

Bahlool's Discussion with a Faqih

It is said that a famous Faqih of Khorasan came to Baghdad. When Haroun heard of this, he invited the Faqih to his court. He was respectfully welcomed and was seated next to Haroun and treated very importantly by Haroun. During their conversation, Bahlool arrived. Haroun told him to take a seat. The Faqih took one look at Bahlool and said to Haroun, “The Khalifa's favors and likes are strange that he likes an ordinary man and seats him close to himself.”

Bahlool understood that the Faqih was talking about him, so with all his might he turned to that man and said, “Don't be arrogant about your worthless knowledge, and don't judge my looks. I am ready to debate with you and prove to the Khalifa that you don't know anything.”

The Faqih replied, “I have heard you are insane and I won't have anything to do with crazy people.”

“I confess my insanity, but you don't acknowledge your misunderstanding.”

Haroun Rashid looked at Bahlool angrily and told him to be quiet, but Bahlool didn't listen to him and said, “If that person is so confident about his knowledge, then he should debate.”

Haroun said to the Faqih, “What is the difficulty? Ask Bahlool some question.”

He replied, “I am ready on one condition, which is that I will ask Bahlool something. If he gives a correct answer, I will give him 1,000 dinars (gold coins). If he can't answer, he will give me 1,000 dinars.

Bahlool said, “I don't have anything of worldly wealth, not even gold dinars, but I am ready; when I answer your question, I will take the money and distribute it among paupers. If I can't answer, then I will attend to you as a servant and slave.”

The man accepted these conditions and asked Bahlool, “In a house a wife is sitting with her lawful husband. In that house one person is praying Salat (prayer) and another is fasting. Someone from outside enters the house. Because of his coming, the husband and wife become unlawful for each other, the prayers and fasts also become unlawful. Can you tell me who is the person that came?”

Bahloul immediately answered, "The man that entered the house was the woman's first husband, who had gone on a journey. When a very long time had passed since he left, and news was received that he had died; according to the permission of Shariah, the woman married the man sitting next to her. She hired two people; one to fulfill her dead husband's overdue, unfulfilled prayers, and another to fulfill tardy fasts. During this time the man who had gone on the journey returned, although news of his death was widespread. Therefore, the other husband becomes unlawful as do the prayers and fasts."

Haroun and those present became confident and praised Bahloul for solving the problem correctly. Then Bahloul said, "Now it's my turn to ask a question."

The Faqih said, "Ask."

Bahloul asked, "I have one jar of honey and a second full of vinegar. I want to prepare the refreshing drink Sikanjebeen. I fill one bowl with honey and another with vinegar. To make Sikanjebeen, I mix them both together. Afterwards I see that there is a mouse in it. Can you tell me if the mouse was in the honey or the vinegar jar?"

The Faqih thought for a long time, but was unsuccessful in answering.

Haroun said to Bahloul, "Now, you give the answer."

Bahloul replied, "If this person accepts his inferior knowledge I will answer the question."

Helpless, the Faqih confessed his inferiority.

Bahloul replied, "We should take the mouse out, wash it with water, and after it is cleaned of honey and vinegar, cut its stomach open. If the stomach contains vinegar, then believe that it fell in the vinegar jar. If it contains honey, accept that it fell in the honey."

The entire assembly was astonished at Bahloul's intelligence and knowledge, and praised him a lot. The Faqih bowed his head, and according to the deal, Bahloul distributed the 1,000 dinars amongst Baghdad's poor.

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