

Introduction

Nasreddin Hodja came from Turkey, from the village of Aksehir. He lived there hundreds of years ago, in the 13th century. The Hodja was a holy man. He had his own mosque, where he preached a sermon almost every week.

Hodja is written 'hoça' in Turkish. Hoça is the word for teacher. That's precisely what the Hodja was: a teacher. But he was an unusual teacher. The Hodja liked to answer questions with questions. To solve problems, he often caused more problems, and along the way he made lots of jokes. In fact, the Hodja is famous as much for being a trickster as for being a holy man!

Many stories are told about Nasreddin Hodja, not only in Turkey but in other countries in the Middle East. These old folktales sometimes seem strange today. We see the things the Hodja does in a different way. He and the other characters can appear unkind or dishonest to modern-day eyes.

For example, the Hodja is horrible to his wife. People in the stories, including the Hodja, can die suddenly. But of course, life was harder hundreds of years ago. People had to accept sudden death and other harsh things. They also saw these tales as lessons.



1. The Moon

As a child, Nasreddin Hodja wasn't called Hodja. He was just called Nasreddin.

Nasreddin has to go to school almost every day, to the little old school next to the mosque.

His teacher is strict, like all teachers in those days.

The teacher beats the children if they do something wrong.

This punishment is called *falaka*.

The children have to lie on their backs.

They take off their shoes and socks.

The teacher hits the soles of their feet hard with a cane.

That really hurts.

The wood cuts into their feet.

The soles of the feet burn like fire.

At the school there are no benches or chairs.

The children sit on a carpet on the floor.

They learn to sing Suras.

Suras are parts of the Koran.
They learn poetry and literature,
and astronomy.

Nasreddin talks about the Moon
during the astronomy lesson:
‘Yesterday I had to fetch water.
But what did I see there?
The Moon! It had fallen into the well!
Luckily there was a long rope.
I took the rope and threw it to the Moon.
“Hold tight, then I’ll pull you out”,
I called down.
The Moon was very heavy.
I pulled and pulled.
Finally the Moon came up.
I pulled so hard on the rope that I fell over.
I fell on my back, and do you know what I saw?
The Moon! The Moon is back in the sky again!
I did it. I got the Moon out of the water!
The Moon said, “Thanks”.
It was ashamed of being so silly,
so it hid behind the cloud.’

