

# HONEST SA'ID

Before beginning Honest Sa'id it is a good idea to ask the class what the five senses are and whether they can list them. It is sometimes thought that a sixth sense, which Avicenna had overlooked, is proprioception (relative position), and possibly a seventh, interoception (awareness of such things as pain, hunger and the movement of internal organs). Be on the lookout, in an enquiry, for ideas that resemble these. Introduce them with the terms given above, if necessary, rather than trying to simply fit them into the usual five senses. Task Questions 5 and 6 are the main enquiry questions so don't spend too long on the others.

## The story

*Sa'id was 12 years old and very honest. He was so honest he was incapable of telling a lie. Sa'id worked as a servant for his uncle Naseem who was a magician. Naseem was very clever but he had a vice that he could not give up: he was a gambler. Naseem's wife, Heba, who was always worried about Naseem spending the money they needed to live on, made Sa'id promise to keep an eye on Naseem for her, and to tell her when he gambled. Sa'id promised that he would try to keep an eye out.*

*Shortly afterwards, Naseem and Sa'id were walking home when they passed a house. Naseem stopped them and tied up their donkeys and told Sa'id to wait outside while he went in. He said he was going, 'to conduct some business'.*

*That night Naseem was in trouble with his wife for having been gambling.*

## Task Question 1: How do you think she knew?

*The next day Naseem went back to Sa'id and said, 'Did you tell Heba that I was gambling the other day?'*

*Sa'id could not lie. 'I did. I saw through the window with my own eyes, Uncle.'*

*When he heard this Naseem was angry with Sa'id so he cast a spell that caused Sa'id to lose his sight. 'If he can no longer see,' thought Naseem, 'I will be able to gamble without getting caught.'*

*The next day they passed the same gambling house and Naseem went inside to gamble, confident that Sa'id would not know this time.*

*That night Naseem was told off again by Heba!*

## Task Question 2: How do you think Heba knew this time?

*When he found Sa'id the next morning he said again, 'How did you know that I was gambling?'*

*'I could hear you through the window, Uncle,' said Sa'id.*

*This time Naseem cast a spell that caused Sa'id to lose his hearing.*

*The next day they passed the gambling house again and Naseem entered once more.*

*And that night Heba told him off again!*

## Task Question 3: How do you think she knew this time?

*'How did you know I was gambling again?' he asked Sa'id again. But, of course, Sa'id could not hear him without his ears so Naseem poked him in the back. Sa'id knew exactly why he had been poked, so he told him:*

*'When I was getting your clothes ready in the morning I found your money pouch among your clothes and I could feel that it had more than halved in weight, so I knew that you had been gambling again, and because I promised Heba, I had to tell her.'*

*This time the spell removed his sense of touch.*

*Naseem was now much more relaxed. Without his sight, hearing or touch surely Sa'id would not be able to know if he had been gambling.*

*But that night he was told off again, and this time Heba shouted at him louder than before.*

*'HOW DID YOU KNOW?' He screamed at Sa'id the following morning though he knew that the boy couldn't hear him. Then Naseem poked him again so that Sa'id would know that he was angry. But Sa'id couldn't feel anything either, so he didn't know that Naseem was angry. Sa'id just sat there sniffing the air, as that was almost all he could do. This gave Naseem a clue: he found the clothes he had been wearing the night before while gambling and he sniffed them. They smelled of tobacco and coffee: the aromas of the gambling house, and he realised that Sa'id had known because of the smell of his clothes.*

*Naseem then cast a spell to remove Sa'id's sense of smell. Then he remembered that he still had his sense of taste so he cast one more spell to remove his tongue too, just in case! 'Without his tongue Sa'id wouldn't be able to tell Heba anything anyway,' thought Naseem.*

*'I'm free at last!' he shouted out loud, though Sa'id couldn't hear that either.*

*The next day he went gambling again confident that Sa'id, without any of his senses, could not find out that he'd been gambling. He could finally relax and gamble without fear of being told off.*

*That night he got the worst telling off ever!*

*'HOW DID YOU KNOW AND HOW DID YOU TELL HER?' he screamed at Sa'id, but Sa'id had no idea that Naseem was even there because he could neither feel, smell, hear, see nor taste. Naseem was furious. But he was also frustrated because he had no idea how Sa'id had known and how he had managed to tell Heba. Eventually, it was too much for Naseem so he cast one last spell to return Sa'id's senses to him. Then he demanded that Sa'id tell him how he had known and how he had been able to tell Heba. But Sa'id was no fool, and when he realised that he had his senses back, he sprung to his feet and ran away before Naseem had a chance to cast any more spells. So, Naseem never got to find out how Sa'id had known that he was still gambling.*

*How do you think he knew?*

#### **Task Question 4: How do you think he knew that Naseem was still gambling?**

#### **Task Question 5: If someone had, like Sa'id, lost all his or her senses, would he or she know anything at all? If so, what?**

#### **Nested Questions:**

- ✓ Is the brain like a sense organ?
- ✓ What can your brain know without any senses?
- ✓ What would you know if your memory was removed too?

*Sa'id didn't know. But Heba did.*

*Heba had known because Naseem had been gambling every night before, so*

*Heba thought that it stood to reason that he would gamble every night to come. Heba had simply come to believe that Naseem would gamble every night, and so she reasoned that he had been gambling last night too...*

*...And she was right, he had.*

1. Heba believed that Naseem was gambling every night.
2. It was true that Naseem was gambling every night.
3. She believed it because he had gambled every night before and so reasoned that he would gamble every night in the future.

#### **Task Question 6: Do you think Heba did know that Naseem had been gambling?**

#### **Nested Questions:**

- ✓ Is Heba right to think that he will gamble every night in the future because he has gambled every night in the past?
- ✓ Can you predict the future from what has happened in the past?
- ✓ The sun has risen every day in the past, so does that mean that you know it will rise every day in the future?

This last section is based on a philosophical problem of knowledge known as 'the problem of induction'. In other words, the problem of what we can say about future events based on the evidence of past events. The most famous example of which is Hume's idea (1748) that though one has witnessed the sun rising every day in the past one cannot say with certainty that it will continue to rise every day in the future (and, presumably, one day it will not). The argument (steps 1–3) formulates the problem in the standard 'justified (3)-true (2)-belief (1)' form.