

# The Four Valleys

Bahá'u'lláh

Original English



## The Four Valleys

He is the Ever-Living.

O light of truth and sword of faith

And soul of generosity!

No prince hath sky or earth begot

Who fain could hope to rival thee!<sup>1</sup>

I know not why the tie of love was so abruptly severed and the firm covenant of friendship broken. Did ever, God forbid, My devotion lessen or My sincere affection fail, that I came to be so neglected and forgotten?

What fault didst thou observe in me

That made thee cease thy tender care?

Is it that poverty's our lot

And wealth and pageantry thy share?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rúmí. Bahá'u'lláh is here comparing Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Raḥmán, the recipient of the Tablet, with Ḥusámu'd-Dín Chalabí, to whom Rúmí dedicated his Mathnaví. Ḥusámu'd-Dín means "sword of faith".

<sup>2</sup> Sa'dí.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

Or is it that a single arrow hath driven thee from the battle? Hast thou not heard that steadfastness is the prime requisite of the mystic path and the means of admittance to His holy Court? "They that say 'Our Lord is God', and continue steadfast in His way, upon them, verily, shall the angels descend."<sup>3</sup>

Likewise He saith, "Be thou steadfast as thou hast been bidden."<sup>4</sup> It followeth that they that abide in the court of reunion must needs conduct themselves accordingly.

I do as bidden and convey the message,  
Whether it give thee counsel or offence.<sup>5</sup>

Though I have received no reply to My letter, and it would be unbecoming, in the eyes of the wise, to express anew My devotion, yet this new love hath annulled and effaced all the old rules and ways.

Tell us not the tale of Laylí, nor speak of Majnún's woe —  
Thy love hath made the world forget the loves of long ago.  
When once thy name was on the tongue, it reached the lovers' ears  
And set the speakers and the hearers dancing to and fro.<sup>6</sup>

And as to divine wisdom and heavenly admonitions:

Each moon, O my belov'd,  
For three days I go mad;  
Today's the first of these —  
'Tis why thou seest me glad.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Qur'án 41:30.

<sup>4</sup> Qur'án 11:112.

<sup>5</sup> Sa'dí.

<sup>6</sup> Sa'dí.

I hear that thou hast journeyed to Tabríz and Tiflis to engage in debate and instruction, or hast set out for Sanandaj to scale the heights of knowledge.

O my eminent friend! They that seek to ascend to the heaven of mystic wayfaring are of four kinds only. I shall describe them in brief, that the signs and degrees of each may become plain and manifest to thee.

If the wayfarers be among them that seek after the sanctuary of the Desired One, this plane pertaineth to the self — but the self which is intended is “the Self of God that pervadeth all His laws”.<sup>8</sup> In this station the self is not rejected but beloved; it is regarded with favour and is not to be shunned. Although at the beginning this plane is the realm of conflict, yet it endeth in the ascent to the throne of glory. As it hath been said:

O Abraham of the Spirit and God’s Friend in this day!  
Slay! Slay these four thieving birds of prey!<sup>9</sup>

that after death the mystery of life may be unravelled.

This is the plane of the soul that is pleasing unto God, whereof He saith: “Enter thou among My servants, and enter thou My Paradise.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rúmí.

<sup>8</sup> From a prayer attributed to Imám ‘Alí.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rúmí. Here Rúmí tells a story of four evil birds which, when put to death, changed into four birds of goodness. The allegory refers to subduing evil qualities and replacing them with good.

<sup>10</sup> Qur’án 89: 29–30.

This station hath myriad signs and countless tokens. Hence it is said: “We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves, until it become plain to them that there is no God save Him.”<sup>11</sup>

One must, then, read the book of one's own self, rather than the treatise of some grammarian. Wherefore He hath said, “Read thy Book: There needeth none but thyself to make out an account against thee this day.”<sup>12</sup>

The story is told of a mystic knower who went on a journey with a learned grammarian for a companion. They came to the shore of the Sea of Grandeur. The knower, putting his trust in God, straightway flung himself into the waves, but the grammarian stood bewildered and lost in thoughts that were as words traced upon the water. The mystic called out to him, “Why dost thou not follow?” The grammarian answered, “O brother, what can I do? As I dare not advance, I must needs go back again.” Then the mystic cried, “Cast aside what thou hast learned from Sībavayh and Qawlavayh, from Ibn-i-Ḥájib and Ibn-i-Málik, and cross the water!”<sup>13</sup>

With renunciation, not with grammar's rules, one must be armed:

Be nothing, then, and cross this sea unharmed.<sup>14</sup>

Likewise He saith, “And be ye not like those who forget God, and whom He hath therefore caused to forget their own selves. Such men are the evil doers.”<sup>15</sup>

If the wayfarers be among them that dwell in the court of the All-Praised, this is the station of the Intellect, which is known as the messenger of the realm of the body and the most great pillar. That which is intended, however, is the universal divine Intellect, whose sovereignty

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Qur'án 41:53.

<sup>12</sup> Qur'án 17:14.

<sup>13</sup> Famed writers on grammar and rhetoric.

<sup>14</sup> Rúmí.

<sup>15</sup> Qur'án 59:19.

fostereth the growth of all things, and not every vain and feeble mind. Thus hath the wise Saná'í written:

How can meagre reason comprehend the Book,  
Or the spider trap a phoenix in its web?  
Wouldst thou that the mind not hold thee in its snare?  
Seize it and enrol it in the school of God instead!

On this plane, the traveller meeteth with many a trial and reverse. Now is he lifted up to heaven, now is he cast into the depths. As it hath been said: "Now Thou drawest me to the throne of the realms above, again Thou scorcest me in the fire of hell." The hidden mystery of this station is divulged in the following blessed verse from the Súrih of the Cave: "And thou mightest have seen the sun when it arose, pass on the right of their cave, and, and when it set, leave them on the left, while they were in its spacious chamber. This is one of the signs of God. Guided indeed is he whom God guideth; but for him whom He misleadeth, thou shalt by no means find a guardian and guide."<sup>16</sup>

If a soul could grasp the allusions that lie hid in this single verse, it would suffice him. Such indeed are those whom He hath extolled as "men whom neither merchandise nor traffic beguile from the remembrance of God".<sup>17</sup>

This station is that of the true standard of knowledge and the final end of tests and trials. Nor is it needed, in this realm, to seek after knowledge, for He hath said concerning the guidance of wayfarers on this plane, "Fear ye God; God will teach you",<sup>18</sup> and again, "Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Qur'án 18:17.

<sup>17</sup> Qur'án 24:37.

<sup>18</sup> Qur'án 2:282.

<sup>19</sup> From a Ḥadīth.

Wherefore, one must make ready the receptacle and become worthy of the descent of heavenly bestowals, that the all-sufficing Cup-Bearer may give one to drink of the wine of bounty from the crystal chalice of mercy. "For this let the striving strive!"<sup>20</sup> And now do I say, "Verily, we are God's, and to Him shall we return."<sup>21</sup>

If the lovers be among them that abide within the precincts of the abode of the Lodestone of hearts, no soul may dwell on this kingly throne save the countenance of love. I am powerless to describe this station or to depict it in words.

Love shunneth this world and that world too;  
In him are lunacies seventy-and-two.  
The minstrel of love harpeth this lay:  
Servitude enslaveth, lordship doth betray.<sup>22</sup>

This plane demandeth pure love and unalloyed affection. In describing these companions He saith: "They speak not till He hath spoken, and act according to His commandment."<sup>23</sup>

In this station, neither the reign of the intellect is sufficient nor the rule of self. Thus one of the Prophets of God asked, "O my Lord, how shall I reach Thee?" And the answer came: "Leave thy self behind, and then approach Me."

In the estimation of such souls, to be seated amidst the sandals by the door is the same as to abide at the place of honour, and in the path of the Beloved the retreats of earthly beauty differ not from the field of a battle waged.

The dwellers of this abode know not the destination, yet they spur on their chargers. They see naught in the Beloved but His very Self. They find all words of sense to be meaningless, and

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<sup>20</sup> Qur'án 83:26.

<sup>21</sup> Qur'án 2:156.

<sup>22</sup> Rúmí.

<sup>23</sup> Qur'án 21:27.

senseless words to be full of meaning. They cannot distinguish head from foot or one limb from another. To them the mirage is water itself and departure is the mystery of return. Wherefore hath it been said:

The story of Thy beauty reached the hermit's dell;  
Crazed, he sought the Tavern where the wine they buy and sell.  
The love of Thee hath levelled down the fort of patience;  
The pain of Thee hath firmly barred the gate of hope as well.<sup>24</sup>

In this station, both instruction and apprenticeship are assuredly of no avail:

The lovers' teacher is the Loved One's beauty,  
His face their lesson and their only book.  
Learning of wonderment, of longing love their duty;  
Not on learned chapters and dull themes they look.  
The chains that bind them are His musky hair;  
The Cyclic Scheme, to them, is but to Him a stair.<sup>25</sup>

Here followeth a supplication to God — blessed and glorified be He:

O Lord, O Thou Whose grace fulfilleth every need!  
To mention aught before Thee would be sin indeed.  
Allow this mote of knowledge hidden in my soul  
To free itself of lowly clay and reach its goal.  
And grant this drop of wisdom that Thou gavest me  
To be at last united with Thy mighty sea.<sup>26</sup>

Thus do I say: There is no power nor strength except in God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

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<sup>24</sup> Sa'dí.

<sup>25</sup> Rúmí. A reference to the Cyclic Theory of Avicenna (Abu-'Alí Síná [980–1037]).

<sup>26</sup> Rúmí

If the mystic knowers be among them that have attained the beauty of the Beloved, this station is the throne of the inmost heart and the secret of divine guidance. This is the seat of the mystery “He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth.” Should all that are in heaven and on earth attempt to unravel this exalted allusion and subtle mystery, from now until the Day whereon the Trumpet shall sound, yet would they fail to comprehend even a letter thereof, for this is the station of God's immutable decree and His foreordained mystery. Hence, when asked regarding this matter, He made reply: “It is a bottomless sea that none shall ever fathom.” And when the question was repeated, He answered: “It is the blackest of nights through which none can find his way.”<sup>27</sup>

Whoso comprehendeth this station will assuredly conceal it, and were he to reveal but the faintest trace thereof, they would assuredly hang him from the gallows. And yet, by God, were a true seeker to be found, I would divulge it to him; for He saith: “Love is a distinction never conferred upon a heart possessed by fear and dread.”<sup>28</sup>

In truth, the wayfarer who journeyeth unto God, who treadeth the snow-white Path and turneth towards the Crimson Pillar, will never reach his heavenly home unless his hands are empty of such worldly things as are cherished by men. “And he that feareth not God, God shall make him to fear all things; whereas all things fear him who feareth God.”

Speak the Persian tongue, though the Arabian pleaseth more:  
Love indeed doth have a hundred other tongues in store.<sup>29</sup>

How sweet in this connection is the following couplet:

Our hearts will be as open shells  
Should He the pearls of grace bestow;

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<sup>27</sup> From a Ḥadīth.

<sup>28</sup> From a Ḥadīth.

<sup>29</sup> Rūmī.



Our lives will ready targets be  
Were He to hurl the darts of woe.

And were it not contrary to the commandment of the Book, I would surely have bestowed a part of My possessions upon My would-be murderer, and given him to inherit Mine earthly goods, and rendered him a myriad thanks, and solaced Mine own eyes with the touch of his hand. But what can I do? Neither have I any wealth, nor hath the Lord of destiny so decreed.

Methinks at this moment I perceive the musk-scented fragrance of the garment of Há' from the Joseph of Bahá; verily He seemeth near at hand, though ye may think Him far away.<sup>30</sup>

My soul doth sense the fragrant breath  
Of a well-beloved soul:  
The fragrance of that kindly friend  
Who's my heart's desire and goal.

The duty of long years of love obey,  
And tell the tale of blissful days gone by,  
That land and sky may laugh aloud today,  
And it may gladden mind and heart and eye.<sup>31</sup>

This is the realm of pure awareness and utter self-effacement. Not even love can find a way to this plane, nor doth affection have a place therein. Wherefore is it said: "Love is a veil betwixt the lover and the beloved." Here love becometh but an obstructing veil, and aught save the Friend but a curtain. Thus the wise Saná'í hath written:

None may approach that well-belov'd  
Who harboreth his own desire;  
None may embrace that beauteous form  
Who's burdened with his own attire.

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<sup>30</sup> An intimation of Bahá'u'lláh's imminent Manifestation.

<sup>31</sup> Rúmí.

For this is the realm of God and is sanctified above every allusion of His creatures.

Abiding in the court of rapture, the dwellers of this mansion wield with utmost joy and gladness the sceptres of divinity and lordship; and, established upon the lofty seats of justice, they exert their rule and bestow upon every soul its due. Those who drink of this cup abide beneath the canopy of glory, above the throne of the Ancient of Days, and dwell upon the seat of grandeur beneath the tabernacle of majesty. These are they that “know neither sun nor piercing cold”.<sup>32</sup>

On this plane the highest heavens are neither opposed to, nor distinguished from, the lowly earth, for this is the realm of divine favours, not the arena of worldly contraries. Albeit at every moment a new condition be displayed, yet that condition is ever the same. Wherefore He saith in one instance, “Nothing whatsoever keepeth Him from being occupied with any other thing.”<sup>33</sup> And in another He saith, “Verily, His ways differ every day.”<sup>34</sup>

This is the food whose savour changeth not and whose colour altereth not. Wert thou to partake thereof, thou wouldst assuredly recite the verse “I have turned my face to Him Who hath created the heavens and the earth, following the right religion and submissive before God. I am not one of those who add gods to God.”<sup>35</sup> “And thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth, that he might be stablished in knowledge.”<sup>36</sup> Wherefore, put thy hand into thy bosom, then stretch it forth with power, and behold, thou shalt find it a light unto all the world.

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<sup>32</sup> Qur’án 76:13.

<sup>33</sup> A famous adage cited in many Islamic sources.

<sup>34</sup> Qur’án 55:29.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Qur’án 6:79.

<sup>36</sup> Qur’án 6:75.

How clear this crystal water that the enraptured Cup-Bearer passeth round! How exquisite this pure wine that the intoxicated Beauty doth proffer! How pleasing this draught of joy that floweth from the Heavenly Cup! Well is it with him who drinketh thereof, and tasteth of its sweetness, and attaineth unto its knowledge.

No more than this will I impart to thee:

The riverbed can never hold the sea.<sup>37</sup>

For its mystery lieth hid in the storehouses of His inviolable protection and is laid up in the treasuries of His power. It is exalted above the highest essence of utterance and sanctified beyond the subtlest mode of explanation.

Astonishment here is highly prized, and utter poverty greatly cherished. Wherefore hath He said, "Poverty is My pride."<sup>38</sup> And again: "God hath a people beneath the canopy of grandeur, whom He hath concealed in the garment of poverty to exalt in rank."<sup>39</sup> These are they who see with His eyes and hear with His ears, as hath been recorded in the well-known tradition.<sup>40</sup>

Concerning this realm there is many a tradition and many a verse, whether of general or specific import, but two of these will suffice, that they may serve as a light for knowing hearts and bring delight to longing souls.

The first is His statement "O My servant! Obey Me, that I may make thee like unto Myself. For I say 'Be', and it is, and thou shalt say 'Be', and it shall be." And the second: "O son of Adam! Seek fellowship with none until thou hast found Me, and whensoever thou shalt long for Me, thou shalt find Me nigh unto thee."

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<sup>37</sup> Rûmî.

<sup>38</sup> From a Ḥadīth.

<sup>39</sup> From a Ḥadīth.

<sup>40</sup> See the Seven Valleys, ¶ 44.

Whatever high proofs and wondrous allusions are recounted herein concern but a single letter and a single point. For such is God's method, and no change canst thou find in His mode of dealing.<sup>41</sup>

I undertook to write this epistle some time ago in thy remembrance, and, since thy letter had not reached Me yet, I began with a few words of grievance and reproach. Now, thy new missive hath dispelled that feeling and hath caused Me to send thee this letter. To speak of My love for thine eminence is needless. "Sufficient witness is God unto us."<sup>42</sup>

As for his eminence Ṣhayḵ Muḥammad — may God, the Exalted, bless him! — I shall confine Myself to the two following lines, which I request be delivered to him:

I seek thy nearness, more desired than heaven in mine eyes;  
I see thy visage, fairer than the bowers of Paradise.

When I entrusted this message of love to My pen, it refused the burden and swooned away. Then, coming to itself, it spoke and said, "Glory be to Thee! To Thee do I turn in penitence, and I am the first of them that implore Thy pardon."<sup>43</sup> All praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds!

Let us tell, some other day  
This parting hurt and woe;  
Let us write, some other way,  
Love's secrets — better so.  
Leave blood and noise and all of these,  
And say no more of Shams-i-Tabríz.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Qur'án 35:43, 48:23.

<sup>42</sup> Qur'án 4:166.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Qur'án 7:143.

<sup>44</sup> Rúmí. Shams-i-Tabríz was the Ṣúfí who exerted a powerful influence on Rúmí, diverting his attention from science to mysticism. A great part of Rúmí's works are dedicated to him.



Peace be upon thee, and upon them who circle round thee and attain thy presence.

That which I had written ere this hath been eaten by the flies, so rich was the ink to their taste,  
even as Sa'dí hath said:

I write no more, beleaguered by the flies  
That my sweet words have drawn about the page.

And now the hand can write no more, and pleadeth that this is enough. Wherefore do I say: Far  
from the glory of my Lord, the All-Glorious, be that which His creatures affirm of Him!