

# Nasreddin Hodja





REPUBLIC OF TURKEY  
GOVERNERSHIP  
OF ESKİŞEHİR



*eskişehir* 2013

CULTURAL CAPITAL OF TURKİC WORLD



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# Nasreddin Hodja

**The Famous Humanist and  
Turkish - Islamic Thinker,  
Brought up in Eskişehir**



*Nasreddin Hodja*

# *Nasreddin Hodja His life*



***Nasreddin Hodja, the sage of Turkish-Islamic culture and the master of laughter, was born in 1208 in the village of Hortu, later named Nasrettin Hodja Beldesi, a region of Sivrihisar in Eskişehir.***





His father is Abdullah and his mother is Sıdıka. Nasreddin Hodja learnt his early knowledge from his father who was a religious teacher. Later he had an education in madrasahs in Sivrihisar and Konya. He worked as an imam and preacher in his village. He later went to Akşehir to increase his knowledge. In Akşehir, he took lessons from the sages of the time and wise people such as Seyyid Mahmut Hayranı and Seyyid Hacı İbrahim Veli. After he completed his education, he settled in Akşehir. Even though his actual job was hodja, he worked as a teacher in a madrasah, clerk, cadi, and used his expertise in courts. He sometimes made his living with farming, gardening and working in bazaars. The reason he had so many jobs was that he wanted to live his life among people and because of the economic conditions of the time.

Hodja's first marriage was in Akşehir. After the death of his wife, he married for a second time, and from this marriage he had a daughter called Fatma. Hodja's other daughter is Dürr-i Melek Hatun. It is understood from his jokes that he also had a son called Ömer. Nasreddin Hodja died at the age of 76 in 1284 in Akşehir and was buried in an old Seljuk cemetery. His resting place was later turned into a tomb.



*Nasreddin Hodja Beldesi (the old name Hortu)  
the birthplace of Nasreddin Hodja*

*Nasreddin Hodja*

# *Nasreddin Hodja's Personality*

**Nasreddin Hodja had a good  
childhood, good family  
upbringing, good education, and  
his personality was formed  
according to that.**







*Hodja's descendants meet you  
with their smiling faces in  
Nasreddin Hodja Beldesi*

The distinctive personality feature of Nasreddin Hodja was that he was a man of humor. But to view him as a funny man would be wrong because making someone laugh requires making someone think. This was what Hodja wanted to do. In other words, making people think through laughter... He performed his duty towards society through his quick-wittedness and sharp-minded humor. Hodja was also a knowledgeable person but he wasn't boastful. He didn't only follow traditional book-learning when problems occurred. He found solutions using his mind. He also added his humanity to his wisdom. Hodja was a man of the people. He not only took and gave lessons in madrasahs, he also involved himself in life and events. His attitude was to observe and involve himself in the social structures around him even when there was no apparent central character. Thus, he was both a teacher and an educator. He was a person whom everybody around loved and consulted due to these characteristics. He was a leader who guided people. He addressed truth by criticising the social imbalance. But, while doing this, he was tolerant. He was never destructive. He was merciful and forgiving towards people who committed crime.

Nasreddin Hodja was a man who lived in troubled times. He helped people who were upset and hopeless in the circumstances of the age to overcome their negativity with joy and humor. Despite its negativities and problems, he thought the world was worth living in, and that life was a period of time which should be appreciated and enjoyed. He showed that every difficulty could have an easy solution. Hodja was respectful of and adhered to the state, laws and society's rules, but this attitude didn't deter him from criticising the government and bureaucrats. He pointed out their mistakes. But, because he did this in a kind way, he didn't suffer harm, and his words were taken seriously by those who were the object of his criticism. He expressed the thoughts, dilemmas and criticisms of all manner of people; the rich, the poor, villagers and townsfolk. But, he did this in such a clever way that nobody was offended by his criticisms. Moreover, while he was censuring others, he was self-effacing. Such self-criticism required a high level of maturity. Hodja was undoubtedly a mature character. Hodja was not a dreamer; he was realistic. We see the shared features of humanity in him. There was never exaggeration or unrealistic imaginings in him. It could never be said that his joviality in public was in any way sychophantic.



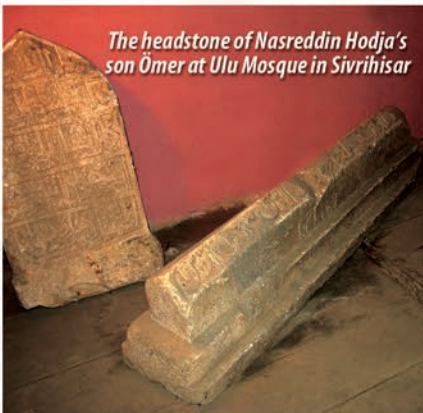




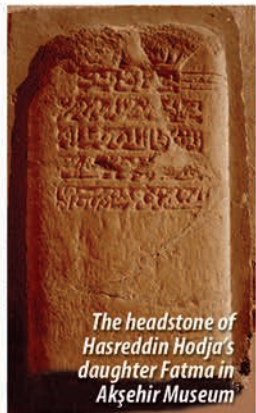
*The house where Nasreddin Hodja's was born*

## **Archeological Excavations**

The evidence relating to the Hodja as a real person is not limited to written documentation. As a result of excavations conducted to find Nasreddin Hodja's daughter, Fatma Hatun's resting place in Sivrihisar, Eskişehir, her grave was discovered. The excavation team was headed by Anadolu University Art History Department Instructor Doç. Dr Erol Altınsapan, supported by the Eti Archeology Museum.



*The headstone of Nasreddin Hodja's son Ömer at Ulu Mosque in Sivrihisar*



*The headstone of Nasreddin Hodja's daughter Fatma in Akşehir Museum*



## ***The Features of his Stories***

The main subject of Hodja's stories is people. Their funny sides, mistakes, weaknesses, clumsiness and desperation are portrayed. Certain problems of human relationships are analysed. At the same time, love and respect for people, society, the environment and all other life forms are evident. Sarcastic or humiliating attitudes are never pursued. If there is any criticism in his writing, it is directed at people's failings, and the main aim is to indicate the correct path and to make them realise their own shortcomings. Most of his stories are not only concerned with the common features of Turkish people, but also those of the rest of the world's people. This is one of the reasons why Hodja is popular throughout the world. Society finds solutions to problems in these stories. There is almost no character who isn't analysed or any social matter which isn't considered. Besides illiteracy, selfishness, theft, deceit and worldliness, governments' controlling and unjust influence, workers' graft and corrupt attitudes, scientists' aloofness, the ignorance of certain theologians, the qualities of true theologians, and their relationship with God, and the essence of worship and moral values are the central subject matter of his stories... We see the ties to morality. There is no possibility of any vulgarity or obscenity in his writing because of his moral standing.



## ***The World's Hodja***

Nasreddin Hodja is not only the hodja of his locality, he is considered to be the world's hodja. Even in Ottoman times, his stories spread from Anatolia to the Middle East, Iran, Middle Asia, the Balkans, North Africa, the Caucasus and all over Europe. Now, he is known throughout the Turkish-Islamic world from Turkistan to Europe, from the Crimea to Africa and in other countries. Over time, this fame became acknowledged by these countries. Geographically, he is known by such names as, 'Ependi', 'Nasraddin Huca', and 'Nasreddin Afandi'.

## ***The Stories of Nasreddin Hodja***

What brought Nasreddin Hodja to the modern era and made him known, not only in his own culture but throughout the world, is his stories. It is impossible to know the exact number of these stories because there was no single publication compiled by Nasreddin Hodja. These stories were an oral tradition which have since been put into written form. So, their number has varied according to time and place. Since the 15th century, these stories have been written from oral sources. Hodja's stories were first published in Istanbul in 1837 under the title of '**Letaif**', and others followed. The first Nasreddin Hodja book with pictures was published in 1869. The collation of Nasreddin Hodja stories has continued up to the present time, and their number has gradually increased. For example, in a 1968 collection there were 445 stories. Hodja's stories have been translated into several languages. But, even before they were translated, Hodja was already known in many parts of the world. This Anatolian genius' stories went wherever Turks went in the same way that Yunus Emre's poems, and Battal



Gazi's exploits did, and they became known by everybody regardless of whether they were Turkish or Muslim. In addition, they became more widely-known after UNESCO declared 1996 as 'Nasreddin Hodja Year'. The analysis and study of the stories have developed, and they have become the subject of numerous films, plays, musicals, pictures and caricatures.

Nasreddin Hodja, who has made people laugh and think with his knowledgeable and humorous stories since the time when he lived, is a subject of increasing interest as an international symbol of Turkish culture.

## ***Views of his Stories***

"The stories of Hodja the courageous wise one have references to nature and society. Most of them are based on international truths which will be a lesson for all time and all nationalities. They have an answer to all of society's situations because religion, the economy, education, law, and even scientific



subjects and social relationships were placed before Hodja, and the solutions asked of him" (***Ahmet Kabaklı***)

"In Nasreddin Hodja's stories, there is always a personal touch based on personal humor. We can picture the characters in his stories as if they were before us. We realize that a wider world view is apparent in the stories. Hodja was an intelligent, logical, happy and fatherly character, and he liked being controversial. His humor is not as direct as satire. It is more productive. He was a symbol of good intention." (***Ahmet Kutsi Tecer***)

"Hodja was a mirror of society. His witticisms are reflexions of humankind in a mirror. In these reflexions there is us with our differences and dilemmas, our beliefs and indifference, our submission and revolt, our courage and cowardliness, our love and hate, our intelligence and stupidity, our thinking and smiling faces, our tolerance and cruelty... In short, us in our most private moments." (***N.Ahmet Özalp***)



"The deceased neither kept talking about the wierdness of events like others, nor made vulgar jokes with meaningless words. What made the humor, was not his words or sayings, it was his soul and outlook. He found the vein of the things he observed with his soul, and he saw the 'funny' side of things even they appeared serious due to his outlook. He laughed at them while making others laugh." *(Eflatun Cem Güney)*



"Nasreddin Hodja, who reflected the knowledgeable, humorous, ordinary Turkish man's positive world and his reactions to events with meaningful commentary, was an unconventional, public philosopher. He assessed life with tolerance away from harsh criticism by finding solutions to daily worries and troubled situations." *(Behçet Necatigil)*

In central Eskişehir, Sivrihisar and Nasreddin Hodja Beldesi in memory of Hodja every year between 3-10 June '**Nasreddin Hodja Festival and Memorial Week**' are celebrated.



***Turbah of Nasreddin Hodja  
in Akşehir***

Photo by: Mustafa ÖZCELİK





## ***Nasreddin Hodja's Grandchild and Istanbul's First Cadi Hızır Bey***

Hızır Bey, a 15th century scientist, was the son of Sivrihisar cadi, Molla Celaleddin. It was rumoured that Molla Celaleddin was Nasreddin Hodja's daughter's son. Hızır bey was educated by his father and other Hodja's in Sivrihisar, and he learnt Arabic, Persian and knowledge of the age perfectly. His first job was cadi of Istanbul. He worked as a teacher in Bursa, and he married the daughter of Molla Mehmet Yegah. After the conquest of Istanbul, he was made Istanbul's first cadi by Fatih Sultan Mehmet. Kadiköy, where he lived and was known as 'the village of cadi', took its name from Hızır Bey. He died in 1458 while still cadi and was buried around Vefa. Because he was short, Hızır Bey was called 'full of knowledge' and he translated a work called '**Motali**' from Arabic into Persian at Fatih Sultan Mehmet's request. Hızır Bey taught many people, such as Hayati and Hocazade Ali Arabi. His three sons, Sinan, Yakup and Ahmet became viziers. He built a mosque known as 'Hacıkadın' in Istanbul. His son produced a work called '**Tazarruname**'. Hızır Bey was a cheerful



*Hızır Bey and his son Sinan Pasha*



and humorous person. One day, while at an audience with Hızır Bey people were discussing being a *cadi* and all its difficulties, one of the assembled said, "If one of the nobility was an enemy, then being a *cadi* would be difficult." Hızır Bey replied with a smile, "I don't see any difficult side to it. If you are afraid of losing your position, behave favorably towards that party, but, if both sides are of the nobility, then governing as a *cadi* would be difficult" (Zeki Pakalın, *Tarihe Mal Olmuş Fıkralar*)

## Turban



One day, a man with a letter in his hand grabs the Hodja and says,

**-Hodja, if you don't mind, would you please read this letter for me.**

Hodja opens the letter and looks at it. It is in Arabic from beginning to end.

However he tries, he cannot decipher the letter and despairingly he hands it back saying,

**-Give it to somebody else to read for you.**

The man is surprised and asks,

**-Why?**

The reply was,

**-It is not in Turkish, I can't read it.**

The man again doesn't understand and thinks Hodja does not know how to read.

**-Shame on you, Hodja. You are wearing a turban, but you can't even read a simple letter.**

Hodja takes the turban off and gives it to the man saying,

**-If a man can do something just because he is wearing a turban, then here! You wear it and let's see you read the letter.**

## **Take my Hand**

Hodja has a very mean friend. One day, while the friend is walking by a lake, he suddenly slips and falls in the water. One of the man's friends runs to help him and says,

**-Give me your hand. I will pull you out of the water.**

But, the mean man is reluctant to give his hand. Others offer too, but the result is the same. Then Hodja arrives, and he is told about the situation.

Hodja says that he will sort it out and soon he says to the man,

**-Take my hand, I will pull you out of the water and save you.**

He then takes Hodja's hand and is rescued from the water.

Hodja explains to those around,

**-He is very mean, so you shouldn't say to him 'give', you should say to him 'take'. He is never keen to give, but he is always ready to take whatever it is.**





## **Hodja's Answer**

Somebody who had a reputation for asking unnecessary questions came to Akşehir. He said,

**- I want to see the most knowledgeable person in the city.**

People took him to Hodja. The man said to Hodja,

**-Sir, I am going to ask you forty questions, but you will give only one answer to these questions.**

Hodja said,

**- Go ahead then.**

The man asked the forty questions one after the other. When the questions finished, Hodja, who had carefully listened to the man, turned and said,

**- I don't know.**

## **A Fight About Age**

Hodja sits under a tree in his garden, listening to the birds and waiting for the praying time. There is a knock at his door. Hodja, who opens the door, sees his neighbour.

The man is in a nervous state. Hodja asks,

**- What is the matter?**

**- Don't ask Hodja, my sister and wife are fighting,** the man says.

**- You should have separated them,** Hodja says.

**- Is it not possible, Hodja. I couldn't separate them,** he says. Hodja asks,

**-Why are the ladies fighting, do you know?**

**- No, Hodja, I don't know.**

**- I hope they are not fighting over age,** Hodja says.

**- No, Hodja. It must be about something else,** the man replies.

**- Okay, don't worry then. If it is not about age, they will make peace.**

**Probably they have already made peace...** Hodja says.

## **The Old Moon**

One day, several of the youngsters in Akşehir get together and want to challenge Hodja by asking tricky questions.

They go to Hodja and ask,

**-Hodja! When the new moon starts, what do they do with the old one?**

Hodja, without hesitation, replies,

**-What do they do? They cut it up and make stars from it.**

## **The Sea Ran Out**

One day, Hodja sets out by boat. There are many passengers in the boat. He sits near the steering wheel and watches it for a while thinking steering is easy. He gets close to the steerman to prove he can steer and says,

**-Friend, you may not know me, but don't worry. Leave the steering to me, and you rest a bit. Watch how I am going to steer.**

The steersman is gullible and believes him. He leaves it to Hodja, and he himself lies down. Hodja steers through the blue waves without problem. However, just as they are close to the shore, a huge wave comes and hits the boat. Then the boat becomes beached. The passengers are in a panic and are screaming,

**-What is going on? Hey Hodja! What have you done?**

Hodja is very serious and answers,

**-I haven't done anything, we have just run out of sea.**



## What if it Happens?



One day, a man saw Hodja by a lake. He realised that Hodja was washing pots and pans. He asked,

**-What are you up to, Hodja?**

Hodja looked him up and down and said,

**-Nothing special. I am trying to make yoghurt using lake water.**

The man couldn't believe what he was hearing and said,

**-Isn't such a thing unheard of? Can you make yoghurt from lake water?**

**-I really don't know, but what if it does happen?**  
Hodja answered.

## The Beard

One day, a man asks Hodja,

**-Hodja, guess how many hairs there are in my beard?**

Hodja replies,

**-There are as many as there are hairs on my donkey's tail.**

When the man asks for proof, Hodja says,

**-Come here, then I will prove it. In turn let's take a hair from you and one from the donkey's tail and continue in this manner. Then you will see whether you have the same number of hairs.**

When the man hears that, he runs away.



## **The Inexperienced Barber**

One day, Nasreddin Hodja went to a barber to have his head shaved. The barber was inexperienced, so he almost cut everywhere on Hodja's head. Each time he made a cut, he placed cotton on it to stop the bleeding. At last, Hodja could stand it no longer and said to the barber,

**-Enough, you have put cotton on half of my head. Leave it, and I will put linen on the other half of my head.**



## **The Tip**

One day, Hodja went to a hamam. The staff in the hamam didn't show any interest in him. They gave him old worn towels to wear. Hodja didn't say anything, but he was offended. He decided to play a trick on them, but he waited. He had a bath, and as he was leaving the hamam, he left a big tip. One week later, he went to the same hamam and, this time, the staff there were very attentive to Hodja. They gave him the newest towels. When Hodja finished his bath, he left only a small tip this time.

The hamam staff said,

**-Hodja how can you leave so small a tip for such really good service?** Hodja said,

**-You are right, but you forget something. The tip I gave you today was indeed last week's tip. The one I gave last week is for the service you gave this week. Now we are even.**

## ***Bed bugs***

One day, Hodja's house was ablaze. While his wife and neighbours were trying to save the

furniture in a panic, Hodja was standing opposite the house laughing. Those who were watching were amazed at Hodja being so happy and indifferent and asked,

**-Are you mad? When your house is burning, how can you watch so happily?**

Hodja replied,

**-Friends, why shouldn't I be happy? Thanks to God, at last I am getting rid of all the bed bugs.**



*Mikud*  
2005

## ***To Lay Flour on a Rope***

One day, somebody asked Hodja for some rope. Hodja went inside and came out saying,

**-They laid flour on the rope.**

The man who had asked for rope said,

**-How can they lay flour on rope?**

Hodja said,

**-If someone is reluctant to give it, even flour can be laid on rope.**

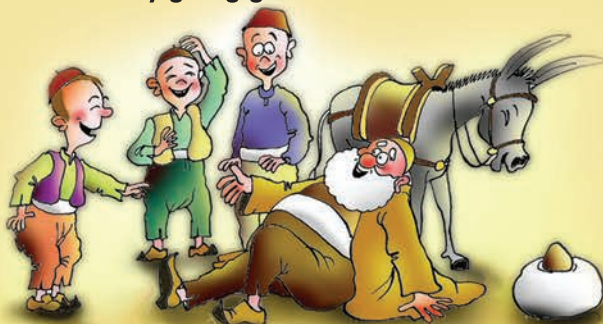
## ***I Was Already Going to Get Off***

One day, when Nasreddin Hodja was riding his donkey, the donkey tripped and fell. The local children, who saw Hodja fall, ran around Hodja and cried out,

**-Hodja fell off his donkey, Hodja fell off his donkey.**

They cheered and jumped around Hodja. Hodja stood up, brushed himself down, and looked closely at the children who were mocking him. Behaving as if nothing had happened, he said,

**-Children, why are you looking? If I hadn't fallen off, I was already going get off.**



*Mikud*  
2005

## **An Axe and a Cat**

Nasreddin Hodja likes liver a lot, and he often buys liver. He wants his wife to cook it so they can enjoy eating it. But, every day there are other meals at the table. At last Hodja can stand it no longer and asks,

**-How many times have I brought liver for you to cook, but we still can't eat it? What is happening to the liver I buy?**

The wife replies,

**-Don't even ask Hodja. The cat eats all the liver you bring. It likes liver, too.**

As soon as Hodja hears this, he grabs an axe standing in the corner and goes to the storage room. He then locks the axe in a chest. His wife doesn't understand anything and asks,

**-Hodja, why are you hiding the axe?**

Hodja answers,

**-I am hiding it from the cat.** His wife asks in more amazement,

**-What will the cat do with the axe?** Hodja looks his wife up and down and says,

**-Why wouldn't a cat which takes the liver that cost a few pennies take the axe that cost a hundred pennies.**

## **Isn't the Thief Guilty After All?**

One night, Hodja's donkey was stolen. What could he do without his donkey? The poor man was not only telling everybody about the theft, he was also extolling the many virtues of his donkey. Did anyone in fact, care about the donkey? Everybody shouted,

**-Have you been hibernating Hodja?**

**-Why didn't you put a fence around your house?**

**-Did you forget to lock the door?**

In the end, Hodja could stand it no longer and said,

**-Are you siding with the thief or with me? Isn't the thief guilty after all?**

## **Hodja's Shoes**

One day, children in the neighbourhood decided to steal Hodja's shoes. They took Hodja under a tree. When the children said,

**-Nobody can climb this tree.** Hodja said,

**-I can,** and he tied his shoes around his waist. Then the children asked

**-Hodja, what will you do with shoes up the tree?** Hodja said,

**-Maybe there is a road there and they should be ready with me.**





## A Stranger

A man who is curious about Nasreddin Hodja comes to Akşehir and sees a man who is holding up a wall which is about to collapse. He asks,

**-Nasreddin Hodja is in Akşehir, I am looking for him. How can I find him?**

The man who is holding up the wall replies,

**-Come here and hold up the wall, and I will bring Nasreddin Hodja to you?**

The stranger waits and waits, but nobody comes. As it is about to get dark, he mentions it to somebody and the man says,

**-The man who went to fetch Nasreddin Hodja was, in fact, Nasreddin Hodja. That was his first lesson for you.**

## Money and the Whistle

One day, Hodja went shopping. Some children stopped him asked him to buy whistles for them. But only one of them paid.

However, Hodja agreed. The children were looking forward to nightfall when Hodja was due to present them with their whistles. When Hodja returned from shopping, the children cried out,

**-Whistle, whistle.**

Hodja gave a whistle to the one child who had earlier paid. The other children asked,

**-Where are our whistles?**

Hodja replied,

**-Those who pay, blow whistles.**

## Eat my Fur



One day, Hodja was invited for dinner. He went to the meal dressed in his old clothes. Nobody welcomed him. Later, Hodja found an opportunity to leave. He changed into new clothes and returned. On this occasion, the host welcomed him cordially. In front of all those in attendance Hodja said,

**-My furs you eat heartily. This respect is clearly for you.**

At this, all those present blushed in embarrassment.



Anemon Otel'den Eskişehir'in gündüz ve gece görüntüleri







