



## The Crazy Young Man and the Old Man

*Palestine*

Once there was a widow with a son who, according to her, was very clever. The woman, who had been widowed at a very young age, had done her best to raise the boy so that he would be a smart and capable man with a good heart, with the hopes that he would find a wife as good and clever as he was and start a new life for himself.

One day, her son, who was by now a young man, offered to accompany an old man he had just met on his errands. The old man agreed gladly.

The young man asked him:

‘Will you carry me or will I carry you?’

‘How would you carry me, when I weigh much more than you?’ asked the old man, astonished by this strange question. ‘And how would I carry you, being as old as I am?’ So they continued on their way walking side by side.

They passed over a hill, from which they could see a large field of green wheat rocking in the breeze.

‘Do you think that the farmer will eat this crop or not?’ the young man asked, shading his eyes with his hand as he looked at the field.

The old man did not reply this time, thinking that maybe the young man was crazy and that's why he asked such strange questions.

By the time they got back to the city it was evening. They passed in front of a large building adorned with bright lights, and the old man commented:

'What a beautiful building!'

To which the young man responded:

'Well, it seems too dark to me, without light.'

The old man looked at him and said nothing. It appeared that the young man, who had been so kind to accompany him on his errands, might not be in his right mind.

Next, they passed through a dark alley, where a group of children played and ran, screaming with joy.

'What a dark and dirty alley!' the old man complained.

'It seems very bright to me,' replied the young man, 'and much more beautiful than the house we saw before.'

This was too strange for the old man, who already felt uncomfortable in the company of the young man, and now was convinced that he was crazy.

Finally, the old man arrived at his house, where he parted ways with the young man. The old man told his daughter what happened that day with the crazy young man.

'That boy is not crazy, father!' replied the surprised daughter. 'Quite the opposite. He is very clever!'

The old man did not understand.

'When he asked you, who will carry whom, he meant, who would tell a story to the other, to make the walk pass more quickly.'

The father raised an eyebrow, thinking maybe his daughter was right.

‘When he asked if the farmer would eat the crop,’ his daughter continued, ‘he was wondering if the field and the crop belonged entirely to the farmer, or if someone else had lent him the money to plant it, and would therefore be the owner of the crop.’

The old man frowned, making an effort to follow his daughter’s reasoning.

‘And when you passed the big house and the dark, dirty alley,’ the girl concluded, ‘beauty and light were, for him, in the joy of children.’

She added, with a mischievous smile: ‘I would like to meet this young man, father.’

The next morning, the girl sent thirty eggs and a large loaf of bread to the clever young man, hoping that he would understand her message. When the messenger gave him the gift, the young man asked who had sent it to him.

‘The daughter of the old man you accompanied yesterday,’ the messenger replied. ‘She is waiting for you to accept this gift.’

The young man smiled and said:

‘Well, my answer is this: ‘Your month and your bread are not complete’.’

The messenger returned and relayed the answer to the girl, and she knew that the young man would meet her after twenty-nine days, and so it was!

When the young man arrived, the old man apologised for not having understood him and for thinking he was crazy. The young man replied that he understood and that the old man did not need to apologise.

Not long after, the young man’s mother and the old man met to make preparations for the wedding. □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2019).

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## Comments

True wisdom may seem foolish to the fool, just as, for the arrogant Western mental framework, systemic wisdom of other peoples seemed to them ignorance, if not savagery.

However, the proof of ignorance and savagery has become fully apparent through the hegemonic empire of Western thought, with a social 'savagery' that only takes into account the needs and benefits of a privileged minority and a destruction of the natural world that threatens to end life on Earth.

As the Earth Charter says, we need a change of mind and heart, although that may seem 'madness' for the prevailing framework of values.

## Sources

Al Mawrid (1996). *Stories from Bethleem: Manual for English language teaching*. Ramallah.

Arab Educational Institute (1999). *Moral Stories from Palestine*. Bethlehem: Culture Palestine Series.

## *Associated text of the Earth Charter*

The Way Forward: This requires a change of mind and heart.

