

"Honorable signs always appear on the faces of honorable men"

A story by Salam Al Rassi

Sheikh Abu Ali Sayyagha was one of the most respected and honest men in his days. He was capable whenever he meets someone for the first time to guess immediately what type of person he was, whether smart or stupid , generous or stingy , honest or not, by just stirring at his face , a science called those days physiognomy.

Before cars were made, the sheikh was one day walking on foot from Hasbayya to Jdeidet Marjeyoun (South Lebanon).

When he arrived at the intersection of Souq El Khan, he met a man riding on a donkey going in the same direction. When the man got close to him, the Sheikh glanced at his face and said to himself "I don't like him... he's not an honest man."

The man dismounted his donkey, rushed to the sheikh, kissed his hand and asked: "Where are you heading for?"

"Jdeidet Marjeyoun" the sheikh replied. The man said in a loud voice "How lucky I am. I'm going there too." Then he insisted that the sheikh should mount the donkey. The sheikh hesitated and thought for a while. "How can such a noble gesture come from a seemingly bastard?" Then he starred again at the man's face to only see signs of dishonesty on his face.

The sheikh apologised in a nice way saying "No , thank you...But I prefer to walk." The man insisted "It is impossible for you to walk while I ride" and added: "Someone we know may pass by and say how rude and impolite I am. No, no, you must ride, I insist."

The sheikh finally mounted the donkey in spite of his will. Every time he stopped the donkey and was about to dismount, the man would stand in his way threatening to rip away the donkey's belly with his dagger if he did so.

On the way, the man continued to mumble about his devoutness and respect to clergymen, a thing which made the sheikh worry even further: "To me, this man looks infernal, but his behaviour shows that he is a man of honour. I believe I may have a problem here. I may have to reconsider from now on the way I judge people. If my judgment of this man is wrong, then I may have misjudged others...and that's a serious problem, because then I may loose people's confidence in me."

Arriving in Jdeidet Marjeyoun, the sheikh dismounted the donkey, thanked the man and walked away...

The man ran after the sheikh saying "But your eminence, you haven't paid me the donkey's fare..." The sheikh asked "Yes of course, how much do you want?" The man replied: "Half a Majidi"

The sheikh looked at the man's face and said to him: "Listen my friend, only the truth prevails in the end. I knew what person you were from the first time I saw your face, but you got me worried about the way I read people..." and added: "Here's a whole Majidi and I am so happy that I was not mistaken about you."

From the book *Li-alla Tadhi' "lest they are lost"* by Salam Al Rassi. Adapted and translated to English by Hanna H. Farha