



# H A B I B P U B L I C S C H O O L

## A L U M N I A S S O C I A T I O N

### ASWAD

A STORY BY AKHTAR WASIM DAR (Batch 1975)

**On a desolate road, if somebody asks you for a lift, be careful, the stranger can be anybody, even ...**

As usual I was driving in the fast lane, but without keeping pace with the speed needed to move in that lane, and constantly cars in the rear were honking. As usual I was immersed in some wayward thoughts which were random and unclassified. As usual FM radio was on, and was playing some non-stop music. Suddenly music stopped and an announcement was made by city traffic police about some road closures and diversions due to President's entourage. I tried to focus on the news item and learned that I am also hit by this calamity, which today is known as V VIP movement, a movement which renders mortals like us small and useless to the sense of guilt and fault. I looked at the watch the dial was showing 7.30 pm, took a sigh and knew that this diversion meant another hour and half before reaching home. The day had been hectic and whole body and mind needed some rest and relaxation, which seemed far and distant after the radio announcement.

I decided to take a short cut, a road somewhat desolate and less traveled. I thought this route will save a good half an hour as traffic there is very thin, this decision made me feel better and relaxed.

I turned off FM radio and thought of listening to some real music, so the choice was Mozart. I switched on CD player, which started playing symphony forty-one, which is a real treat and whenever I listen to it, I find a different level of satisfaction and depth in it. This symphony is also remembered as Jupiter symphony. It starts with four simple notes and transforms into one of the most complex pieces of music of all time with an incomparable fugal coda.

I put the car into top gear and for a moment shunned every thought from mind and just concentrated on the road and the music. In the process took a diversion to the short cut and looked in the rear view mirror and saw the tall abandoned building which meant I was on right track. As I looked in front, I found someone fully clad in black waving at me, the presence and aura of that person was such magnetic that I could do nothing but

pull the car on the side and ask him, "Can I help you?" "No, but you still can drop me round the corner", he replied and took the front seat.

He was in his middle forties, graying hair neatly combed back, high cheek bone and a radiating complexion that showed his physical well being and from that glow was reminiscent an inner light that was giving calming, comforting and soothing vibrations. He was holding a small pocket size book in his hands, his whole body looking in great shape, like a Michael Angelo's sculpture of David.

I thought, how in these times, when everybody finds life and its problems so telling can someone have such a calming airs that each part of his body and presence were oozing serenity and tranquility.

"How is life?" he glanced towards me and asked, as if reading my thoughts.

"It's okay but it's difficult" I said philosophically.

"Yes, this is a great truth; one of the greatest truths, what makes life difficult is that the process of confronting and solving problems is painful one. Problems depending upon their nature evoke in us frustration, grief, sadness, anger, anxiety or despair. And since life poses an endless series of problems, life is always difficult and is full of pain as well of joy."

He looked at me with his blissful smile and continued, "Yet it is in this whole process of meeting and solving problems that life has its meaning. It is only because of the problems that we grow mentally and spiritually. Problems do not go away they must be worked through or else they remain forever a barrier to the growth and development of the spirit."

"So you mean, we cannot solve life's problem except by solving them" I looked at him.

He nodded with his customary smile, and I also nodded, that I understood.

"You never will be the person you can be if pressure, tension and discipline are taken out of your life."

He continued " People need tension in their lives. It's the force of personal evolution -- it sparks creativity and higher consciousness. If you are not comfortable with a situation, you try to improve it, right?"

I nodded, and without looking at me he said "Tension arises through experience of opposites. These opposites fight each other as each one struggles for dominance. Tension is transformed when two opposite dimensions of reality are brought together in balance and in wholeness. Know that tension is an integral part of growth. Instead of avoiding or resisting tension when it arises, identify the opposing forces at play. Make space for each of them to be there together and the tension will transform. As its popularly known that, Life begins at the end of your comfort zone."

As I was driving, I exactly knew someone special was with me in the car and this can be no coincidence but a matter of providence. I trusted my gut feeling and was contemplating on asking the questions that were with me from time immemorial.

In his presence I was feeling very assured and thought it was an opportunity to ask him how things can be improved.

"Until we can do what we decide to do, until we can be true to our own word, we're a mess inside."

He said in his gentle voice and I was taken aback as to how he read my thoughts again.

He continued: When you say you'll be there at eight a.m., be there at eight a.m. When you say, "No, thank you, I don't want dessert," mean it and keep your word.

When you tell someone, "You can count on me, I'll be there," then be there.

When you say the job will be ready at two o'clock, be sure and have it ready at two o'clock.

When you say the project will cost thousand rupees, don't expect to jack the price up to ten thousand rupees while maintaining your sense of well being. Mean thousand rupees. If you don't know how much a job is going to cost, or how much time it will take, say so. Don't hurt other people through misinforming them. The world is suffering enough as it is from gross misinformation."

I was amazed again at the way he was reading my mind and answering to the questions before I was able to put them. I thought he was KHIZAR, the great legend in the

Muslim and other tradition who is there since the beginning of times and is seen helping people on the coastal areas.

“Who are you sir, KHIZAR?” I asked with amazement.

He looked at me and before he can speak I said “but you can’t be KHIZAR!”

“Why?”

“Because, the tradition says KHIZAR is always clad in green, which is why he is called KHIZAR, whereas you are in complete black.”

“So this way I can be ASWAD, the one in black”

I smiled, and he was also grinning and nodding.

“But Black usually signifies something profound”

“Like what?”

“Mystery, something unknown, Death, grief and of course, black is equated with powers of darkness”

As I uttered those words I looked at him and to my astonishment, the blissful and peaceful features of the stranger were replaced by anguish and discontent, a person who a while back had so pleasing and cheerful presence that I thought he was a gift from God had dramatically changed in such a way that his whole persona was emitting sadness and melancholy. The aura that was so soothing and relaxing that I was completely in the state of bliss was now pulsating with uneasiness.

I was shocked and totally disoriented, and could not find an explanation to this which was being revealed.

“What is the matter, Sir?”

He looked at me with eyes full of sorrow and agony and kept silent. Then after a while he spoke in a voice that was filled with pain and pathos.

“You were thinking that I was KHIZAR or some noble soul, but then you pointed to the forces of darkness and thought that I could be one of those. I would like to tell you that I represent those forces”

“My God! Who are you?”

“Devil!”

“Devil, no I don’t believe!”

“Trust me, if you can still, I am.”

“But a while back you were so blissful and was speaking and telling those things that were meant for betterment of humanity, how can devil speak about goodness and well being?”

“Yes this is what the perception is about me, and I do not represent myself but the perception about myself.

The transformation that you are witnessing in me from bliss to sorrow is due to the perception and the mindset that you have about me, it has nothing to do with my real personality”

“So you are telling me that by nature you are a nice person and it’s only the negative perception that we have about you is making you look as an evil” I interrupted.

“Yes, that is the case”

“I do not buy this argument”

“Fine, this is your choice, and after all you are human being and supposedly possess free will”

“What do you mean supposedly? Don’t you know like you we humans also possess free will?”

“I know about myself, and you should better know about yourself. I for one do not possess what you call a free will”

“Mr. ASWAD, or whatever you are, you are trying to tell me that you don’t have free will and whatever you are doing is predestined and designed by God and you are a poor soul that is just been pushed around to do this dirty work.”

“Well, Mr. White or Clean or whoever you are, you are very correct.”

I was terrified and appalled at listening to what he was telling me, but I was still in my senses and argued:

“I do not subscribe to your idea that you do not possess free will and you were not the one who disobeyed God and was cursed eternally and thrown out from paradise.”

“Please mind your theology! I was not the one who was thrown out of Paradise, but it was you (Adam) that was shown the red card.”

“But you were instrumental in that.”

“That is what you think.”

“This is not what I think or anybody else thinks, but it’s the matter of religious record preserved in all sacred scriptures.”

“Let me tell you something, you must go and probe beyond the words and the statements and the myths recorded in the religious scriptures. Unless you do that you would not be able to know my role and know your real place and meaning in this world”

“You cannot distract me from what is reality and I know and honor what is written in sacred books. You cannot distract me from the truth by just looking and sensing logical and philosophical. This was fine until I didn’t know who you were but no more.”

“I am in no way asking your favor to understand me properly and do justice to me, no, this is not the case. By that way I would not find some solace as you might think, I just want you to know something more.”

“What’s that?”

“Look in the mirror”

I instantly looked in the rear view mirror, and was shocked to see the tall abandoned building behind me which I had passed long before ASWAD was given the lift.

“Don’t look at the building, turn the mirror and see yourself.”

In one quick reflex action I adjusted the mirror and to my horror it was ASWAD staring me in the mirror.

“You devil what you have done!” I screamed and put brakes on the car, car stopped with a big screech.

“For all your faults and the faults of your fathers and ancestors I had been accused, that I led them astray, no that is beyond my powers and control, it is the ASWAD in you, the lust, evil in you that has led you astray. There is a great void in the human consciousness, which is darker than the unexplored Africa, in that unexplored dark jungle your ASWAD resides and do what you and other of your kind have done and have always blamed me.

It is the lack of goodness or light in you that create the problem, the only solution to keep dark out is to illuminate. Light up your minds, hearts and spirits and there would be no darkness and no ASWAD. Where there is SUN there is no NIGHT, where there is LIGHT there is no ASWAD.”

I was regaining my composure as ASWAD was deliberating.

“It is the void and darkness of ignorance that you have to light up to get rid of the forces that you consider evil. Evil is not something out there, it’s something within, which you can only do away with when you understand what that’s all about.

You and your human folk have not understood the concept of forces of darkness and were led to believe that some powerful outside force is responsible for all your problems and sins, that is a naive approach."

"If I take your word it means that all bad and evil is within me and only with light of goodness it can be conquered." I hesitantly looked at him.

Stepping out of car he nodded.

"But that means you are not real?"

"No, I am real, as real as you are, but the difference is I am the mirror. You see your faults and sins and evil in me, I have nothing to do with it, I just reflect what you have. You cannot blame me for this!"

"But where are you going?"

"I have to clarify my position with the person who is next approaching this road and also show him the mirror."

I started the car and looked in the rear view mirror, tall abandoned building was behind me and a car was seen emerging in a distance, and a tall fellow fully clad in black was waving for a lift.