

Palestinian Jokes

by Lesley Dawson

“Heard the one about the Khalili tour guide who took a group of foreign tourists to the Dead Sea? When they got out of the coach he said to them ‘Ladies and gentlemen you are now the lowest people on earth’, meaning of course that they were at the lowest point on earth, 430 plus metres below sea level”

Joe was sitting with his students in the café just outside the main gate of Bethlehem University drinking Arabic coffee. It was not his favourite drink, he always seemed to get the gritty bits in the bottom stuck in his teeth and he hated the sugar that was piled into the small cup, but he had been told he must sample all the delights of Arabic food and drink. He hoped they weren’t going to make him eat the rice and meat mixture bound up in the inside of a cow’s stomach that he knew was a real delicacy in the villages around.

The three boys who were regaling him with stories about the inhabitants of Hebron were all sophisticated Jerusalemites, whose parents worked for the UN. As such, they looked down on “Khalilis” as they were called, but Joe had not yet visited the town so could pass no comment on the accuracy of the characterisation of its inhabitants.

As he speculated if he could ask these superior young men if they would take him to Hebron, another voice piped up “The best story I have heard about Khalilis is this. When a Khalili goes on a journey he takes two plastic bottles with him, one is full of water and the other is empty.

Mr Joe, why do you think they do that?”

Joe scratched his head but could think of no sensible answer. When he didn't reply there was a burst of laughter and Usama blurted out "Because on the journey he may be thirsty, or he may not be thirsty"

Smiling but not really understanding, Joe reminded himself of a student in his class who had been the butt of jokes when the group were trying to come to terms with the word "subtle". The way he had chosen to clarify its meaning had been to solicit questions about people and actions. When they asked about Moder, a boy from Hebron, Joe had shaken his head to indicate that Moder was not subtle at all.

This had caused a huge roar of laughter with Moder at the centre preening himself on his lack of subtilty and being proud of it. However, Moder's father was a successful business man with a sewing machine factory in Hebron, so his lack of subtlety didn't seem to be holding him back.