"

<sup>1</sup>A hoca is a preacher and the religious leader of a community. In pre-Republican times the hoca was also the community teacher. Separation of church and state in the Republic required that teachers be people of secular rather than of religious training. Nasreddin Hoca is Turkey's most popular comic folk character.

<sup>2</sup>In the latter years of the Ottoman Empire, the prestigious headgear for Turkish men was the fez. In earlier times, however,

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Nasreddin Hoca very calmly removed the turban from his head and placed it on the head of the owner of the letter. He then said to that man, "Since you seem to think that the turban makes that much difference, I have transferred it to your head. You go ahead and read the letter now!"

sultans, government officials, and educated men wore turbans. The turban was a status symbol.