

THE OBSTINATE HODJA

(a story from Turkey)

Early one morning, when Nasreddin Hodja and his wife were still fast asleep in bed, their donkey started to bray loudly in his stable. The noise woke Hodja up.

The donkey was braying because he was hungry, and Hodja made up his mind to make his wife get up and feed him

So he poked his wife, saying, 'Wake up, dear. The donkey is braying because he is hungry. Please get up and feed him.'

His wife, who was only half awake, said, 'O no, dear. It's your turn,' and she pulled the bedclothes up over her head.

But Hodja did not give up. 'Wake up, dear. The poor Donkey is hungry, he wants his breakfast. He won't be quiet unless you feed him.'

But Hodja's wife answered, 'Don't be so obstinate, husband, you go and feed the donkey, you know it's your turn!' And she did not lift her head from the pillow.

Hodja said, 'you are quite wrong, my dear, it was me, not you, who fed the donkey yesterday. Come along now, up you get!

Hodja's wife realised that he was determined to make her feed the donkey, but she was just as determined that she was not going to.

So she sat up in bed beside him and said, very firmly, 'No, no, no! Don't you remember our agreement? We would take it in turns to feed the donkey. I fed him yesterday and it's your turn today!

Hodja would not budge. 'That can't be true, dear, you are making a mistake.'

But before he could finish speaking, his wife interrupted and said, 'No, it's you who is wrong. Now don't be so obstinate. Go and feed the poor animal!'

It was no use, though. Hodja had made up his mind that, whatever it took, he would make his wife feed the donkey and he started to think how he would get his own way.

He turned to his wife with a broad smile on his face and said, 'my dear, I think I have the answer to our problem. As soon as I have finished my explanation, the first person to say anything will have to feed the donkey. Is that agreed?'

'OK, I agree', his wife said reluctantly, and, pressing her lips firmly together, she sat very still and upright beside her husband.

For the next two hours neither of them said anything.

Now, you should understand that Hodja's wife loved to chatter and gossip and she was bursting to say something. She knew that she would lose if she stayed there. So she slipped out of bed and went quietly out of the room and went to visit her next-door neighbours. And there she sat, talking excitedly while Hodja stayed in his bed, as still as a stone.

I expect you know that people from the village would often call on Hodja to ask his help and advice and this day was like any other. But this day, even though people crowded round his bed, Hodja would neither speak nor answer their questions.

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The villagers tried to think of a way to make Hodja start talking and, before long, they started to carry away his furniture: first the chairs, then the wardrobe and then everything else in the bedroom. Of course, Hodja could not say anything or he would lose his bet with his wife.

Finally, in desperation, the neighbours even took Hodja's night-cap from his head. And he said not one word.

Around noon, Hodja's wife sent the neighbour's daughter with a bowl of soup and these instructions: 'If he says anything to you, you must repeat it to me.'

The girl went into Hodja's room and asked where she should put the soup. Hodja pointed to every part of the room and then to his bare head: trying to explain what had happened. But, from Hodja's miming, the girl thought he meant: 'Walk round the room and then come and pour the soup on my head!'

So that was what she did. And Hodja stayed silent.

The girl was frightened when she saw Hodja sitting so still and silent and she ran back home.

Hodja's wife was waiting anxiously and asked the girl what had happened. When the girl told her she was horrified and she screamed 'O my goodness, you have scalded my husband!' She ran home as fast as she could.

Hodja was still sitting up in bed with soup all over his head and face and even dripping off the end of his nose. His wife tried to wipe him clean, saying 'I'm so sorry for what that silly girl did!'

A satisfied smile spread across Hodja's face. 'Go and feed the donkey,' he said, 'you have lost the contest!'