



CRAZY HUSSAIN & THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM



Part 1

There was once a man called Crazy Hussain. On the night of his wedding two scholars who had come to perform the marriage settled down in the midst of the festivities to hold a friendly discussion on a religious topic. Crazy Hussain was fascinated by their conversation. "Tomorrow at the latest," he told himself, "I must go and acquire knowledge. I must become learned like these men so that I can participate in such friendly discussions." Regretfully he reflected, "How awful to be so ignorant. I am twenty years old and I have just got married. But what is the use? I know nothing about anything!" He turned to the scholars when they had finished their discussion, saying, "Learned sirs! Where did you acquire this knowledge? Where did you learn to converse so politely? My friends and I sometimes talk together, but all we do is quarrel and insult each other. You have not offended each other nor said a single bad word." One of the scholars replied, "This is a learned discussion. Such conversations are conducted without cursing, rudeness or quarrelling. It is because you speak of anything but Allah Ta'ala that your conversations end up in angry insults and squabbling."

With the marriage ceremony performed, Crazy Hussain entered the bridal chamber. All his thoughts however, were on setting off for Istanbul first thing in the morning to begin his studies. He got up at dawn, performed his early morning prayer and then took to the road after saying to his wife, "Look Fatima, there are sheep in the pen and cows in the cowshed. The garden and orchard are yours as well. I am off to Istanbul to acquire knowledge. I shall come back as soon as I complete my studies. Do not mention my absence to anyone. I entrust my mother and sisters firstly to Allah Ta'ala and then to you. Sow, reap and work hard. I'll soon be home again." When he reached Istanbul, he entered the school which was then regarded as the cradle of knowledge. For thirty whole years he devoted himself to learning.

He plunged himself so deeply into his studies that he never spared a thought for his village, his district, his garden or his wife. Allah Ta'ala gives knowledge to those who wish for it and wealth to those He wills. Although he was twenty years old when he started his studies, Hussain learnt the Qur'an by heart and at the same time graduated to advanced studies.

Years later, now at the age of fifty, with his hair and beard turning grey, he was at last a scholar, receiving his final qualification. He set out on the road home. After a journey of twenty days, as he was making his way to a village where he would spend the night before travelling the last day's distance home, he encountered an old man working in his field, and gave him a greeting. The villager acknowledged his salutation, saying, "Stop a moment, sir, and wait for me. I saw you before you entered the village, so you are my guest." The scholar accepted this invitation, saying, "Yes, I happened to meet you first. I shall be very happy to be a guest in your house."

The villager finished his work and they set off together for the village in his ox-cart. After eating a meal in his house, they went out to the Masjid for the night prayer. After the prayer, Hussain got up to preach a sermon. He delivered counsel and advice. His sermon was so moving that everybody in the Masjid listened to this learned scholar with great attention. In fact, Hussain had the people marvelling at him. There was a festive atmosphere in the village. They seldom saw a learned man in those parts of the village. The congregation made the most of this opportunity, taking Hussain to the village café after the sermon, and treating him with honour and respect. Those with problems in religious matters had their problems solved by him.

After a while they got up and went back to the villager's house. Before they went to bed, the villager asked Hussain, "Sir, was it your father who caused you to study? If so, may Allah Ta'ala be pleased with him for giving us Muslims a scholar like yourself." At this, Hussain smiled, remembering what had actually happened to him and what had led him to go and study. "No," he replied. "My father died when I was small. I can hardly remember him. Being an orphan, I was not able to study; not until I was twenty years old. It was a learned discussion between two scholars in my house on the night of my wedding that encouraged me to study. I went to Istanbul the very next day and there carried out my intention to acquire knowledge. It is now thirty years since I left my village, thirty years I have spent in study. I left my village when I was twenty and I am going back there now at the age of fifty." Tears came to his eyes as he spoke these words. He wept as he recalled his life before and after he set out to study.

"I admire you for it," said the villager, adding, "Would you permit me to ask you a question?" "Of course," replied Hussain. The villager then asked, "In light of your thirty years of study, what is the beginning of wisdom?" Hussain replied, "O villager, the beginning of wisdom is the Dua, "My Lord, perfect me in goodness."" But the villager said, "No sir! That is not the beginning of wisdom." Hussain then recited the letters of the alphabet, but the villager said again, "That is not the beginning of wisdom either." Hussain then said, "It is, "In the name of Allah."" The villager replied, "No, that is not the beginning of wisdom either." Hussain then conjugated an Arabic verb, but only to be told that this was not the beginning of wisdom also. He then said, "It is the opening Surah of the Qur'an." This was not it either.

Hussain gave up at this point, saying, "Brother villager, in that case you can teach me the beginning of wisdom." This time the villager said with a smile, "How can I teach you in one night something you have not been able to learn in thirty years." Hussain said, "I shall do whatever is necessary in order to learn," but the villager replied, "I wonder whether you will accept my condition. In only one more day you will return to your village and the wife you have not seen for thirty years. However, in order to be able to teach you the beginning of wisdom, you would have to stay with me for one year. I do not know whether you have the patience for that."

Hussain replied, "Naturally, I am homesick after all these years. Be reasonable. Do not keep me here for a whole year; rather tell me the secret right away." "No," replied the villager, "It is impossible to teach you in less than one year something you have not been able to learn in thirty. Still, since you are an intelligent man with a love for learning, I promise to teach you in one year. There are people who can neither learn nor be taught the beginning of wisdom in fifty, sixty or even seventy years." Hussain could argue no more and finally said, "Very well then."

To be continued...

May Allah Ta'ala grant us the enthusiasm to seek knowledge, to put it into practice in our lives, and to teach others, Allahumma Ameen.

[*Compiled from Irshad: Wisdom of a Sufi Master by Shaikh Muzaffer Al Jerrahi*]