

The Mullah of Many Myths [ver 1.00]

This is a collection of new Nasruddin-inspired stories that, once, only nobody knew.

Updated versions will be posted to no6ody.wordpress.com

Once, the sultan went to see a curiosity—the mad mullah was begging in the market. When the people let him choose between large gold and small copper coins, the much mythologized mullah always took the copper. The amused shoppers asked Nasruddin to choose coins again and again while the sultan was watching.

The sultan asked the mad mullah to explain himself.

“If I took the large coin, soon the people would offer me nothing. This way, I entertain them and my begging bears fruit.”

The amused sultan decided to be nice to the mullah. “How much would you like? Speak your wish.”

The mad mullah's eyes crossed as he spun and muttered--then he asked for a handful of earth.

The sultan asked for another explanation.

"If I was to ask for money, I might become like the rich men I know and ignore poor men like myself--and I don't want to become like the objects of my mockery. If I asked for land and a big house... and then I thought of my wife with only one servant--me--I decided to think a bit more. Since a drunk wants more wine the way a rich man wants more money and granting such wishes does no good, I asked for something I didn't want... a handful of earth. Perhaps I'll plant a seed in it. If it grows, the earth will not shrink--the gift can last a long time. Also, when my wife finds it and throws it away, it won't be too much work for her. Best of all, perhaps the sultan will once again speak with the mad mullah, and, perhaps, offer him his daughter's hand in marriage just to see what happens.

"What would happen?"

"I'd ask my wife what to do. Her reaction should be quite

entertaining--but her shrieking is best endured at a distance."

"I am worried about earthquakes," said the mad mullah. "After I plant this tree, it will grow because you, dear wife, cannot bear to see living things die and will give it water. It will grow into a beautiful fruit-bearing tree, and when people enjoy its shade and delicious fruit, they will think of the man who planted it but not the woman who took care of it. However, like all things, it will grow old and feeble, and there might be an earthquake that shakes down some of its once-mighty limbs, and that would be dangerous."

His wife was less than impressed. "The tree will live because I will nag you until you water it. But if you fear earthquakes, plant a date-palm!"

"... and I would be more worried about floods! When it rains in the mountains, sometimes the river floods and then people might need wood for rafts or cooking fires. This will grow into a tree with plenty of wood, able to survive losing a branch or two. Date-palms can be harvested for wood only once. Since there are more floods than earthquakes, it is only logical to plant this one."

The sultan's men found the mullah of many myths not-quite-sleeping next to a stick of a pear tree. He said he's enjoying the shade he was going to have (if his wife will water the tree when he's too lazy to do it... but that's another story).

"Nasruddin, you have often spoken badly about rich men such as myself. Today, you will teach me how to be wealthy. Spend these coins by nightfall, and you owe me nothing--but if you have a single coin left, you must pay me back all."

"I accept the challenge," said the mad mullah, since he was surrounded by armed men. He took the double-handful of silver coins.

"What have you gotten yourself into!" shrieked a familiar voice.

"You'll never pay that back, ever if you were somebody else!"

"Here, then, is one coin," said the mad mullah to his wife. "It is to stop thy shrieking."

"One coin, when you have more than will fit in your moneybag?"

"Don't blame me! The sultan said spend it, not give it away! Here is another coin, now be quiet!"

"I cannot! Go to the baker's, and buy what we need! We have guests!"

Even the most mythologized of mullahs couldn't argue with that...so two of the sultan's men accompanied Nasruddin to the baker's. The guards were forbidden by the Sultan to take money from Nasruddin--but at the baker's, he let the guards choose what to buy for themselves and their companions. After buying the bread and cakes, the baker accepted Nasruddin's offer of an extra coin if he could peek inside the oven.

He tried and failed to tip the guards for carrying the cakes and loaves he'd bought for them, but gave a coin to a child to shine his shoes despite the fact his shoes were sandals and far beyond shining.

The sultan was amazed when the guards reported Nasruddin's actions and marveled at the one plain loaf that the mad mullah had bought for himself.

"Why did you not buy the best bread for yourself?" asked the sultan.

"I tried it once," said the mad mullah, "and it's not worth the price. This bread is value-for-the-money."

"You could have given the baker money for tomorrow's bread," said the sultan.

"I didn't think of that... I'll have my wife do that when she buys bread tomorrow."

"Why did you pay the child to shine your sandals?"

"For the same reason I gave the baker a coin for a peek inside the oven--it's a something that costs them nothing."

"Perhaps you should go into town before the day fades," says

the sultan. "You still have most of the money to spend."

"Certainly not! Whatever money I give to the people here in the village might come back to me when I beg in the market tomorrow."

"Perhaps, if you spent the money wisely, you wouldn't have to beg."

"But I must! Nobody else will mock the rich men who never give me a penny!"

"Yet you stand there with silver that must be spent before nightfall."

"That might be difficult, because I prefer to pay for things that cost nothing... and speaking of nothing, if I give you this much silver, will you come visit me again?"

Once, Nasruddin went somewhere he shouldn't have gone... into a tavern. Lured there by the promise of free food, Nasruddin soon felt betrayed--the free food was salty bread and only free for customers who bought drinks. Nasruddin was about to leave the rather seedy establishment when he noticed a poisonous viper precariously perched on the rafters above his friend's head.

Nasruddin slapped his friend and ran away. Nasruddin's friend quickly followed Nasruddin, as did the less-inebriated patrons of this place.

Nasruddin lets his friend catch him at the door.

"Explain." stated his friend, as the chant of 'fight!' starts to spread.

Nasruddin points. The viper slithered, then slips, obligingly falling onto and into his friend's drink. The chanting stops.

All eyes focused on the viper. Nasruddin decides to leave, and he pulls his friend with him. His friend asks again about the slap.

"If I'd told you about the snake, you might think it was a trick--something that might seem funny to people who've been drinking. My way, you and everyone else able to walk followed me, and the

snake could finish your drink without having to bite you or anyone else first."

"True enough," conceded his friend. "But... snakes have mates. If I ever see a snake near you, I'll try not to hit as hard as I can."

"Bad choice. If you hit me, I'll get names and addresses of witnesses and threaten to sue unless you pay me."

"Then I'll grab your shirt and drag you out!"

"My shirt would tear."

"Then... if our cases were reversed, what should I do?"

"Isn't it obvious? A promise of free food somewhere should get me moving faster than a slapped man."

"So much money, but not one penny for the mad mullah. What does that say about a man?" Nasruddin tried to ensure that his voice carried--and only the rich man's flatterers and sycophants tried to interfere. Even the chickens in baskets next to Nasruddin seemed to cluck less. Perhaps the villagers liked Nasruddin saying what would be financially risky for themselves to say.

"I alone am a free man and can speak the truth. Everyone else here owes money to this man--this man who covers his body in valued objects. There is no better way to show that this man has been consumed by money-lust, and look what he does... and doesn't do."

"What happened to you the last time you had silver coins?" the rich man taunted Nasruddin. "You paid the baker merely to peek at the baking bread?"

"And for the smell..."

... but the rich man kept talking.

"You paid to polish those sandals! Then the sultan leaves with the rest of the money. Where is the profit in that?"

"You are correct in all you say, but it only proves that this Imam knows little and even less about money. But I like to think, that should I ever have money again, my friends will help me not make

more mistakes, or worse, make the same mistakes all rich men make. And I should hope that rich men would hear from their friends about their mistakes so that they might learn of them and be better men for it."

Silence. The rich man will not ask the obvious question, so Nasruddin speaks to an angry chicken as it fills the silence.

"Making money is like a great game, and when a man wins, the temptation to keep playing is irresistible. But money can make men like clay, and when unfeeling clay-men try to get more money..."

A silver coin bounces off Nasruddin's turban and into the basket with the chicken. Nasruddin imitates the squawking of the confined chicken when the coin falls on her back, and the crowd laughs because it looks as if Nasruddin can cluck indignantly.

Horses interrupt this... three black stallions with sword-bearing riders. One rider steers his horse to Nasruddin... and it's obvious to those that know him that Nasruddin is in trouble again. The sword-bearing riders wear the uniform of the Sultan's Private Guard, and two guards ask the crowd to retreat--including the retinue of the rich man. This assured that what the guards say to Nasruddin went unheard... but the smell of chicken-poop increases when a guard opens a saddlebag, and still more when a small statue of dirty, molded clay is released from its wrappings. The guards allow three children a closer look, and they see dirty clay shaped like the sultan. Nasruddin nods several times in response to questions before the smelly clay is once again well-wrapped and stored in a saddlebag. The story practically tells itself--a bored beggar named Nasruddin used the local materials to make a mockery that bothered both the sultan's eye, nose, and dignity--and the guards give him an Official Summons. Nasruddin is, once again, in Big Trouble.

Obvious... but not to everyone. The rich man did not see anything but a rude lump of clay and did not realize that the odor of chicken-poop had intensified when it was unwrapped. The rich

man thinks only of the official summons for an audience with the sultan... who sent three of his private guard to deliver it to Nasruddin!

The guards allow the rich man to approach Nasruddin, and he presses a small purse of gold coins into Nasruddin's hands. "Keep this and I'll give you more if you tell the sultan..."

The guards took both the purse and the rich man away from Nasruddin, who thought if losing the money meant losing the pest, it's all for the best... especially where he was going.

The sultan was not pleased with Nasruddin's 'art.' Rather than pay the ultimate penalty, Nasruddin promised he'd undertake the task of teaching the sultan's horse to sing--and an amused sultan agreed and allowed a year and a day. Nasruddin must teach a rather restive stallion to carry a tune.

Nasruddin found it easy to teach the horse to vocalize constantly. Whenever the sultan's stallion saw him, it would whicker and whinny and whine and whatever else it could think of, then Nasruddin would reward the horse with a few strands of honeyed hay.

During a training session, the sultan came to see Nasruddin. The guards and sedan chair overawed the horse, and it was quiet as Nasruddin bowed.

"I don't think feeding honey to a horse will sweeten its voice," said His Excellency.

Nasruddin pretended to be tongue-tied, since time was on his side—and as he expected, the stallion tries a bit of horsey babbling. Immediately Nasruddin gave the horse a large handful of honeyed hay, then quickly spoke while the horse was eating.

"You are correct--but the honey is needed because your horse is so well-treated that it will not work for anything else. My donkey will work for a handful of alfalfa, but..."

The horse interrupted him. Nasruddin gave the horse more to

eat despite the rudeness, then spoke again.

"His speech is not good yet, but he was trying to apologize. If a man listens closely, you can make out some of the words."

The horse again made noise as Nasruddin was not usually so generous with the honeyed hay. And again, while the horse was eating, Nasruddin spoke.

"Perhaps I can only understand him because I've worked with him so long."

"But you were to teach the horse to sing, not talk," said the sultan.

The horse almost interrupted in its desire to vocalize, and Nasruddin gave it another handful of honeyed hay.

"Like he said--how can he sing unless he knows the words?"

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Not long after the sultan sent Nasruddin home rather than let him feed honey to his horse for a year, the sultan's men came through town... and every able-bodied male was ordered to join the army. Nasruddin was given a sword and ordered to wait for further orders while remaining at the guard-post.

Nasruddin waited... and waited... and became quite hungry. The other guards avoided the guard-post, preferring the barracks. Feeling trapped, Nasruddin left the guard-post unguarded for a few minutes. When he came back, he was carrying bread and a bag, and he had a wooden sword in his scabbard in place of an iron one.

Much later, Nasruddin received new orders... and, after a thought and a small detour, he arrived at the Palace Square.

The sultan himself is among the quiet audience. A man is led on-stage, his face covered in a hood. Nasruddin is ordered to stand three paces away from the kneeling man--then the sultan orders him to kill. Nasruddin, with a little difficulty, unsheathes his wooden sword--it's covered with pitch. Before the sword is halfway out of the scabbard, it begins burning because one of the

many match-heads Nasruddin had stuck in the pitch ignited.

Sadly, Nasruddin's sword-hand became slightly burned before he was able to toss the flaming wooden sword between himself and the bound and hooded man. He hid his hand in his shirt, pretending it hurt terribly, while striking out at the burning pitch stuck on the scabbard with the other—it threatened to set his shirt on fire.

"Allah has struck me, for I am a sinner!" Nasruddin said, keeping his hand hidden.

The sword burned in silence. One of the ministers spoke softly to the sultan, but Nasruddin could overhear--the sultan's superstitious soldiers won't like serving with such a man in the ranks. The sultan agreed--Nasruddin as a soldier would be a liability. The sultan ordered ordered Nasruddin to take the prisoner to the city gates and never return--a decision that the crowd seemed to like.

Nasruddin and the soon-to-be-freed-prisoner are ejected from the sultan's city, but only the border-guards can untie the prisoner's hands and take the hood off. So... slowly... Nasruddin and his ex-prisoner finally find the border-guards...

Free!

As they walked down the long dusty road to the village where Nasruddin lived, the grateful ex-prisoner decided he owed Nasruddin his story... and told a tale that started the day he'd answered a summons without bringing a sword.

Nasruddin once held a bag of dried figs in front of a group of children. "Divide them the way men do it or the way Allah does it?"

Naturally, the children said "Allah's way!"

So Nasruddin gave a child named Ahmet two big handfuls of dried figs, and a big handful to his friend Phage, then a skimpy handful to the third and fourth children, and one fig each to six

children, leaving three children with none.

Phage ate a fig, but the other children stared at Nasruddin... who stared right back. The questions began... but Nasruddin would not answer any.

Ahmet gave three dried figs to the three children who had none, and two each to others until he had a scanty handful left.

Phage chewed quickly, but eating dried figs is a slow process without water. The stares of his comrades resulted in him giving the rest of his figs to Ahmet, who distributed them fairly.

Nasruddin started speaking to Ahmet, but all the children listened. "Allah made the world and everything in it. Allah didn't need anybody's help--but The Merciful and Compassionate left wet clay within a human's grasp, whether it is real clay or metaphorical clay. Your decisions were good... perhaps you should be an Imam and work with your wet-clay friend here. If he'll do the right thing when his friends stare at him, then he will be easy to teach and an ideal student for you to practice on."

Nasruddin had a few words for Phage, too. "If we hadn't been here watching, you would have taken some steps closer to forming anti-social habits. What's even worse... if we weren't watching Ahmet, he would have eaten his figs without sharing—same with any of us. Since I made sure Ahmet's little sister was one of the children who got no figs, it was easier for Ahmet to be quick to share."

"You didn't get any figs," said Phage.

"Of course not. If I ate figs, I might not be hungry enough to go to the market and beg, and if I'm not there, nobody will tell the rich men what they need to hear... especially the ones who won't give me a penny."

Once, the much mythologized mullah of many myths was having a particularly loud argument with his wife, enabling their words to be recorded.

"All your hair is white!" said his wife.

"No! Not all," he said.

"I shall give you a kopeck if you can show me one black hair of yours."

"Certainly... it's inside this envelope with my name on it."

"Here is your kopeck... good luck spending it. Where did this come from?"

"Does it matter? It belongs to me now."

"Since I have paid already... tell me the truth. Was that once a hair from your head?"

"Since you only paid one kopeck... tell me first which is more likely... I might have saved that hair for years, hoping to wheedle a kopeck now and then someday when I was old, thinking of the future, supposing I could save at least a hair or two for my retirement--or I found one of your hairs and put it in this envelope a few minutes ago."

"Neither! My hair is white, like yours!"

"Not to me."

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One rainy day the Mullah of Many Myths decided to read a borrowed book about the Universe. He learned that the rain falling on his roof was once a vapor, and less than eighteen grams of water contained six followed by twenty-three zeroes water molecules, and that each jigging molecule was composed of two hydrogen atoms plus one oxygen that constantly pushed and pulled against their atomic bonds while the molecules almost bounced off each other, and if the rain were to turn to snow, this molecular—atomic dancing would only slow... and no matter how cold or hot, the dance could never ever stop.

"Wife, now I know why your prayers for a better husband haven't been answered. Because of technology, Allah is very very busy these days."

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