

The Tale of Nasrudin and the Wise men

A Storyteller's Advice to his audience
(Extracted from Kalila Wa Dimna Vol.1 – Ramsay Wood)

I must emphasize this point: my stories require, at this stage, no extra commentary, imaginings, or guesswork by you, me, or anyone else. The very worst would be that of moralizing away the effective substance. Thus the urge to tag tidy little rationalizations, persuasive formulas, intellectual summaries, symbolical labels, or any other convenient pigeon-holing device, must be steadfastly resisted. Mental encapsulation perverts the medicine, rendering it impotent. It amounts to a bypass around the story's true destination; to explain away is to forget. Thus, let the stories which you can remember do their own work by their very diversity. Familiarize yourself with them.

Nasrudin and the Wise Men

The philosophers, logicians and doctors of law were drawn up at Court to examine Nasrudin. This was a serious case, because he had admitted going from village to village saying: 'The so-called wise men are ignorant, irresolute and confused.' He was charged with undermining the security of the State.

'You may speak first,' said the King. 'Have paper and pens brought,' said the Mulla. Paper and pens were brought. 'Give some to each of the first seven savants.' They were distributed.

'Have them separately write an answer to this question:
"What is bread?"'

This was done.

The papers were handed to the King, who read them out:

The first said: 'Bread is a food.'

The second: 'It is flour and water.'

The third: 'A gift of God.'

The fourth: 'Baked dough.'

The fifth: 'Changeable, according to how you mean "bread".'

The sixth: 'A nutritious substance.'

The seventh: 'Nobody really knows.'



'When they decide what bread is,' said Nasrudin, 'it will be possible for them to decide other things. For example, whether I am right or wrong? Can you entrust matters of assessment and judgement to people like this? Is it or is it not strange that they cannot agree about something which they eat each day, yet are unanimous that I am a heretic?'

Joke from 'The exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin' compiled by Idries Shah