

NASRUDIN FABLE--1988

Even when the Mullah Nasrudin was still quite young, he was widely regarded as a wise and holy man. As such, he had attracted to himself a band of loyal devotees who hung on his every utterance.

One day, in the city of Qr Jsm, he called them all together addressing them thusly: "I must soon travel from this place hence, so these are my parting remarks. I fear they may distress you. They concern the significance of ethics for the holy man. My friends, to our misfortune, there is none. As we have noted again and again over the years, all things and actions are equal in the eyes of Allah, so to behave as if they weren't is to deny oneself entry into the first courtyard of the spiritual edifice." So saying, he mounted his ass and rode into the desert.

His devotees sat stunned. This was such a sharp reversal of the Mullah's previous emphasis—the contemplation of universal love—that his acolytes fell into such a deep well of mental confusion that when, several hours later, hunger pangs at last raised them back to the world of ordinary reality they collectively agreed that they must have experienced enlightenment. They praised the diabolical cleverness of the Mullah that he could produce such a wonder.

As the years passed, the Mullah's devotees brought to the people of the city the message of universal love. They also brought to themselves, little by little, very slowly at first, but ever more rapidly, a reputation for obesity, sloth, deviousness, welching, womanizing, orgies, mysterious disappearances, and the like. After many years they one by one descended to the level of the most miserable of beggars, shunned by the community, ostracized by other seekers.

After many, many years there at last came a day when the Mullah Nasrudin reappeared from the direction in which he had departed on his ass as was his wont of yore.

Word of the Mullah's return spread like the smell of a camel's fart after eating overripe dates. Out of the large crowd that assembled, there jostled to the fore, one by one, a band of desperate, ragged beggars. Their spokesman dropped to his knees and implored the Mullah thusly: "O Beloved Master, we have followed all your precepts most faithfully, but have yet come to this. O master, where have we failed?"

"The trouble with you is—you have no ethics!" shot out the Mullah, turning his ass, and riding back into the desert.

Chuck Metcalf

6/8/98