



Nasreddin's path

Nasreddin was the youngest son of one of the wealthiest families in the Turkish city of Aksehir. One fine day, his father said to him,

"Nasreddin, a man must find his path in life. You'll soon be twelve and it's high time you made up your mind what you want to be."

But young Nasreddin didn't know whether he wanted to be a soldier, a sailor, or a teacher. All these ideas twittered through his bird-brained head. He thought to himself that if he travelled the world he might find a road signposted "Nasreddin's Path".

He set out on his travels and only thought of the day when he would become a very important person and make his father happy.

One summer morning, Nasreddin came to a small duckpond. He was so hungry that he tried to catch them, but they were too quick for him. Angry, he thrust his hands into his pockets and found a stone-hard crust of bread. He dipped it in the pond to soften it.

"Nasreddin let out a long "mmm" as he ate the wet bread as if it were the tastiest morsel in the whole wide world.

A tailor who was coming back from the fair couldn't believe his eyes when he saw what Nasreddin was doing.

"Boy! Are you mad? Why are you dipping your bread in the pond?"
"Well, as you can see, I'm eating this fine duck soup!" answered Nasreddin.

The tailor smiled and took pity on the the boy and took Nasreddin to work for him. And that is how the story of the duck soup spread through all the markets where Nasreddin and his master plied their trade.

One evening, there was a big festival in the city and a merchant invited Nasreddin to the feast he was holding for his wealthiest clients.

When the boy went up to the door of the merchant's house, the servants gruffly barred his way. "Who are you, you ill-clad ruffian? Don't you know this is a feast for important folk. Be gone with you!", they shouted. Nasreddin went to see a friend of his who was a tailor and begged him to make a tunic of the finest cloth. Dressed in the garment, he returned to the merchant's house. Now the servants bowed and scraped before him,

"Oh, Great Lord", said the servants, for they didn't recognize the boy they had turned away, "you honor us with your presence". Nasreddin walked into the banquet hall as if he were a prince.

When the first dish was served, Nasreddin dipped his sleeve in the gravy and said, "Here, lovely

tunic, taste it. It's as delicious as can be!"

The city governor, who was sitting by his side, couldn't resist blurting out,

"Whatever are you doing? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

As usual, Nasreddin came up with one of his quick-witted answers.

"Look, if it weren't for this tunic, I wouldn't be sitting here before all this wonderful food. So it's only right my garment taste these dishes - after all, it deserves it much more than me!"

The governor thought hard and long about the boy's reply and at the end of the banquet, invited Nasreddin to be the city's new judge. Only someone who could utter such truths deserved the job.

And that was how Nasreddin became a judge. He didn't recognize himself when he looked in the mirror. He was no longer a boy. And he thought to himself,

"What of my path? I have grown up, yet I have never traveled anywhere."

One fine day, a butcher was roasting meat on a spit in the marketplace. A beggar too poor to buy food stood by, smelling the smoke wafting from the tasty joint. But the miserly butcher only thought of wringing something out of the beggar.

"Thief!", shouted the butcher, "pay me for the smoke you're gorging from my meat!"

The two men began arguing so furiously that the people in the market decided to send for the judge - who was none other than Nasreddin.

The butcher wanted to charge for the smoke from his meat, but the beggar said the smoke had drifted his way of its own accord and could not be bought or sold.

Finally, Nasreddin reached a decision. He asked the beggar to empty his pockets of the few coins he had. But the judge, instead of giving them to the butcher, jingled them in the miser's ear.

"Do you hear them?" Nasreddin asked the butcher. "Then consider yourself well paid", he went on. "If you want to charge for your smoke, we'll pay you with the clinking of coins".

Everyone cheered Nasreddin's wise judgement and his fame spread through the city like wildfire. But he was still not altogether happy. Nasreddin had not found his path and feared that he never would. One evening, he returned home to see his family. Now all he wanted was to embrace his family.

But when he got to his parents' home, his mother and father, who were very old by then, shouted,

"It's Nasreddin, it's Nasreddin Hodja!"

While he had been away, the stories of Nasreddin the Wise - or hodja in Turkish - had spread far and wide.

Nasreddin, seeing his parents' joy, realized that he had at last found his long-sought path.

Nasreddin lived for many, many more years and even when he was a doddering old man, he was still a bit bird-brained. Who knows? Maybe those birds made up the stories they still tell of Nasreddin around the world.

Script: Maica Meseguer i Espada

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