

Two Stories of Nasruddin Hodja

Who was Nasruddin Hodja?

The word 'Hodja' means 'teacher' in Turkish. So, he may have been a Turkish teacher. We don't know much about him, but we do know that he was a Muslim, and lived in the 13th century. Many of his stories are told in Muslim countries. They show that he was a wise man who often pretended to be a fool in order to make a point, or perhaps simply for a joke. Actually, we hardly know anything about him personally, but his stories are enjoyed by children as well as adults.

1. How Hodja Saved the Moon One night, Nasruddin Hodja was walking home. A cool night breeze was blowing gently. From the sky above, a million stars, and among them a smiling moon, were looking down on him. Hodja was whistling happily as he walked.

There was a well by the wayside. He peered into it to see how much water there was in it. Suddenly his happy mood left him, for what he saw deep down in the well was the moon! Could a devil have grabbed it from the sky and thrown it into the well?

Nasruddin Hodja ran to his house, and returned with a large iron hook tied to a rope. Holding the rope, he let the hook down into the water in the well. As he tried to haul the moon out with the hook, the hook got caught in a rock in the well, and the rope jerked out of Hodja's hands. Hodja fell flat on his back, screaming with shock and pain.

But as he lay on his back, his face turned upward, he saw the moon, smiling down at him from the sky! His pain vanished and he cried, “Oh thank God! I’ve hurt myself but I have got the moon back into the sky!”

2. Hodja borrows a cooking pot. One day Nasruddin Hodja went to his neighbour’s house and asked to borrow his large cooking pot.

“My wife is cooking a meal for all our relatives, so we need the largest vessel you have.”

The neighbour did not want to lend his cooking pot, thinking that Hodja was careless and may damage his precious vessel. But then, reflecting that he could not refuse a good neighbour, he brought out the pot, and saying “Be very careful with it. It is a very special pot” he handed it to Hodja.

“Don’t worry” said Hodja cheerfully, as he picked up the pot, “We’ll be careful.

The next day he went to the neighbour’s house again, thanked him and returned the pot to him.

The neighbour took the pot from Hodja, and as he was looking inside it to make sure it was not damaged, he was surprised to see another little pot inside his big one.

“What is this?” he asked Hodja.

“Oh that,” said Hodja as he turned to leave, “We put away your pot after the cooking was done. During the night your pot gave birth, and the little pot is its baby.”

The neighbour was pleased with the gift. He smiled, and without a word, took the two pots; while Hodja left, whistling.

Some days later, Hodja went once again to borrow the pot from his neighbour. This time the neighbour lent it willingly; perhaps thinking that it was a good way to add to the number of his cooking pots.

A few days passed, and when Hodja did not return his pot, the neighbour went to his house.

“You must have done your cooking. Please return my pot” he said.

Looking sad, Hodja replied, “Unfortunately, your pot has died.”

The neighbour’s face went red with anger. “That’s nonsense! Cooking pots don’t die” he cried.

Very pleasantly, Hodja replied “A pot doesn’t give birth; it doesn’t have a baby. Yet you readily believed that. Why don’t you believe that it can die?”

The neighbour had no reply for that. He got up, and with a furious look at Hodja, he left.

Retold by Amina Azfar