

# The Tales of Nasrudin Hodja

The tales of Nasrudin Hodja are told around the world in Arabic, Persian and Turkic languages. As a consequence he goes by many names, and those names may be spelled differently in English. Here he is called Nasrudin Hodja, Nasreddin Hodja and Djuha.

## 1. Delivering a Khutba

Once, Nasrudin was invited to deliver a *khutba* (sermon), which he really didn't want to do. When he got on the minbar (pulpit), he asked, "Do you know what I am going to say?" The audience replied "NO", so he announced, "I have no desire to speak to people who don't even know what I will be talking about!" and he left.

The people felt embarrassed and called him back again the next day. This time, when he asked the same question, the people replied "YES". So Nasrudin said, "Well, since you already know what I am going to say, I won't waste any more of your time!" and he left.

Now the people were really perplexed. They decided to try one more time and once again invited the Mullah (religious scholar) to speak the following week. Once again he asked the same question - "Do you know what I am going to say?" Now the people were prepared and so half of them answered, "YES" while the other half replied "NO". So Nasrudin said "The half who know what I am going to say, tell it to the other half," and he left.

## 2. Go Measure It

Once Hodja was hammering the nail at the end of his donkey's bridle, as he was going to a teahouse. Someone asked him: 'Mullah (religious scholar), where is the Center of the Universe'. Hodja said, 'The Center of the Universe is where I just hammered the nail to my donkey's bridle'. Someone said, 'I do not believe this'. Hodja took a sip of his tea and said, 'If you do not believe it, go measure it!'

## 3. The Cauldron That Died

Nasreddin Hodja, having need for a large cooking container, borrowed his neighbor's copper cauldron, then returned it in a timely manner.

"What is this?" asked his neighbor upon examining the returned cauldron. "There is a small pot inside my cauldron."

"Oh," responded the Hodja. "While it was in my care your cauldron gave birth to a little one. Because you are the owner of the mother cauldron, it is only right that you should keep its baby. And in any event, it would not be right to separate the child from its mother at such a young age."

The neighbor, thinking that the Hodja had gone quite mad, did not argue. Whatever had caused the crazy man to come up with this explanation, the neighbor had a nice little pot, and it had cost him nothing.

Some time later the Hodja asked to borrow the cauldron again.

"Why not?" thought the neighbor to himself. "Perhaps there will be another little pot inside when he returns it."

But this time the Hodja did not return the cauldron. After many days had passed, the neighbor went to the Hodja and asked for the return of the borrowed cauldron.

"My dear friend," replied the Hodja. "I have bad news. Your cauldron has died, and is now in her grave."

"What are you saying?" shouted the neighbor. A cauldron does not live, and it cannot die. Return it to me at once!"

"One moment!" answered the Hodja. "This is the same cauldron that but a short time ago gave birth to a child, a child that is still in your possession. If a cauldron can give birth to a child, then it also can die."

#### **4. The Slap**

Nasreddin Hodja was standing in the marketplace when a stranger stepped up to him and slapped him in the face, but then said, "I beg your pardon. I thought that you were someone else."

This explanation did not satisfy the Hodja, so he brought the stranger before the qadi (judge) and demanded compensation.

The Hodja soon perceived that the qadi and the defendant were friends. The latter admitted his guilt, and the judge pronounced the sentence: "The settlement for this offense is one piaster, to be paid to the plaintiff. If you do not have a piaster with you, then you may bring it here to the plaintiff at your convenience."

Hearing this sentence, the defendant went on his way. The Hodja waited for him to return with the piaster. And he waited. And he waited.

Some time later the Hodja said to the qadi, "Do I understand correctly that one piaster is sufficient payment for a slap?"

"Yes," answered the qadi.

Hearing this answer, the Hodja slapped the judge in the face and said, "You may keep my piaster when the defendant returns with it," then walked away.

## **5. The Smell of Soup and the Sound of Money**

A beggar was given a piece of bread, but nothing to put on it. Hoping to get something to go with his bread, he went to a nearby inn and asked for a handout. The innkeeper turned him away with nothing, but the beggar sneaked into the kitchen where he saw a large pot of soup cooking over the fire. He held his piece of bread over the steaming pot, hoping to thus capture a bit of flavor from the good-smelling vapor. Suddenly the innkeeper seized him by the arm and accused him of stealing soup.

"I took no soup," said the beggar. "I was only smelling the vapor."

"Then you must pay for the smell," answered the innkeeper.

The poor beggar had no money, so the angry innkeeper dragged him before the qadi.

Now Nasreddin Hodja was at that time serving as qadi (judge), and he heard the innkeeper's complaint and the beggar's explanation.

"So you demand payment for the smell of your soup?" summarized the Hodja after the hearing.

"Yes!" insisted the innkeeper.

"Then I myself will pay you," said the Hodja, "and I will pay for the smell of your soup with the sound of money."

Thus saying, the Hodja drew two coins from his pocket, rang them together loudly, put them back into his pocket, and sent the beggar and the innkeeper each on his own way.

## **6. Faith Moves Mountains**

The Hodja was boasting about the power of his faith.

"If your faith is so strong, then pray for that mountain to come to you," said a skeptic, pointing to a mountain in the distance.

The Hodja prayed fervently, but the mountain did not move. He prayed more, but the mountain remained unmoved.

Finally the Hodja got up from his knees and began walking toward the mountain. "I am a humble man," he said, "and the faith of Islam is a practical one. If the mountain will not come to the Hodja, then the Hodja will go to the mountain."

## **7. Everyone Is Right**

Once when Nasreddin Hodja was serving as qadi (judge), one of his neighbors came to him with a complaint against a fellow neighbor.

The Hodja listened to the charges carefully, then concluded, "Yes, dear neighbor, you are quite right."

Then the other neighbor came to him. The Hodja listened to his defense carefully, then concluded, "Yes, dear neighbor, you are quite right."

The Hodja's wife, having listened in on the entire proceeding, said to him, "Husband, both men cannot be right."

The Hodja answered, "Yes, dear wife, you are quite right."

## **8. Walnuts and Pumpkins**

Nasreddin Hodja was lying in the shade of an ancient walnut tree. His body was at rest, but, befitting his calling as an imam (prayer leader), his mind did not relax. Looking up into the mighty tree he considered the greatness and wisdom of God.

"God is great and God is good," said the Hodja, "but was it indeed wise that such a great tree as this be created to bear only tiny walnuts as fruit? Behold the stout stem and strong limbs. They could easily carry the pumpkins that grow from spindly vines in yonder field, vines that cannot begin to bear the weight of their own fruit. Should not walnuts grow on weakly vines and pumpkins on sturdy trees?"

So thinking, the Hodja dozed off, only to be awakened by a walnut that fell from the tree, striking him on his forehead.

"God be praised!" he exclaimed, seeing what had happened. "If the world had been created according to my meager wisdom, it would have been a pumpkin that fell from the tree and hit me on the head. It would have killed me for sure! God is great! God is good! God is wise!"

Never again did Nasreddin Hodja question the wisdom of God."

### 9. The Djuha's (Hodja's) Clothes

One day Djuha arrived at a banquet in his usual worn clothes, only to be turned away at the door. After going home and changing into his most expensive clothes, he returned to the banquet. This time he was welcomed respectfully and seated near the guest of honor. As Djuha reached for a piece of lamb, his sleeve happened to dip into the food. "Watch your sleeve," said the man sitting next to him.

"No," replied the Djuha, "I will not." Then addressing his sleeve he said, "Feast, dear sleeve, eat as much as you desire. You have more right to feast than I, since they respect you more than me."

### 10. Djuha's (Hodja) Wisdom

A group of scholars were annoyed that the caliph (successors to the Prophet who lead the Muslim community) paid so much attention to Djuha. They thought he was stupid. One day they asked Djuha, "Can you tell us precisely where God is to be found?" Djuha replied, "Allah is everywhere at all times. Now, can you tell me where God is not?"

## Assignments for Hodja Stories

Define the following vocabulary words, based on the stories:

**Khutba** \_\_\_\_\_

**Minbar** \_\_\_\_\_

**Qadi** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mullah** \_\_\_\_\_

**Caliph** \_\_\_\_\_

1. List the things you can tell about life where the story takes place, based on the Hodja Stories.

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**2. For each story you read fill in the elements that are**

**Story Title:**

**Student's Name:**

<b>ILLOGICAL, SIMPLE, FOOLISH</b>	<b>LOGICAL, PROFOUND, SHARP</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>5.</b>

**3. Check off the categories appropriate to the story (or stories) you read and be ready to justify your answers with examples from the story.**

- Authority
- Justice
- Faith in God
- The visible real world versus spiritual world
- Wisdom about human behavior

**Other Assignments:**

- Create an illustrated book of the tale for younger students.
- Compare two versions of the same Hodja story. Which is told more effectively?
- Take the kernel of the Hodja story as presented here and weave into it many vivid details of life where the story is taking place (anywhere in the Arab, Persian or Turkic speaking world). Re-tell the story to a classmate in four minute's time.

Story 1 found on Wikipedia. Stories 2 through 8 found on The Persian Mirror. Stores 8 to 10 from a conference handout unattributed.

[http://www.persianmirror.com/Article\\_det.cfm?id=2393&getArticleCategory=59&getArticleSubCategory=33](http://www.persianmirror.com/Article_det.cfm?id=2393&getArticleCategory=59&getArticleSubCategory=33)

## **Addendum:**

Definitions from *Key Words in Islam* by Ron Geaves, Georgetown University Press, 2006.\*

### **Caliph (Khalifa)**

The successors to the Prophet. They do not inherit the mantle of Prophethood but lead the Muslim community. The first Caliph was Abu Bakr and he and the three Caliphs that followed are known as the four righteous ones.... In 1517 the Ottomans removed the Caliphate to Istanbul, from where it was finally abolished by Kemal Ataturk in 1924.

### **Khutba**

The sermon delivered at the juma prayers on Friday or at the eid celebrations. The sermon generally follows a set pattern and is an exhortation in tone. It rarely analyzes or provides exegesis. The general assumption is that believers know what is required but forget to do it...

### **Imam**

In the Sunni tradition of Islam, the title simply refers to one who leads the public prayers in the mosque. Such a person is usually an alim, someone who has completed full religious education in a madrasa, but in the absence of a qualified imam, the eldest or most pious member of the community is called upon.

### **Minbar**

The platform or chair from which the imam delivers the Friday sermon or Khutba at Juma (Friday) prayers.

### **Mullah**

Mullah is used in various parts of the Islāmic world as an honorific attached to the name of a king, sultan, or other noble (as in Morocco and other parts of North Africa) or of a scholar or religious leader (as in parts of the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent). There are no formal requirements for acquisition of the title, but normally persons called by it have had some training in a madrasa, or religious school.

### **Qadi**

The title of a Muslim judge who administers the Shari'a or Islamic law. The ideal of the Qadi is of a man who is qualified in Muslim law but also pious in religious devotion. Islamic law states that he must treat all citizens equally and they all must have the right of a person appearance before him.

\*Exception: the definition of *mullah* is taken from the Encyclopedia Britannica On line.

