

Tiny Tales from the Sufis



TINY TALES
FROM THE
SUFIS



Laura Gibbs



Tiny Tales from the Sufis by Laura Gibbs is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), except where otherwise noted.

Contents

[About This Book](#)

[1](#)

[The Stories](#)

[3](#)

[Story Title Index](#)

[205](#)

[Story Sources](#)

[212](#)

About This Book

The Sufis are spiritual seekers in the Islamic tradition, and much Sufi wisdom is conveyed in story form. In this book you will find stories from the Persian poet Rumi and other Sufi saints, along with stories from modern Sufi teachers such as Inayat Khan. You will meet the mad lover Majnun in these pages, and also the wise fool Nasruddin. Sufi stories aim to jolt you into a new awareness of reality, and, like parables, the stories sometimes conceal their deeper meaning. Look beneath the surface; you might realize the story is about you. Find out more here:

Sufis.LauraGibbs.net

The paragraph you just read about the Sufis is 100 words long, as is this paragraph, and that's also the length of each story in this book. The stories go fast, but you can slow down when you find one you like. Read it again. Let it sink in. Maybe even write your own version of the story, using your imagination to add more details. Meanwhile, if you don't like a story, don't get bogged down; just move on to the next one. There are more 100-word stories from the Sufis, along with stories from other cultural traditions, at:

100Words.LauraGibbs.net

The Stories



1. A Handful of Dust

God told Gabriel, “Fetch me a handful of Earth’s dust.”

“No!” said Earth. She didn’t want God to create Adam.

God sent Michael. Earth refused.

Then Seraphiel. Earth refused.

Finally, God sent Azrael.

“I cannot fail to accomplish God’s command,” Azrael said to Earth.

They debated back and forth, and when Earth was distracted by their argument, Azrael snatched the handful of dust.

God then appointed Azrael as the Angel of Death.

“But everyone will hate and fear me,” said Azrael.

“I will create fevers and sicknesses,” God replied, “and weapons of war. They will bear the blame, not you.”

2. Noah and Canaan

God flooded the whole earth.

Deep waters covered all the land.

Noah and his family were safe in the ark upon the waters, but Noah's son Canaan was trying to swim on his own.

"I won't get into Noah's ark!" he shouted.

Noah shouted back, "But I'm your father! Get into the ark!"

"You are my enemy. I defy you!" said Canaan. "I can swim! I'll swim to the mountain-top to find salvation."

"God is the only salvation!" replied Noah. "Get into the ark!"

"No!" said Canaan. "Never!"

And then a great wave smashed down upon Canaan, and he drowned.

3. The Child in the Shipwreck

“Why are you grieving?” God asked Azrael, Angel of Death.

“Because of the child from the shipwreck,” said Azrael. “Remember? I saw a mother and child clinging to a plank. You let me save the mother, but not the child. I’m still grieving.”

“Hear what happened next,” God replied. “I told the waves to bear the child to an island. A leopardess nursed him. The fairies taught him. But that blessed child grew up to become Nimrod, an unbeliever who curses my name and persecutes my prophet Abraham, casting him into the fire. That’s the child for whom you grieve!”

4. Abraham in the Fire

There is a living fire that gives life, and a death-dealing fire that brings fear. All believers should burn with the living fire as Abraham did, the son of Azar.

Azar was a maker of idols, but Abraham smashed the idols of the temple with an ax. Abraham spared only the largest idol, putting the ax in the idol's hands.

“Who smashed the idols?” shouted the people.

“Just ask the idol with the ax in its hands!” Abraham replied.

Enraged, King Nimrod threw Abraham into the fire, but with God's help, Abraham did not die in the fire: Abraham lived.

5. The Sound of Joseph's Cup

During a famine, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt for relief.

Joseph received them, his face covered with a veil.

As they spoke, Joseph kept striking a cup which resounded mournfully.

Finally, Joseph's brothers could bear it no longer. "What is the meaning of this mournful sound?" they asked.

Joseph struck the cup. "The cup says you had a brother named Joseph."

Again. "It says you threw Joseph into a well."

Again. "You sold him into slavery."

Again. "You told your father his son was dead."

Joseph's brothers all wept and were afraid.

Now they were the ones in the well.

6. Pharaoh and the Newborns

Pharaoh's astrologers predicted the night of Moses's conception, and nine months later, Pharaoh summoned the Israelite mothers and their newborns.

"Bring your babes," Pharaoh proclaimed, "and I will give you golden gifts."

Then, when the women came, Pharaoh's soldiers executed every male child.

Moses's mother was more cautious. She didn't go to Pharaoh, and when soldiers came looking for her, she hid Moses in the oven.

"God protect him!" she prayed as she threw Moses into the fire.

The soldiers came, and they did not find the child.

By God's grace, Moses survived the fire: it did not burn him.

7. Moses and Khidr

Moses was traveling with Khidr, his teacher.

“Obey,” Khidr told Moses, “and be silent.”

They saw a child drowning in a river. “Save him!” shouted Moses.

“Be silent,” Khidr said, “and obey.”

They saw a ship sinking in a lake. “Save them!” shouted Moses.

“You are not being silent,” said Khidr. “You are not obeying.”

Only later did Khidr explain. “The boy who drowned would have led the world into cataclysmic war if he had lived. The boat was full of pirates who were ready to attack a ship of pilgrims. God is behind it all; be silent, and obey.”

8. The Language of Animals

A man said to Moses, “Teach me the language of animals!”

“You’ll regret it,” Moses warned him, but the man insisted.

So Moses taught him.

The man then understood what the animals said.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo! Horse will die today!” shouted the rooster.

So the man sold his horse.

The next morning: “Cock-a-doodle-doo! Slave will die today.”

So the man sold his slave.

The next morning, the man was shocked to hear: “Cock-a-doodle-doo! Master will die today.”

The man ran to Moses for help. “Save me from this doom!”

“Go sell yourself if you can,” said Moses. “There’s nothing I can do.”

9. Moses and the Bearded Dervish

A dervish begged Moses for help. “Please ask God why I can’t make spiritual progress despite my endless prayers and deep devotion.”

When Moses asked God, God explained, “That dervish is obsessed with his beautiful bushy beard. He even interrupts his prayers to comb his beard. His beard obsession is blocking his progress.”

Moses told the dervish what God said, and the dervish immediately began tearing out his beard, wailing.

The angel Gabriel then appeared to Moses. “Look at that poor dervish!” Gabriel scoffed. “While tearing out his beard, he’s just as obsessed with it now as he was before.”

10. Moses and the Shepherd

Moses overheard a shepherd in the desert. “I will darn your socks!” said the shepherd. “I will kiss your hands and rub your feet! I will comb your hair and remove all the lice!”

“Surely you’re not speaking to me,” Moses called out. “Who are you talking to?”

“To the Creator! God! My beloved!” replied the shepherd.

“You can’t talk to God like that,” said Moses indignantly.

Ashamed, the faithful shepherd began to weep.

Then God rebuked Moses. “How dare you scoff at this shepherd’s devotion? I hear the heart, not the words. Let love’s fire burn in every heart!”

11. God Questions Moses

“Moses!” God called. “Moses! Why didn’t you visit me when I was sick?”

“I don’t understand,” Moses replied. “You are All-Powerful and All-Perfect! How could you be sick?”

But God didn’t answer Moses’s question. Instead, God said, “When I was sick, why didn’t you ask after me?”

“God, I still don’t understand,” replied Moses. “How could you be sick?”

“When my servant is sick, then I am sick,” God replied. “Why didn’t you visit me when I was sick?”

Moses wept and said, “O God, now I understand. I will ask after your servants and visit them in their sickness.”

12. Moses Questions God

Moses once asked God, “Why do you destroy the life you have brought forth?”

God did not answer the question but only said, “Go sow a field with seed, and then you will know.”

Moses sowed, the crop grew, and the ears of wheat waved in the wind. Moses took a sickle and began the harvest.

Then God’s voice rang out. “Why do you destroy the life you have brought forth?”

“Because I must separate the straw and grain on the threshing floor,” Moses replied.

“If you understand how to do that,” replied God, “then know that I do likewise.”

13. Moses Seeks Advice from Iblis

“Moses!” said God. “I see that you are troubled. Go ask Iblis for advice.”

So Moses went to see Iblis, who had once been a heavenly angel but who had rebelled and been cast out.

“God sent me to you for advice,” Moses said to Iblis.

“My advice is simple,” replied Iblis. “Never say ‘I’ about anything. Set aside all ego. That way you won’t become like me. Your vanity and self-pride, your resentment, your envy and your anger are like dragons. Yet instead of subduing them, you pet them and cherish them, and you do so at your peril.”

14. Azrael and King Solomon

“Save me, King!” shouted Solomon’s courtier. “The angel of death looked at me angrily in the marketplace!”

“I cannot save you from Azrael,” Solomon replied.

“Command the winds to transport me to India; that way I’ll escape.”

Solomon commanded the winds; whoooosh... the winds carried the man to India.

The next day, Azrael visited Solomon’s court.

“Why did you look upon my courtier so angrily that he fled to India?” Solomon asked.

“I wasn’t angry at him,” Azrael replied. “I was simply astonished to see him there because I knew he was fated to die later that day in India.”

15. The Gnat and King Solomon

A gnat came to King Solomon's court with a complaint.

"We gnats beg you for protection from the wind!" shouted the gnat. "He blows us wherever he wants; we are powerless under his sway."

"Let us hear what the wind says about this," said King Solomon. "Wind, I summon you here to face your accuser!"

The wind rushed in, and the gnat flew away.

"Where are you going?" shouted Solomon. "The accused must confront his accuser!"

"The wind is my doom!" the gnat's voice cried faintly from far away. "I cannot breathe when he blows: in his presence, I'm nothing."

16. Jesus and the Jug of Water

Jesus and his companion drank from a stream.

“How sweet this water is!” Jesus said.

They filled a jug with water from the stream and continued their journey.

When Jesus felt thirsty, he drank from the jug but immediately spat it out. “I don’t understand!” he exclaimed. “It’s the same water. Why does it taste bitter?”

The jug itself answered Jesus. “I’m old as earth, made and remade many times, taking many forms; this time my form is that of a jug. I always carry the bitterness of death, and it is death’s bitterness you just tasted in my water.”

17. Jesus and the Name of God

A fool kept begging Jesus for the secret of resurrection. “Teach me the name of God that restores the dead to life!”

But Jesus refused.

“Look! Some bones!” the fool exclaimed. “You can recite the secret name and bring the bones to life.”

Jesus prayed, and God brought the bones back to life.

They were a lion’s bones, and the raging lion tore the fool to pieces.

“Why don’t you eat him?” Jesus asked the lion.

“I ate all I needed in life,” said the lion. “I killed this fool not for food, but so others can see and learn.”

18. Jesus and the Fool

A fool chased Jesus through the wilderness; Jesus fled as though from a lion.

“Why are you fleeing?” shouted the fool.

“I’m fleeing from you, fool!”

“But aren’t you Jesus who heals the deaf and the blind?”

“Yes.”

“Who brings life to birds made of clay?”

“Yes.”

“Then why are you afraid of me?” asked the fool.

“I can heal the sick and I can quicken lifeless matter, but there is nothing I can do for the fools. I have tried to save them, but a fool’s heart is hard; it is the sand in which no green can grow.”

19. Jesus Went Walking

The great teacher Al-Ghazali told this story about Jesus.

Jesus went walking along the road and saw a group of richly dressed people who all looked very sad.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“We are sorrowing because of our fear of Hell,” they replied.

Jesus continued walking and saw some more sad-looking people.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“We are anxious that we will not attain Paradise,” they replied.

Jesus continued and met a third group of people. Their clothes were humble, but their faces shone with joy.

“Rejoice!” they said. “We have seen the Truth!”

And Jesus rejoiced with those people.

20. The Dreams of the Three Travelers

Three men of different faiths traveled together: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. They begged for food and shared what they received.

One day they received four pieces of halvah.

Each ate one, and one piece was left.

They decided that whoever had the best dream would eat the last piece, and at dawn they reported their dreams.

“Moses led me up Mount Sinai, where fiery angels danced.”

“The Messiah led me through the gates of the heavenly city.”

“Muhammad came to me and said, ‘Moses took the one, and Jesus the other; you can eat the halvah now.’ So I did.”

21. The Sufi Who Went to Heaven

A Sufi dreamed he ascended to heaven.

“Rejoice!” the angels said. “Today is God’s birthday!”

Then the Sufi saw a holiday parade. Muhammad rode a white stallion, surrounded by angels and flocks of followers. Then came Krishna on a peacock, also with angels and followers. Next was Jesus. Buddha. Mahavira. So many holy leaders.

Finally there came an old man riding a donkey, all alone.

“Who are you?” the Sufi asked.

“I’m God,” he said, “and I’m alone here because my followers follow others.”

When he awoke, the Sufi decided to worship God only; he no longer followed any religion.

22. The Bundles of Misery

A wretched man prayed, “God, I’m miserable! Let me trade my misery for another’s!”

God’s voice boomed from the sky. “Everyone, gather your miseries into a bundle and come to the town square.”

The wretched man gathered his miseries and was shocked to see people coming to the town square with bundles far bigger than his. Even people he thought prosperous! Even they had huge bundles.

“Put your bundles down,” God commanded. “And now, pick any bundle you want.”

“Who knows about those other bundles?” the wretched man thought. “This burden I know.”

And thus everyone chose their own bundle.

23. The Dervish and the Ship's Captain

A dervish was crossing the sea on a ship.

“Someone has stolen my bag of gold!” shrieked one of the ship’s passengers, and the captain ordered a search of everyone on board.

Suspicion soon fell on the dervish. “Strip off your clothes!” said the captain.

But the dervish said, “O God, do thy will!”

And from the sea thousands of fishes arose, each bearing a priceless pearl in its mouth.

The dervish grabbed a handful of pearls, cast them on the ship’s deck, and then rose up into the air. “Keep your ship!” he proclaimed. “I will go with God!”

24. The Man of Baghdad's Treasure

A man of Baghdad heard a voice in a dream. "Go to Cairo to find the treasure!"

He spent every penny on the journey.

Then, with no money for a room, he wandered Cairo's streets.

A patrolman accosted him, and he explained about the dream that brought him to Cairo.

The patrolman laughed. "You can't put stock in dreams!" he said. "I often have a dream about Baghdad where I see treasure buried under a house..."

As the patrolman described the dream, the man of Baghdad recognized his own house!

He hurried back to Baghdad and found the treasure there.

25. The Haunted Mosque

The town's mosque was haunted. Anyone seeking shelter there died before dawn.

The townspeople put up a sign: DANGER!

A wandering dervish arrived. "I'll sleep in the mosque," he declared. "I've died in the flames of love already; I fear nothing."

In the night, he heard a dreadful voice.

"Be afraid!" said the voice.

"I fear not!" he replied.

Five times the voice spoke; five times the dervish replied.

The fifth time, gold rained down, filling the mosque.

The dervish worked until dawn hauling out the gold.

"Fear not," said the dervish, and he gave the gold to the townspeople.

26. The Sultan's Seven Years

"Plunge your head into this basin of water," said the Sufi to the Sultan.

The Sultan found himself on a seashore.

A beautiful woman approached. "I must marry a shipwrecked man!" she said.

They married and had seven sons, living luxuriously for seven years.

"My wealth is gone," the woman said. "Provide for us!"

So the Sultan became a porter in the marketplace.

One day he bent down to wash his face in a basin of water and found himself in his old palace.

"Seven years..." muttered the Sultan.

"No," said the Sufi, smiling. "It was only a moment."

27. Turning Lead into Gold

A greedy king wanted to turn lead into gold, so he found a teacher who could do this.

“If you too want this power,” said the teacher, “you must spend twelve years with me in the forest as my disciple.”

Greedy for gold, the king agreed.

Together with the teacher’s other disciples, the king endured pain and discomfort year after year.

After twelve years, the teacher taught him the mantra for turning metal into gold and rocks into jewels.

But the king now realized that such wealth meant nothing.

He chose instead to remain in the forest with his teacher.

28. The Water of Old

“Store water now,” warned Khidr. “New water is coming that will drive you mad.”

Only one man followed Khidr’s advice.

The rivers, lakes, and oceans dried up. Then rains fell: rains of new water.

People drank the new water, and they lost their minds.

Meanwhile, the one man kept drinking the old water.

He knew everyone was mad, but they said he was mad. He remembered what had happened; they said he was imagining things.

Finally, he too drank the new water.

He also lost his mind, and he no longer remembered where he had stored the water of old.

29. The Stream in the Desert

A mountain stream flowed down into the desert.

There, the stream saw the wind crossing the desert. "I too want to cross over!" shouted the stream.

"Let the wind absorb you," advised the sand. "The wind will take you to the ocean."

"But I'm a stream! I don't want to be absorbed by the wind, and I've never heard of this ocean you speak of."

"Trust me," said the sand. "I know. I myself stretch to the ocean."

So the stream released itself into the arms of the wind, and later, the stream fell into the ocean, drop by drop.

30. The Bread and the Ocean

An old man went on a long ocean voyage.

After a while, the only food he had left was a crust of bread, so stale and hard that he couldn't eat it. The old man was hungry, but the bread was no good to him, so he threw it into the water.

A wave swept the bread away and said to it, "Who are you?"

"I'm just a hard, dry crust of bread that nobody even wants," the bread replied.

"Stay with us here and get soaked," said the wave. "Then we shall all be part of the ocean together."

31. Qays and Layla in Love

A boy named Qays and a girl named Layla once fell completely in love.

Layla could see only Qays, and Qays could see only Layla; there was no one else.

When the teacher asked Qays to recite aloud, he repeated “Layla Layla Layla.” That was all he could see.

When the teacher dictated, Layla wrote “Qays Qays Qays,” covering her slate with his name. That was all she could hear.

Qays later became known as Majnun – “madman” – because of his love for Layla.

For the lovers, there is nothing but their beloved in the world.

The beloved is their world.

32. Majnun and Layla's Dog

Qays loved Layla, and she loved him.

But the greatness of Qays' love made him act strangely, and people started calling him "madman" – Majnun.

Majnun's parents begged Layla's family to let them marry.

Layla's parents agreed, provided Majnun wasn't really mad.

When they went to visit Layla's family, her little dog ran out to greet them.

Seeing her dog, Majnun was overcome with emotion. "This is Layla's dog!" he thought. He fell to the ground, kissing the dog's feet. "My love, my love!" he groaned.

"He really is Majnun!" shouted Layla's parents, and they promised her in marriage to another.

33. Majnun and Layla's Beauty

When the people heard Majnun raving about Layla's beauty, they laughed.

"She's attractive, to be sure," they said, "but there are thousands of ravishing women in the city who are far more beautiful than she is."

"You understand nothing," Majnun replied. "The outward form is just the pitcher. God has poured wine for me from that pitcher, and I am drunk on her beauty. For you, he pours forth nothing but vinegar. God can pour forth honey or poison from the same pitcher. You can see the pitcher from the outside, but you do not know what is hidden inside."

34. Majnun's Eyes

Majnun was completely devoted to Layla, but Layla's parents were alarmed by Majnun's strange behavior, so they arranged for her to marry someone else.

Thus separated from his beloved Layla, Majnun fell into despair. His behavior grew more and more bizarre.

Majnun's family tried to help, but they could find no cure for his lovesickness.

"Layla is not even all that beautiful!" his friends and relatives told him. "We can find someone for you who is even more beautiful than Layla."

"You understand nothing," Majnun replied. "To see the beauty of Layla, you must see with the eyes of Majnun."

35. Majnun and the Letter-Carrier

Majnun loved Layla, and she loved him, but her parents arranged for her to marry someone else who lived in a city that was a hundred miles away.

Majnun sought out the letter-carrier. "I need you to take a message to Layla."

The letter-carrier agreed, and Majnun walked alongside him, dictating his message of love.

He walked ten miles, speaking only of Layla.

"Will your message never end?" the letter-carrier asked.

Majnun didn't stop.

Ten miles.

Another ten miles.

Majnun walked a hundred miles speaking only of Layla.

He did not need the letter-carrier after all: Majnun himself had come.

36. Majnun and the Shepherd

Majnun followed his beloved Layla's caravan into the desert, but her parents wouldn't let him near her.

Mad with love, he persuaded a shepherd to loan him a sheepskin. "Disguised as a sheep, I will join your flock and when you lead your flock past Layla's tent, I might catch the scent of her perfume."

But when they reached Layla's tent and Majnun smelled Layla's perfume, he fainted.

The shepherd had to carry the unconscious Majnun back out into the desert.

The shepherd then threw water on Majnun's face, reviving him, but the water could not cool his burning love.

37. Majnun and the Caravan

As Majnun roamed the desert, grieving because of his separation from Layla, he chanced upon a caravan.

The merchants invited him to sit by their campfire, having heard of this strange madman and of his love for Layla.

“Surely the time has come to set this love aside,” one of the merchants said to Majnun. “You could go back to your old life, and everyone would praise you for making a wise choice.”

“I don’t want everyone’s praise!” Majnun shouted. “I refuse such praise! An insult from Layla is worth more to me than a thousand compliments from anyone else.”

38. Majnun's Feet

Majnun had made a long journey to the city where his beloved Layla lived with her husband. He knew that this was her city, but he did not know where exactly she lived.

North? South? East? West?

Layla could be anywhere.

Everywhere.

“It would be rude for me to sleep with my feet stretched in her direction,” Majnun thought to himself.

He tried to sleep standing up, but he was afraid he might fall down in his sleep.

“I need to tie my feet with a rope and suspend myself from a beam,” Majnun decided, and so he did.

Madman.

39. Majnun among the Beggars

Knowing Majnun had come to see her and was living among the beggars, Layla sent her maid with baskets of food to give him.

But another beggar, greedy for food, said, "I'm Majnun!"

He ate the food, and Majnun said nothing.

The beggar grew fat on Layla's gifts, day after day.

Majnun said nothing.

The maid told Layla that Majnun thanked her kindly. "He's starting to get quite fat," she added.

"That doesn't sound like Majnun!" Layla said.

Then the maid told her about the silent one. "He is sad, and never speaks."

"That one is my Majnun!" Layla cried.

40. Majnun's Blood

Layla needed her maid to find Majnun among the beggars, so she devised a test.

“Take this knife and tell them: Layla is ill, and Majnun’s blood is the only medicine that can cure her.”

Seeing the knife, Majnun didn’t hesitate. “Blood means nothing; I would give my life for her.”

But when he went to cut himself, not even a drop of blood came out. He had starved himself so long that he was only skin and bone.

Finally, he was able to draw forth a single drop.

“That’s all I have left,” he said. “It is for her.”

41. Majnun and the Tree

Layla's husband took her away to escape Majnun.

"I'll come back to you, Majnun!" she promised.

Majnun waited, standing propped against a tree. His hands clutched the branches; they became branches. His body became the tree.

"That tree is haunted!" people said. "It keeps saying Laaay-laaa."

When Layla returned, she learned of the ghost in the tree and realized it must be Majnun. She ran to the tree.

"I'm Layla!" she cried.

Majnun's voice echoed, "I'm Layla!"

"No, I'm Layla," she said.

"You are Layla?" he said. "Then I am ... not."

And he died.

"Majnun!" Layla cried.

And she died.

42. The Beggar and the King

A beggar fell at the king's feet, professing his love.

"For daring to love me," said the king, "you must choose: beheading or exile."

"O beloved king," replied the beggar, weeping, "I will go into exile."

But the king ordered the guards to behead him.

Later, in private, the king's minister asked, "Why did you execute that beggar?"

"Because he wasn't a true lover," replied the king. "If he truly loved me, he would have chosen death, and then I would have spared him and become his dervish. But he loved his head better; he didn't love me at all."

43. Knocking at the Door

A lover came to the house of the beloved and knocked on the door.

“Who is it?” asked the beloved.

“It is me,” replied the lover.

“Go away!” said the beloved. “This house does not have room for a you and a me.”

The lover went away into the wilderness to ponder these words. What did this mean? Love had pulled the lover to the house, and love continued to pull the lover to the house.

The lover went back and knocked again.

“Who is it?” asked the beloved.

“It is you,” replied the lover.

The door opened at once.

44. The Man without a Key

“Help!” a man shouted. “Has anyone found a key lying in the road? This is my house, this is my door, but I have lost my key.”

A wandering Sufi walked towards him.

“Do you have my key?” the man asked eagerly.

“No, I don’t have your key,” said the Sufi. “But don’t worry. Just stay here near the door, even though it’s shut. Be patient, and someone will open the door for you. You are lucky: I do not have a door or a key. I pray to God that I might find my own door, open or shut!”

45. The Traveler and the Teacher

A wealthy man had traveled far to meet a famous teacher. He had studied the teacher's words; now they would meet in person.

He reached the teacher's door and knocked.

"Come in!" said a friendly voice.

When he entered the room, he saw the teacher sitting on the floor, and there wasn't any furniture.

"But where is the furniture?" asked the traveler.

"Where is yours?" the teacher replied.

"I'm just a visitor here. It wouldn't make sense to try to carry furniture with me."

"In this world we're all just visitors," replied the teacher. "We're here, and then, we're gone."

46. The Palace with One Door

Fearing his enemies, a mighty king built his palace without windows. There was one door only, guarded by a thousand soldiers.

Then one day, the king took a walk.

A Sufi by the roadside laughed at him.

“Why are you laughing?” asked the king angrily.

“The door is still open to your enemies,” said the Sufi.
“You need to brick it in.”

“The palace would then be a tomb!” protested the king.

“So it is already,” replied the Sufi. “Eliminating doors and windows, you eliminated life. Widen the doors! Widen them until the walls are no more. That is life!”

47. The King's New Palace

A king had built the most splendid palace in the world, and he celebrated with a splendid feast.

The king then asked his guests, "What do you think of my new palace?"

Everyone praised the king's great achievement, but then a lone sage spoke forth. "Were it not for one flaw, O King, this palace could be a paradise on earth!"

"What flaw?" shouted the king in anger. "I see no flaw!"

"I'm referring to the door through which Azrael, the Angel of Death, will enter," replied the sage. "With all your wealth and power, you cannot close that door."

48. The Boy and his Candle

A wandering Sufi saw a little boy bringing a candle to the mosque.

The Sufi decided to tease the boy, asking, “Did you light the candle yourself?”

The little boy nodded.

“And what is the source of the light?” the Sufi asked.

“I don’t understand,” replied the boy.

“It was dark, and then it was light,” said the Sufi. “Where did the light come from?”

Smiling, the boy blew out his candle. “It was light, and now it is dark,” said the boy. “Where did the light go?”

Thus in the end the wise little boy had humbled the Sufi.

49. The Faithful Man's Shadow

A man worshiped God constantly. He danced, and he sang God's praises. Every step, every breath, all was for God. He cared nothing for himself; he cared only for God.

God wanted to reward this faithful man. "Ask for anything!" God said.

"I have everything," the man replied.

"Ask not for yourself," God suggested.

"On one condition," said the man.

"Name it," God replied.

"Let my shadow behind me work miracles, so I neither see it nor know it. My shadow, not me. That way I will not fall into the trap of ego from which love has freed me."

50. The Sufi and the Gravedigger

A Sufi wandered one day into the cemetery and saw an old gravedigger working there.

“Old man,” the Sufi said to him, “may I ask you a question?”

The gravedigger looked up from his work. “Of course,” he said. “Ask!”

“In the many years you have spent here in the cemetery digging graves, have you ever witnessed a miracle?”

The gravedigger laughed. “The only miracle I’ve witnessed is this: every day the dead come here and I bury them, but I still can’t master my own desires. People die every day, but the dog of desire inside me never dies.”

51. The King Enslaved

A king wished to honor a dervish.

“I’ll give you a gift,” said the king. “Tell me what you want!”

The dervish just laughed. “A slave doesn’t give gifts to his master; the slave’s life is already his.”

This made the king angry. “I’m the king!” he shouted.

“You may be the king,” replied the dervish, “but you are also the slave of my slaves, which makes me your master.”

The king stared at him in bewilderment.

“I’ve mastered both anger and lust, making them my slaves,” the dervish explained, “while you, though a king, are enslaved to them both.”

52. The Dervish and the Rich Man

A dervish invited a rich man to break the fast, offering him only dry bread.

The rich man later sent the dervish a purse containing a thousand gold coins.

The dervish returned the purse with a note: "Bread is useful; gold is not €" you only imagine it is."

The dervish then sent a beggar to the rich man's house.

The beggar returned and said, "He gave me nothing."

"Such foolishness!" said the dervish. "People think bread is equal to gold and try to exchange one for the other. Then, when a needy person asks for help, they don't help."

53. A Prayer for a Tyrant

There was a dervish whose prayers were very acceptable to God.

One day his wanderings took the dervish to Baghdad, and there the tyrannical governor summoned the dervish into his presence.

“Pray a good prayer for me,” the governor commanded.

The dervish prayed, “O God, please take away this man’s life!”

The governor shouted, “What kind of prayer is that?”

“It is a prayer for you and for the whole world,” replied the dervish. “Nothing in this world’s bazaar lasts forever. I prayed that you be free of life, and so then the world will be free of your tyranny.”

54. The Disciple Sentenced to Death

“The king will arrest you tomorrow,” a wise dervish told his disciple, and the dervish then told his disciple exactly what to do.

The next day, as foretold, the king arrested the disciple. “I sentence you to death,” he said.

The dervish rushed in, shouting, “No, kill me instead!”

“No!” shouted the disciple. “Kill me instead of the dervish.”

The tyrant was baffled. “What does this mean?”

“I know a secret prophecy,” said the dervish. “The man who dies today will rise from death and live forever.”

“Then kill me!” the king shouted.

The executioner killed him.

The dervish smiled.

55. The Teacher in the Tavern

A man saw a famous teacher enter a tavern. “That teacher is a Muhammad by day but an Abu Lahab by night!” he said in disgust.

“You’re wrong,” said one of the teacher’s disciples. “Come see.”

The man entered the tavern. “I see a goblet brimming with Satan’s piss in his hand!” he shouted.

“But you are mistaken, good man,” said the teacher calmly.

He gave the cup to the man, who saw it was full of honey.

Then the teacher said, “Bring me some wine!”

But all the wine in every wine-jar in the tavern had turned to honey.

56. The Wisest Man in the City

A farmer came to the city seeking advice. "I'm looking for the wisest man to advise me!" he said at the city gate.

The guard pointed to a disheveled old man who was playing marbles with some street-urchins. "You might give him a try."

The farmer approached the strange-looking man and, much to his surprise, he received very good advice.

"Thank you!" said the farmer. "But I don't understand: with all your wisdom, why are you playing marbles, cavorting with the children like this?"

"They wanted to make me mayor," the man explained. "Playing the fool was how I escaped!"

57. The Old Man and the Two Strangers

An old man sat outside the town gate.

A stranger arrived. "What's this town like? My hometown was full of thieves and liars. I need a new home."

"Thieves and liars here too," said the old man.

The stranger began to walk away.

Another stranger approached. "I'm looking for work. Is this a good town? In my hometown people are good and kind."

"Good and kind here too," said the old man.

The first stranger protested. "You really are a liar!"

"I speak the truth," the old man explained. "Wherever you go, you'll find people are just what you are."

58. Seeking the Tree of Heaven

A woman sought the Tree of Heaven.

She asked a dervish for help.

“I can teach you,” said the dervish, “but it takes thirty years.”

“I can’t wait,” she said.

“Then I can’t help you,” he replied. “Seek the dervish Arif.”

She sought Arif, who sent her to Hakim, then Majzub, Alim... so many teachers.

Thirty years passed.

Then she reached the garden: there was the Tree of Heaven!

And beneath it... the dervish.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were the Tree’s keeper?”

“You didn’t ask,” he said. “And I know the Tree fruits only once every thirty years.”

59. Advice to a Seeker

A young man left his home to seek a teacher.

Along the way, he found an old man sitting under a tree.

“Old man,” he said, “I seek a teacher. Where should I look?”

The old man smiled as he recited the names of many cities, near and far.

The young man thanked him and went from place to place, seeking.

Thirty years passed. Then, he understood.

He hurried back to the tree. The old man was still there, now even older.

“Why didn’t you reveal yourself then?” he asked.

“You weren’t ready,” said the old man. “Now you are.”

60. The Death of Socrates

Socrates had been condemned to death.

His pupils, grieving, gathered around him.

“After we take you up and wash you and wrap you in your shroud, where do you want us to bury you?” they asked.

“If you can find me,” he said, “bury me wherever you want. But will you be able to find me? I am not sure about that. At this moment I have not so much as a shred of knowledge of myself. If over the course of my long life I have not found myself, how do you expect to find me when I’m dead?”

61. Muhammad and the Eagle

At the time of prayer, Muhammad took off his shoes.

Then an eagle swooped down and grabbed one of the shoes.

Muhammad shouted at the eagle as it flew away, “O Creature-of-God, why do you act so rudely?”

The eagle then waved the shoe back and forth, and out tumbled a poisonous snake which fell to the ground and was killed.

The eagle then returned the shoe. “I apologize for acting rudely, O Chosen-of-God! I did so out of dire necessity; please forgive me.”

Your rudeness was kindness!’ exclaimed Muhammad. “I was thinking only of myself, but God sees all.”

62. Ali and his Servant

The prophet Muhammad had whispered to Ali's servant that Ali would die by the servant's own hand.

The servant begged Ali to slay him instead. "Let me not commit this terrible sin!" said the servant, weeping.

But Ali replied, "I won't attempt to evade what is fated for me by God."

"Let it fall to someone else!" pleaded the servant. "Slay me now, and then another may carry out God's will."

Again Ali refused. "God's word is written, and the ink of the Pen of Fate is dry. The deed is not yours, but God's doing: it is all One."

63. Ali and the Knight

Ali had defeated an enemy knight, but just as he was about to strike the death-blow the knight spat in Ali's face.

Ali immediately threw his sword away and said to the knight, "Arise!"

"I don't understand," said the knight as he got to his feet.

"I wield that sword for God," said Ali. "Let it not be said that I slew someone from anger. You spat upon me, and for that I forgive you. God's mercy has made me your friend, and I open my heart's door to you."

When he heard Ali's words, the knight converted to Islam.

64. When Hallaj Grew Pale

Hallaj dared to say, “I am the Truth” (Ana ‘l-Haqq). In other words: “I am God.”

So the people condemned Hallaj to death.

They impaled him, and they cut off his hands and feet.

The loss of blood made Hallaj grow pale, so he lifted up the stumps of his wrists and moved them across his face.

“I do not want to look pale,” he said, “because I do not want them to think I am afraid. With this blood I redden my face. Now when my executioner looks upon me, he will see that I am a brave man.”

65. The Caliph and the Pearl

Caliph Abdul-Aziz possessed a pearl of exquisite beauty, and he had it set in a ring of gold. All the courtiers of the Caliph's court admired this marvelous pearl.

A famine then swept through the country, and the people were in distress, so the Caliph decided to sell the priceless pearl to feed his people.

"But you will never acquire such a pearl again!" his courtiers warned him.

"I can't drink from this pitcher while my people have nothing but poison," the Caliph replied. "Better to see my gold ring without its pearl than to see my people in distress."

66. The King's Caravansary

A wandering Sufi demanded an audience with the king, Ibrahim ibn-Adham.

Intrigued, the king asked him, "What do you want?"

"I would like to spend the night here at your caravansary," said the Sufi.

"But this is no caravansary!" exclaimed the king. "This is the royal palace."

"I see only a caravansary," replied the Sufi calmly. "Who owned it before you?"

"My father ruled here before me," said the king. "He passed away."

"And before him?"

"His father," said the king, "who also passed away."

"People stay, and then they go." The Sufi smiled. "A caravansary, just as I said."

67. King Ibrahim on the Roof

King Ibrahim ibn-Adham still sat on the throne; he had not yet become a dervish.

One night, the king heard heavy footsteps on the palace roof.

“Who dares disturb my peace?” he wondered, and he went to investigate.

On the roof he saw people, strangers he had never seen before, running back and forth.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he shouted.

“We’re looking for camels,” they said.

“Camels?” exclaimed the king. “Who looks for camels on the roof of a palace?”

“And who looks for God while sitting on a royal throne?” they replied.

And then... the strangers vanished.

68. King Ibrahim Hears the Voice

King Ibrahim ibn-Adham was a skilled horseman and hunter.

One day as he chased a deer, he heard a voice shout, “O Ibrahim, were you created for this?”

He thought he was imagining things, and he continued the chase.

Then he heard the voice again. “Were you created for this?”

He continued the chase.

A third time: “I did not create you for this!”

Ibrahim was shaken. “I do not know why God created me,” he realized, “but I will not rest until I know.”

He renounced the throne and became a Sufi, dwelling in the ruins of the desert.

69. King Ibrahim and the Needle

King Ibrahim ibn-Adham had renounced his throne and became a wandering Sufi.

One day as he sat by the seashore, using a needle to stitch his patched cloak, a nobleman walked by and saw him.

“That is King Ibrahim ibn-Adham!” he thought. “What is he doing here, darning a cloak?”

The saint read his thoughts and threw his needle into the sea. He then shouted, “Come forth, Needle!”

At his words, thousands of fish rose up from the water, each bearing a golden needle in its mouth.

“Behold the kingdom!” Ibrahim said, smiling. “It is all the love of God.”

70. King Ibrahim and the Old Sufi

An old Sufi came looking for Ibrahim in the wilderness.

Ibrahim welcomed him and served him a splendid banquet.

“How is this possible?” asked the old man, amazed.

“God provides,” said Ibrahim, smiling kindly.

“How long have you been a Sufi?” the old man asked.

“I gave up my throne two years ago.”

“But I’ve been a seeker for thirty years and God doesn’t provide for me like this.”

God’s own voice rang out. “Ibrahim never thinks about the throne he gave up, while you never stop thinking about the sacrifices you have made.”

At last, the old Sufi understood.

71. Rabia's House

Rabia lived as a slave, dwelling in the ruins.

Her master, impressed by her devotions, decided to give her a house.

“You cannot live in those ruins,” he said. “Come live in this house instead!”

Rabia moved into the house, but the fine furnishings burdened her heart, and locking the door with a key made her feel constricted in spirit.

So Rabia went to her master and gave the keys back. “When I had no house, nothing stood between me and God,” she said. “I will go back to the ruins now; that is where I will find my beloved.”

72. Rabia and the Governor of Basra

Rabia earned the admiration of many men, but she rejected their proposals of marriage.

When the governor of Basra implored her to marry him, she said, “Only someone who exists can enter into marriage, but “I” do not exist. I don’t belong to myself; I belong only to God.”

“Please!” he said. “If you marry me, I’ll give you all my wealth!”

“Even if you gave me all your wealth, what difference would that make?” replied Rabia. “How could I devote myself to you when I cannot turn from God for even as long as the blink of an eye?”

73. Rabia's Total Devotion

So great was Rabia's devotion to God that she had no time for anything else, neither love nor hate.

"Don't you revile Satan?" someone asked.

"I do," she said. "But my love of the all-merciful God leaves no room for hatred of Satan."

One night the Prophet appeared to Rabia in a dream. "Do you love me?" he asked.

"O Prophet of God!" she exclaimed. "Who could not love you? I love you, but my heart is so filled with the love of God our Creator that there is no room there for love of his creation or his creatures."

74. Rabia and the Blanket

A friend gave Rabia four coins so she could buy a blanket. "This winter is very cold," she said to Rabia. "You need a blanket!"

So Rabia took the money and went to the market where she found a vendor selling blankets.

"Which blanket do you want?" the vendor asked her. "Perhaps this white blanket? Or this black one?"

Without a word, Rabia left the market and walked to the river. "Even before I burden myself with the blanket, I'm burdened with choosing a color. I want no such discord!" she said, and she threw the coins into the river.

75. Rabia and the Purse of Gold

A wealthy man wished to give Rabia a gift, so he brought her a purse of gold coins.

“God provides for everyone, even those who curse him,” Rabia said. “I don’t need your gold.”

The rich man still stood there, purse in hand.

“Take it away!” Rabia repeated. “I once used the light of the sultan’s lamp to sew by, but it bound my heart. I undid every stitch, and then I used the light of God’s sun to do my work. That is how I freed my heart. Do not ask me to bind my heart with this gold.”

76. Rabia and the Donkey

Rabia decided to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Then, in the middle of the desert, her donkey died. Her fellow pilgrims offered to let her ride with them, but she said, “Go on without me. I have come this far trusting in God, and I know God will provide.”

The caravan moved on, and Rabia prayed. “O God, you invited me to your dwelling, but you have let my donkey die. Is this how the king treats the women of his kingdom?”

Answering Rabia’s prayer, God resurrected the donkey, and then the donkey carried Rabia all the way to Mecca.

77. Rabia Breaks her Fast

Rabia was ready to break a long fast with milk, but a cat spilled the milk.

Rabia then reached for a water-jug, but her hands shook and she dropped the jug.

“Is this my reward, O God?” she cried.

“If you want, you can have all the world’s gifts,” God replied, “or you can have what I give you.”

“Give me your gifts, O God!” Rabia exclaimed.

A fruit-tree then sprang up inside the house. “This is the tree in Paradise with the fruit of your prayers. Eat!” said God.

Rabia ate, and she knew God was always with her.

78. Rabia and the Bread

Two famous scholars visited Rabia, and she offered them her last two rolls of bread.

At that moment a beggar arrived.

Rabia took the bread from the scholars and gave it to the beggar instead.

The scholars were astonished.

Moments later, the neighbor's daughter arrived. "My mother sends you these freshly baked rolls."

Rabia counted: eighteen rolls. "This isn't right," she said. "Take it away."

The girl took the bread, ran home, and then came back. "You were right!" she said. "My mother meant to send twenty rolls."

Rabia turned towards the scholars and smiled. "God repays our charity tenfold."

79. Rabia and the Preacher

There was a wise man of Basra who preached to the people. “The door will open to whoever knocks,” he proclaimed. “The door will open!”

As he preached this message, Rabia happened to hear him, and she laughed.

“I don’t understand you, woman,” he said to her. “Why are you laughing?”

“I’m laughing because you talk about the door opening,” Rabia told him. “What made you think that the door was ever closed?”

Her words enlightened him.

“I may be a man,” he admitted, “but I am an ignorant fool. It is the woman Rabia who has taught me wisdom.”

80. Rabia's Needle

Rabia was searching for something in the street.

“What did you lose?” the people asked.

“My needle,” she said.

They all looked for the needle.

Nothing.

“Where exactly do you think you dropped it?” they asked.

“I dropped it in my house,” she replied.

This made the people angry. “Why are we looking here in the street?”

“It's light here,” she replied. “It's dark in the house.”

The people were really angry now.

“You do the same,” she said, “searching outside for answers to questions whose answers are inside. You are looking where your eyes can see. Instead: look beyond!”

81. Rabia and Hasan

Hasan of Basra was a great mystic, but Rabia of Basra was greater.

Here is a story about the two of them:

Rabia was in her house, and Hasan came to see her.

“Come outside!” Hasan called to Rabia, who was inside. “The day is beautiful! The birds are singing, and the sun is shining. Why don’t you come outside?”

“Why don’t you come inside?” replied Rabia. “Outside is God’s creation, but here inside is God himself. When you are done with the outside and its pleasures, come inside. Here you can listen to God’s song and see God’s light.”

82. Rabia Instructs Hasan

“If you are a true Lover of God,” said Hasan, “you must be strong when the Beloved afflicts you.”

“Say it better!” said Rabia.

“You must be thankful when the Beloved afflicts you.”

“Say it even better!”

“You must rejoice when the Beloved afflicts you.”

“No!” said Rabia. “Love goes beyond even that: you must not even feel the pain of the affliction as you contemplate the Beloved. Remember the ladies of Egypt who felt no pain when they cut themselves with knives as they contemplated Joseph’s beauty. How much more true then must this be as we contemplate God!”

83. Rabia and Hasan by the Lake

Rabia and Hasan, both great seekers, sat beside a lake.

Wanting to impress Rabia, Hasan took his prayer rug and placed it upon the water. Hasan's rug floated on the water.

"Join me!" Hasan said to Rabia, proud of the power of his faith.

Rabia spread out her rug and it levitated in the air above Hasan.

"You are only doing what a fish can do," she said. "And what I am doing, any bird can do, as can any moth. But we have a greater calling. Instead of magic tricks and public displays, God asks us to go beyond."

84. Rabia and Sufyan

Sufyan of Basra asked Rabia, “Is there anything you desire?”

“Despite all your learning, you understand nothing,” Rabia replied. “I am God’s slave, and what does a slave have to do with desire? What God desires, I desires. I have everything I desire.”

“I understand your words, Rabia,” said Sufyan. “Now help me to understand myself.”

“You would be a good man if you didn’t love the world so much,” she said.

Then Sufyan prayed, “O God, be content with me!”

“How can you ask God to be content with you,” Rabia exclaimed, “when you are not content with God?”

85. Rabia and Riyah al-Qaysi

Riyah once visited Rabia when she was ill.

As he sat at her bedside, he lamented the woeful state of the world. "People are cruel and unkind," he said. "They commit sins but feel no shame."

Rabia said nothing.

"There are wars among the rich and powerful, while the poor suffer," he said.

Rabia said nothing.

He went on and on about the woes of the world until finally Rabia interrupted him. "You love the world very much," she said. "Too much. You speak about the world because you love it, and someone who loves something speaks about it constantly."

86. Rabia and the Villagers

Rabia wandered into a village, and the villagers asked her, “Where do you come from?”

“From the other world,” she said.

Puzzled, they asked her, “And where are you going?”

“To the other world,” Rabia replied.

“And what are you doing in our world?”

“I consume the bread of this world,” she explained, “but my thoughts are elsewhere. I don’t let what is inside me go out, nor do I let what is outside come in.”

“You sound like a steward!” they said.

“I am!” Rabia agreed. “But I’m a steward of the heart, not of this lump of clay.”

87. Rabia and Azrael

Rabia encountered Azrael, the Angel of Death.

“Who are you?” Rabia asked.

“Behold, mortal: I am the destroyer of delights!” said the Angel of Death.

“Tell me more,” said Rabia.

“Behold, mortal: I am the orphaner of children!” said the Angel of Death.

“Tell me more,” said Rabia.

“Behold, mortal: I am the widower of wives!” said the Angel of Death.

“O Angel, why do you only speak of negative things?” asked Rabia. “Destroyer of delights, orphaner of children, widower of wives. This is all true, but you might also say: I am the one who reunites friend with Friend.”

88. Rabia's Grave

Rabia dug a grave outside her house.

It was her own grave, dug deep down into the ground.

Rabia would go to the edge of this empty grave every morning and every evening, and she would say to herself, "This is where you shall be tomorrow."

Then she would conduct her other prayers and devotions.

Rabia did this every day.

Day after day.

Week after week.

Year after year.

Rabia stood at the edge of her grave every day for forty years, always repeating to herself, "This is where you shall be tomorrow."

That is how Rabia lived her life.

89. A Vision of Rabia

After Rabia's death, she appeared to the faithful in visions. They saw her running with a lit torch in one hand, and a bucket of water in the other.

"Where are you going?" they shouted. "What will you do with the fire and the water?"

"I'm going to Heaven to set it on fire, and then to Hell to extinguish its flames. I must remove the veils of Heaven and Hell," she said, "so people will seek God for God's own sake. If they love God only in hope of Paradise or in fear of Hell, they aren't true lovers."

90. Finding Bayazid

Bayazid of Bastam was a seeker.

He lived a long life and, when he was seventy-four, someone asked how old he was.

Bayazid replied, "I'm four years old now! For seventy years, I was hidden behind veils. I found myself only four years ago."

When Bayazid was a young man, a stranger came to Bastam looking for him. People directed the stranger to Bayazid's house. He knocked at the door, and Bayazid answered.

"I'm looking for Bayazid," the stranger said.

"I'm looking for him too!" replied Bayazid. "I've been looking for over thirty years, and I still haven't found him."

91. Bayazid's Pilgrimage

Bayazid was making the pilgrimage to Mecca. He met a dervish beside the road.

"Where are you headed?" the dervish asked.

"I am on my way to Mecca," said Bayazid.

"Is it a business trip?"

Bayazid was surprised. "No, I'm making the hajj. I will walk around the holy Kaaba, the house of God."

The dervish smiled. "You can walk around me instead."

Bayazid realized in his heart this was true. He walked around the dervish.

Later, when people asked Bayazid if he made the pilgrimage and walked around the Kaaba, he said, "I have walked around a living Kaaba."

92. Bayazid in Ecstasy

In ecstasy, Bayazid al-Bistami exclaimed, "I am God!"

His disciples were shocked. The next day they told him what had happened.

"If I do that again, strike me with your knives," Bayazid told them. "You must kill me."

Later, ecstasy transported again. "God is here in my cloak; why seek heaven and earth?"

The disciples struck with their knives, but Bayazid was not wounded. As they struck him, the disciples themselves were wounded in the very same parts of the body that they struck. Many died.

Thousands flocked to Bayazid in wonder. "Your body is no human body," they said.

93. Dhul-Nun the Madman

Dhul-Nun was acting strangely: screaming, shouting, pelting everyone with sticks and stones.

“He’s insane!” the people said, and they locked him up.

“Maybe he really has gone mad,” said some of his students.

“No,” said others. “He’s testing us!”

When his disciples came to see him, Dhul-Nun became even more agitated.

“We’re your students,” they protested. “We know you!”

“You don’t know me,” he yelled as he rolled in the dirt.

The students all ran away.

Then Dhul-Nun laughed.

“Why are you laughing?” asked a guard.

“They still haven’t learned to look beyond the surface,” said Dhul-Nun. “But they will.”

94. The Grieving Sufi and Shabli

A Sufi came to see Shabli, his teacher, weeping bitterly.

“Why are you weeping?” Shabli asked him.

“I had a friend whose beauty filled my heart. He died yesterday. Now I feel as if I will die of grief today.”

“Grieve not! You enjoyed that friendship while it lasted. You must seek another,” Shabli said. “But this time, take as your friend one who will not die, and then you will have no cause to grieve. This attachment to what is mortal will always end in grief. Go seek your beloved in that place beyond which there is no beyond.”

95. The Disciple and the Dove

A Sufi master gave his disciple a dove. “Take this dove,” he said, “and kill it somewhere where no one will see. Don’t return until you have completed this task!”

The disciple took the dove and left.

He returned three years later.

“Forgive me,” he said, “for I have failed. I climbed mountains, I explored caves, I looked everywhere for a place where God would not be there as a witness. But I could find no place without God, so I haven’t killed the dove.”

The master smiled. “Let the dove go free,” he said. “You have accomplished the mission.”

96. Junaid's Disciples and the Chickens

Junaid favored one disciple more than the others, but no one knew why; Junaid's favorite appeared to be a fool.

"Go to the market," Junaid said to his disciples one day, "and bring back a live chicken."

When they returned with their chickens, Junaid said, "Now, go somewhere no one can see and kill your chicken."

The disciples rushed off to kill their chickens in secret, but the fool didn't move.

They then returned with their dead chickens and laughed at the fool.

Junaid said to him, "Explain yourself."

"There is nowhere God doesn't see," he replied, and Junaid smiled.

97. Junaid's New Neighbor

When Junaid went to greet his new neighbor, the old man snarled and slammed the door in his face.

After enduring the man's rude behavior for several weeks, Junaid despaired. "Oh God," he prayed, "please take this man's life."

That night, God came to Junaid in a dream. "This man has been your neighbor only a few weeks, but he has been my neighbor for sixty years. If I can abide with him, you can too."

When he awoke, Junaid remembered God's words. "I shall let the man be as he is," Junaid decided. "For who am I after all?"

98. Abu Mansur and the Sultan

The sultan summoned his minister, Abu Mansur. “Come at once!” said the sultan’s messenger.

“I must finish my prayers first,” said Abu Mansur.

When he finally arrived, the sultan shouted, “How dare you make me wait?”

“I serve God first,” Abu Mansur replied, “and then Your Majesty.”

The sultan could not protest.

Only Abu Mansur knew that he had delayed for a different reason. The sultan was hot-headed and usually summoned Abu Mansur when he wanted to put someone to death. Each time Abu Mansur delayed, the sultan’s anger cooled down, and Abu Mansur persuaded him to lighten the punishment.

99. Abu Said on the Path

Abu Said and his friend had studied together under the same teacher many years ago.

“Now you are a great teacher,” said his friend. “How did you learn so much more than I did?”

Abu Said said, “One day the lesson was ‘surrendering to God’s will is to be happy and content with what one has.’ What did you do with that lesson?” asked Abu Said.

“I wrote it down, memorized it, and then proceeded to the next lesson.”

“I memorized nothing,” said Abu Said. “I surrendered to God’s will and was happy and content, and on that path I reached the Truth.”

100. Fruits and Thorns

Abu Said lived a long life.

During the early part of his life, he followed the path of the ascetic, dwelling in the desert where he fasted, eating only bitter roots and thornbushes to stay alive.

In later years, he lived in the city, where he enjoyed melon balls and other fruits dipped in sugar.

Someone once asked him, “Which tastes better: the roots and thorns, or the melons and fruits?”

“If you are with God,” replied Abu Said, “the roots and thorns are sweeter than melons, but if you are apart from God, even the sugared fruits taste bitter.”

101. Abu Said's Recitations

Abu Said's disciples were worried by his behavior.

"When he recites from the Quran, he makes mistakes," said one disciple. "He keeps leaving out verses."

Another remarked, "Perhaps his mind is on other things."

"Or perhaps he is ill," said another.

Finally, they decided to ask Abu Said if something was the matter, and Abu Said just smiled. "Yes, I know I am skipping some verses. They are the verses about God's wrath."

The disciples still looked puzzled, so he explained. "For me, there is only God's mercy; I leave God's wrath to others. His mercy is what I recite."

102. Abu Said and the Learned Cleric

When Abu Said came to a certain city, the city's mayor summoned a learned cleric to challenge him. So, the first time that Abu Said spoke to his followers, this learned cleric was there, ready with a question.

"By law we cannot pray in a garment soaked in much blood," he said, "but much blood is that? Is the blood from a flea enough to pollute the garment?"

"I defer to your expertise regarding the blood of fleas," Abu Said replied. "I am not here to speak of fleas, but to guide those who are on the Path to God."

103. Abu Said and the Straight Path

One of Abu Said's disciples was quite wealthy and proud of his fine clothes. When the master and his disciples went walking, he liked to go in front, showing off his clothes.

"No!" said Abu Said. "Walk behind!" So the man walked behind.

"No! Walk on my right!" The man did so.

"No! Walk on my left!" The man did so.

"No! Ahead! Behind! Right! Left!" commanded Abu Said.

The bewildered disciple finally shouted, "Master, where should I be?"

"Put the self away and walk the straight path," replied Abu Said.

At those words, the man awoke and became enlightened.

104. Abu Said and God's Secret Mysteries

"I want to learn God's secret mysteries!" a man said to Abu Said.

Abu Said gave him a box. "Take this home with you. I will come tomorrow and reveal what's inside."

The man, however, couldn't resist. He opened the box as soon as he got home, and a mouse ran out, escaping before the man could catch it.

"I asked about God's secret mysteries, and instead you gave me a mouse!" the man shouted angrily at Abu Said the next day.

"I gave you a mouse," Abu Said replied, "to teach you what it means to keep a secret."

105. Abu Said and the Wealthy Disciple

A rich man became Abu Said's disciple, surrendering all his wealth. Then he became a beggar, surrendering every coin he received, but Abu Said ignored him.

One night he returned empty-handed, and the doorkeeper wouldn't admit him.

In despair, he wept. "God, I'm now a beggar. My teacher has abandoned me. There is only you, God! Don't leave me!"

God's light shone in his heart and he fainted from rapture.

When he awoke, he saw Abu Said and the other disciples rejoicing.

"You made me your idol," Abu Said explained. "You finally broke that idol; now you can worship God."

106. Abu Said and the Wine-Merchant

Abu Said preached God's Love and the Path of the Heart, but some of his followers wanted to punish wrongdoers instead.

"We should destroy the wine-merchant's shop!" they shouted. "It's a haven for gamblers."

"The wine-merchant in his earthly vanity has no time for God," said Abu Said, "but I am surprised that you have time for the wine-merchant. Busy yourself with God's love, nothing else."

Abu Said then went to the wine-merchant and apologized for his followers. "God's blessings upon you, my neighbor," he said.

Treated with loving kindness, the wine-merchant sold his shop and joined Abu Said's disciples.

107. Abu Said and the King of the Gamblers

One day in the market, Abu Said saw some half-naked, scruffy-looking men who were carrying an even more naked and more scruffy-looking man high on their shoulders.

Abu Said asked, “Who are you?”

“I am the King of the Gamblers!” the man replied. “My fellow gamblers made me their king because I lost everything I owned, and I did so without fear.”

Abu Said smiled. “I salute you, brave soul!” he said. Then he told his disciples, “May we all become kings as the King of the Gamblers has done, giving up all we have in order to gain God.”

108. Abu Said and the Bucket of Ashes

One day as Abu Said and his disciples were walking through the narrow streets of a city, a woman poured out a bucket of cold ashes from her balcony, and the ashes fell on top of Abu Said.

His disciples were furious at the woman, but Abu Said only laughed. "Like all sinners, I'm expecting the burning coals of Hell as my eternal punishment," he said. "So if I suffer only cold ashes like this instead, thanks be to God!"

Abu Said thus showed his humility while providing a lesson for his disciples, helping them to set aside their anger.

109. Abu Said and the Bags of Filth

One night Abu Said and his disciples walked by the waste-dump where cleaners hauled bags of filth from the latrines.

“The stench is suffocating!” the disciples said. “We should run away from here as fast as we can.”

“No!” said Abu Said. “Stand here for a moment and listen.”

“Listen to what?”

“Listen to what the bags are saying: We were once delicious food! We were ripe fruits and rich stews! But look at us now: you’ve ruined us! We should be escaping from you, but instead you want to escape from us. Just listen; that’s what the bags say.”

110. Abu Said's Horse

Bandits attacked Abu Said and his disciples on the road, and they stole Abu Said's horse.

When the bandit chief found out who the horse belonged to, he brought the horse back and apologized. "You are a good man, Abu Said," he said. "My men acted in ignorance; they did not know you."

But Abu Said told him to keep his horse. "It is good to let go, and when we let go of something, we do not seize it again."

These words enlightened the bandit chief, and he quit his life of crime and became a man of peace.

111. Sultan Mahmud's Golden Bracelet

One night Sultan Mahmud rode out alone and saw a man sifting earth, looking for gold. Around him were heaps of earth that he had already sifted.

Mahmud approached quietly, threw a golden bracelet among the heaps of earth, and then rode away.

The next night, Mahmud came back, and the man was still there, sifting.

“Surely the gold you found last night would suffice you for many years!” Mahmud said. “Why are you still sifting?”

“I found a dazzling golden bracelet!” the man replied. “Finding such treasure makes me even more eager to keep sifting. Now I'll never stop!”

112. Sultan Mahmud and his Servants

The sultan had ten servants, and he wanted to select one as his personal attendant, so he gave each servant a wine-glass.

“Throw it to the ground!” he said.

All ten did as he commanded.

Next, the sultan asked each one. “Why did you break the wine-glass?”

“Because Your Highness commanded me,” they said, one after another after another.

But Ayaz realized that the sultan knew already what he had commanded, and he didn’t want to tell the sultan what he already knew. “I await Your Highness’s next command,” Ayaz replied.

So the sultan chose Ayaz as his personal attendant.

113. Sultan Mahmud Watches Ayaz

Ayaz was the sultan's most trusted servant, which made the other servants jealous. Ayaz had been a slave, but now he was the royal treasurer.

"He hides himself in the treasury every day!" they gossiped. "Surely he is stealing."

The sultan decided to watch in secret. He saw Ayaz go into the treasury and open the vault. Ayaz took something out; what was it? The tattered old clothes from his slave days! Ayaz kissed the clothes and then said aloud, "You were a slave until the sultan favored you; never forget."

So the sultan trusted Ayaz even more than before.

114. Sultan Mahmud and the Pearl

Sultan Mahmud had a priceless pearl.

“Crush it!” he commanded his vizier.

“I cannot destroy such a treasure!” the vizier protested.

The sultan smiled.

He tried another courtier, who refused, and another, and another. They all refused.

Then the sultan told Ayaz, “Crush it!”

Without hesitation, Ayaz crushed the pearl.

The courtiers shouted in dismay.

“The sultan’s command is more precious than any pearl!” declared Ayaz.

“Death to all my court,” shouted the sultan, “except Ayaz.”

Ayaz then interceded for them. “You are perfection,” he said. “Grant them perfect mercy.”

Thus Ayaz obeyed the sultan and saved the sultan’s court.

115. Ahmad Yasawi and the Seeker

A seeker came to see the Sufi master Ahmad Yasawi.

“I want to learn without books and without teachers,” the man said. “That way nothing will stand between me and the Truth; I want to be enlightened by the Truth directly.”

Ahmad Yasawi smiled at the foolish man. “But do you eat without a mouth? Are you nourished without a stomach? How would you eat if you did not have a mouth? What would be the point of eating without a stomach? You have all those physical organs for a reason, just as books and teachers exist for a reason.”

116. Abu Ali and the Old Woman

There was an old woman who wanted to make an offering to Abu Ali Daqqaq. "Please accept this piece of gold from me," she said.

But Abu Ali replied, "I can accept gifts from God only; I cannot accept this piece of gold from you."

At that, the old woman laughed. "You must be squint-eyed or something! Is that why you are seeing double? God is one with each of us: we are in God and with God. There is nothing else to see. All gifts come from God."

Then Abu Ali understood and he accepted the piece of gold.

117. Jafar Seeks a Teacher

Jafar of Portugal journeyed to Mecca, seeking a teacher.

There, a divine voice told him, “The greatest teacher is ibn-Arabi of Seville.”

Jafar returned to Europe, but this ibn-Arabi of Seville was just a schoolboy, not a teacher at all!

“Where can I find the greatest teacher?” Jafar asked him.

“I can’t tell,” said the boy. “Only time can tell.”

Thirty years passed, and Jafar was still searching.

He came to Aleppo. “Who is the greatest teacher?” he asked.

“Ibn-Arabi!” the people all said.

When ibn-Arabi saw Jafar, he smiled. “We meet in the right time and place at last!”

118. Little Rumi and the Angels

When Rumi was little, he went with the other boys in the neighborhood up to play on the roof.

“Let’s jump from one roof to another!” a boy said.

“That’s the kind of game that cats and dogs play,” said Rumi. “Let’s try something better: we can go up to heaven where the angels are!”

As Rumi spoke these words, he vanished.

His playmates shouted and yelled, frightened about what had happened.

Then Rumi reappeared. “Angels clad all in green took me up to heaven, but when I saw it frightened you, I told them to bring me back here.”

119. Sanai, The Court Poet

Sanai was court poet to King Bahram of Persia.

One day Sanai overheard an old Sufi scoffing at Bahram. "He's the world's greatest fool! His wealth is beyond counting, yet he wages war to gain more." Then the old man added, "And his poet is a fool too!"

"What do you mean?" asked Sanai.

"He squanders his God-given talent on an earthly king when he could sing the praises of heaven's own king."

"I am that poet," shouted Sanai, "and I have indeed been a fool, but I renounce my old ways and will now serve the king of kings."

120. Chishti the Musician

The great Sufi teacher, Chishti, was a musician.

Instead of saying the ritual prayers, he made music. Music was his prayer.

Another great Sufi, Jilani, wanted to visit Chishti. Out of respect, Chishti hid the instruments; Jilani was more orthodox, and Chishti did not want to offend his honored guest.

But when Jilani arrived and they sat together in silence, the instruments began to play on their own, filling the room with music.

Jilani smiled. “You do not need to hide your instruments,” he said to Chishti. “You cannot hide your instruments any more than you can hide your soul.”

121. Nimatullah and the Stolen Lamb

Emperor Tamerlane hated the Sufi Nimatullah and plotted against him. Pretending to honor Nimatullah with a feast, he served food that was haram (forbidden).

After Nimatullah ate, Tamerlane shouted, “You ate stolen lamb! It’s haram! You will die for your sin!”

“On Tamerlane’s orders, I stole the lamb from an old woman,” the cook explained.

Then the old woman shouted, “That man robbed me! I was on my way here to give the lamb to Nimatullah as a gift.”

Thus, the lamb was not haram: it was meant for Nimatullah all along! Tamerlane was but an instrument in God’s plan.

122. Jami and the Would-Be Disciple

Jami was a poet and Sufi teacher who lived in fifteenth-century Khorasan; he was born in the city of Jam (in what is now Ghor province in Afghanistan), hence his name: Jami, the man from Jam.

A young man came to Jami, hoping to become his disciple.

Jami had only one question that he asked this prospective pupil: "Have you ever loved anyone with all your heart and all your soul?"

"No," said the would-be disciple.

"Then you must go and love someone," said Jami, "and then you will be ready."

In every heart, there is a spark of fire.

123. Jami and the Physician's Son

There was a physician who had become wealthy and prosperous thanks to her medical skills. She decided to apprentice her son to study with Jami, the great Sufi teacher and poet.

Jami then assigned the physician's son to clean latrines.

The mother was upset when the boy told her about this, and she sent twelve of her household servants to go clean the latrines instead.

Jami sent the servants back to her, with this message: "If your son had a disease of the gallbladder, would you give the medicine to your servants, or would you give the medicine to him?"

124. Nasruddin and the Quick Learner

There was a would-be disciple who came to study with Nasruddin.

“I’m extremely intelligent,” he said to Nasruddin, “and a quick learner! I’m sure I will be one of your best pupils. How long do you think it will take me to become an accomplished Sufi master?”

“Ten years,” said Nasruddin.

The would-be disciple looked dejected. “What if I study twice as hard?”

“Twenty years,” said Nasruddin.

“That’s impossible!” exclaimed the disciple. “Didn’t you hear me? I told you I would be one of your best pupils. I really am a quick learner!”

“That’s exactly the problem,” said Nasruddin, smiling.

125. Nasruddin and the Scholar

A famous scholar asked Nasruddin to help him move beyond mere book learning. “Please accept me as your student!” he said.

Nasruddin agreed. “For the first week,” he said, “you must go to the marketplace each morning and evening, kiss the ground and then jump up, pulling on your ears and braying like a donkey.”

The scholar agreed. Reluctantly.

He came back a week later. “I did what you told me,” he said, “and everyone laughed. I felt like a fool, a complete and utter fool!”

“Excellent!” said Nasruddin. “That’s a remarkable insight to have gained in just one week.”

126. Nasruddin and the Would-Be Disciple

A would-be disciple came to see Nasruddin.

It was a cold day, and the disciple asked Nasruddin why he was blowing on his hands.

“I blow on my hands to warm them,” Nasruddin explained.

Later, Nasruddin filled two bowls of soup, taking one for himself and offering the other to his would-be disciple.

Then the disciple asked why Nasruddin was blowing on the soup.

“I blow on the soup to cool it,” Nasruddin explained.

“I can’t trust a teacher who uses the same technique for opposite purposes!” the disciple exclaimed, and he left.

Smiling, Nasruddin ate both bowls of soup.

127. A Conversation without Words

Nasruddin and his friend met a dervish in the road.

The dervish said nothing; he silently pointed at the sky.

Nasruddin's friend thought, "This madman could be dangerous!"

Nasruddin pulled a coil of rope from his bag, showing it to the dervish, who then continued on his way.

Nasruddin's friend thought, "I'm glad Nasruddin told the madman we'd tie him up if he became violent!"

But without words the dervish had said, "One truth covers all," and without words Nasruddin had replied, "To seek the truth by ordinary means is like trying to use a rope to climb the sky."

128. God Created the Camel

Nasruddin was proclaiming the glory of God's creation. "Everything is created in the best of all possible ways, guided by the infinite wisdom of our Creator."

The people stared at him expectantly, eager to hear more.

"Consider the camel!" Nasruddin continued. "Just imagine if God had created camels with wings. The sky would be dark with flying camels, and they would land on the rooftops and break all the roof-tiles, and they would also poop in the chimneys." He then paused for dramatic effect. "So, let us praise the Creator for his great wisdom in not creating camels with wings!"

129. Nasruddin's Sermon

Nasruddin was preaching in a village for the first time.

"Do you know what I'm going to say?" Nasruddin asked.

"No!" the people shouted.

"How can I preach to people so ignorant?" he said and left.

They begged him to come back.

"Do you know what I'm going to say?" he asked again.

"Yes!" they shouted.

"Good! We can all leave."

But they asked him to try one more time.

"Do you know what I'm going to say?" he asked.

"Yes!" shouted some. "No!" shouted others.

"So let those who know teach those who don't!"

That was Nasruddin's last sermon.

130. Nasruddin and the Pilgrims

Everyone in Nasruddin's village was preparing to go on a religious pilgrimage.

Everyone except Nasruddin.

All the other villagers loaded up their carts and wagons, their donkeys and camels, and then they set out down the road to begin their long journey.

Later that same day, Nasruddin came galloping up behind them on his donkey.

"What's wrong, Nasruddin?" they asked him in alarm.

"Where's my donkey?" he shouted. "I'm trying to find my donkey!"

They laughed. "You're riding him," they said. "You don't need to go looking for him."

"Really?" said Nasruddin. "So why do you go looking for God?"

131. Nasruddin and the Shrine

Nasruddin was traveling to a distant country.

Along the way, his donkey died of exhaustion, and Nasruddin buried him by the roadside.

As Nasruddin knelt there, weeping, a man saw him and began to weep also.

“Why are you weeping?” Nasruddin asked.

“Like you, I weep tears for the holy saint who’s buried here,” the man replied.

“There’s no saint here,” Nasruddin explained. “Just my donkey.”

But the man continued to weep.

Then he went and told others.

In time, pilgrims came from all over to visit the shrine of the saint.

Nasruddin, meanwhile, departed, continuing his journey on foot.

132. Nasruddin Crossing the Lake

Nasruddin was crossing a lake on a ferry loaded with passengers.

Unexpectedly, a storm arose, and the ferry tossed violently in the rising waves. The passengers started screaming, and many of them prayed loudly. "Save us, God!" they shouted.

Nasruddin, meanwhile, stayed completely calm.

The storm eventually died down, and the ferry reached the shore safely.

"How could you stay so calm?" someone asked Nasruddin. "There was nothing but some planks of wood between us and a watery death."

"There is often less than that between you and death in your everyday life," replied Nasruddin. "You just don't see it."

133. Nasruddin in a New Town

Nasruddin was visiting a new town for the first time. He didn't know anybody in the town, and he wasn't sure what to do or where to go; it made him feel uneasy.

He decided to enter the first door he found open: a carpenter's shop.

"Hello!" said the carpenter.

"Hello!" replied Nasruddin. "Did you see me just now walk into your shop?"

"Yes," replied the carpenter, not sure what Nasruddin was getting at.

"And have you ever seen me before?" asked Nasruddin.

"No, I've never seen you before," admitted the carpenter.

"Then how did you know it was me?"

134. Nasruddin Leaves the Tavern

It was late at night, and Nasruddin had spent the entire evening in a tavern, drinking and talking, talking and drinking. And drinking.

By the time he decided to head home, he was quite intoxicated.

As Nasruddin staggered through the streets, he ran into the night watchman.

“Who’s that there?” asked the watchman. “What are you doing out at this late hour? Where did you come from? Where are you going?”

“Those are all very important questions,” said Nasruddin, “very important indeed.” Then he smiled. “And if I knew the answers to your questions, I suppose I’d be home already.”

135. Nasruddin by Night

“You wouldn’t know it just by looking at me,” said Nasruddin, “but I have truly miraculous powers.”

Nasruddin’s friend laughed. “So tell me,” he said, “what is your most miraculous power?”

“I can see in the dark! In the darkest darkness, I can see as clearly as if it were broad daylight. I need no light of any kind.”

“Surely you’re joking!” his friend objected. “I’ve seen you carrying a lantern in the dark, just like everybody else does.”

“Of course!” said Nasruddin, smiling. “But I carry a lantern in the dark only so that others won’t run into me.”

136. Nasruddin and the Frogs

Nasruddin's friend saw him throwing money into a pool.

"Nasruddin! What on earth are you doing?" he asked.

Nasruddin smiled. "I'm paying the frogs."

"I don't understand," said his friend.

"Well, I was riding along and my donkey slipped. We were sliding right into the pool! But then the frogs started croaking, and they croaked so loudly that it scared the donkey, so he leaped back up onto solid ground, and we didn't end up in the water. Don't you think the frogs deserve a reward for saving us like that?"

Nasruddin smiled, and kept throwing money into the pool.

137. Nasruddin and the Man's Bag

Nasruddin saw a man weeping as he walked along the road.

“What’s wrong?” Nasruddin asked.

“I’ve lost everything. All I have left is here,” said the man, holding up a tattered bag.

Nasruddin grabbed the bag and ran.

The man shrieked. “Stop! STOP!”

Nasruddin ran until he was out of sight and then put the bag in the road for the man to find.

The man came trudging along, weeping even more loudly than before.

Then he saw his bag. “Oh, my bag!” he shouted. “I thought you were lost forever!”

From his hiding place in the bushes, Nasruddin smiled.

138. Nasruddin and the Drowning Man

Nasruddin heard people shouting by the lake.

He ran to investigate: a man had fallen in. The tax collector! He couldn't swim and was shouting for help.

"Give me your hand!" the people yelled, reaching out their hands for the man to grab. "We'll help you!" But he just kept flailing in the water.

Nasruddin shouted, "Take my hand!"

Immediately, he seized Nasruddin's hand and Nasruddin pulled him to safety.

"You need to understand people," Nasruddin explained. "He's a tax collector, so he's not going to give you anything. But if you tell him to take something, he'll take it!"

139. Nasruddin and the Music Teacher

Nasruddin had decided that he would like to learn to play the lute.

Nasruddin happened to have a lute already, but he did not have much money. He knew that would make it difficult to find a music teacher, but he was determined to succeed.

“Can you teach me to play the lute?” Nasruddin asked.

“I can,” said the teacher.

“And how much do you charge?” asked Nasruddin.

“Three silver coins for the first month, and then one silver coin monthly for the second month and thereafter.”

“Excellent!” said Nasruddin. “I’ll skip the first month and start with the second.”

140. Nasruddin at the Baths

Nasruddin went to the bathhouse.

When the attendant saw Nasruddin's shabby clothes, he treated him poorly, giving him a threadbare towel and only a tiny piece of soap. Nevertheless, after Nasruddin finished his bath, he tipped the attendant very generously.

On his next visit, the attendant greeted Nasruddin with great respect, remembering the generous tip. He gave Nasruddin several luxurious towels and a new bar of soap. But when he left, Nasruddin gave the attendant no tip at all.

"That's for last time," Nasruddin explained, "and the tip I gave you last time was for this time. Now we're even!"

141. A Sign for Nasruddin's Restaurant

Nasruddin made a sign for his new restaurant.

RESTAURANT

“You need to say more!” suggested a friend. So Nasruddin changed the sign:

RESTAURANT – FINEST FOOD

Another friend insisted, “It needs action!”

RESTAURANT – FINEST FOOD SERVED HERE

“Why here?” a third friend objected. “The location is obvious.”

RESTAURANT – FINEST FOOD SERVED

“What else would you do with food?” said a fourth friend.

RESTAURANT – FINEST FOOD

“That’s debatable,” complained a fifth friend. “Who’s to say what food is finest?”

RESTAURANT – FOOD

“All restaurants have food!” scoffed a sixth friend.

So Nasruddin ended up where he began:

RESTAURANT was all the sign said.

142. Nasruddin's Duck Soup

Nasruddin's relative showed up for dinner, bringing a duck.

Nasruddin made duck soup.

"Delicious!" said Nasruddin's relative.

The next day Nasruddin added water to the leftover soup.

A knock at the door: it was a friend of his relative, and he stayed for dinner. "Good soup!" the man said.

The next day Nasruddin added water to the leftover soup again.

Another knock: a friend of the friend of his relative. When Nasruddin served the soup, the man frowned. "It's not very good."

"What do you expect?" Nasruddin shouted. "It's the soup of the soup of the soup of the duck!"

143. Nasruddin and the Puddle

One day Nasruddin almost fell into a deep puddle; a friend grabbed his arm just in time.

Later, whenever this friend ran into Nasruddin, he would remind Nasruddin about it.

“Do you remember how I rescued you?”

“You had a close call with that puddle!”

“How lucky that I was there when you almost fell in the puddle!”

Finally Nasruddin couldn't take it anymore; he jumped into the deepest puddle he could find.

“See! I'm just as wet now as I would have been if I had never even met you!” Nasruddin shouted. “Can you leave me alone now, please?”

144. Nasruddin on the Way to the Cemetery

“What is it like to be dead?” Nasruddin asked his wife.

“How should I know?” she replied. “The dead are cold; that’s all I know.”

Chopping wood the next day, Nasruddin suddenly felt very cold. “I must be dead,” he thought. Then he lay down, because that’s what the dead do.

People found him there. “This poor man is dead!” they said, and carried him off to the cemetery.

As they argued at a crossroads about which way to go, Nasruddin spoke up. “Perhaps I can help,” he said. “If you don’t know the way, I can give you directions.”

145. A Beggar at the Door

A beggar came to a house. "A crust of bread, please, sir!" he said.

The homeowner opened the door and shouted, "What do you think this is: a bakery?"

"A bit of meat?"

"This isn't a butcher's shop, you fool!"

"A sip of water to quench my thirst?"

"Water? Does this look like a river to you?"

The beggar said nothing more, but walked in through the door, pulled up his cloak, and squatted down.

"Hey!" shouted the homeowner. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Since this house serves no useful purpose," said the beggar, "that makes it an outhouse."

146. The Wicked Man's Thornbush

A wicked man planted a thornbush in the road beside his house.

The people begged him to destroy the thornbush. "It tears our clothes!" they cried. "It pricks our hands and feet; we're bleeding."

The man didn't care. He did nothing.

"Uproot that thornbush!" ordered the mayor.

"Maybe tomorrow..." said the man. He did nothing.

Then the governor came. "Uproot it now!"

"Maybe later..." said the man. He did nothing.

Then the sultan came. The roots had grown deep; the thornbush couldn't be uprooted.

So the sultan set the thornbush on fire, and the wicked man's house burned down too.

147. The Peasant and the General

A peasant was plowing, and a general rode by.

The general's horse had a stone in his hoof and was lame. "I need your horse!" yelled the general. "I order you to give me your horse!"

"Why should I obey you?" the peasant shouted back.

"Because I'm a general in the army!"

"I know what an army is!" said the peasant. "I was in the army. I got all my orders from the sergeant. You're not a sergeant!"

"I'm a general!" shouted the general.

"I don't know what a general is. Go get a sergeant, and I'll listen to him!"

148. The Farmer and the Thief

A farmer caught a man stealing fruit from the trees in his orchard. "I'm going to thrash you!" the farmer shouted.

You can't do that! retorted the thief. "I am only God's servant eating of God's fruits. This is all God's doing."

But the farmer grabbed a stick and began beating the thief. "With God's stick God's servant is thrashing another servant of God. The stick is God's, and so is the back (thwack!) and the sides (thwack!) and the shoulders (thwack!)."

"You're right!" the thief shouted. "I repent. I acted of my own free will! It wasn't God's doing."

149. The Schoolboys and their Teacher

Some schoolboys were angry at their schoolteacher, so they decided to trick him.

“Teacher,” the schoolboys said to him, “you look so pale. Are you perhaps ill?”

“No, I feel fine!” said the teacher angrily. “Now, attend to your lessons.”

They continued day after day. All the schoolboys joined in.

“Are you sure you are well?”

“You look thin. Have you lost weight?”

“Should we fetch the doctor, sir?”

Finally, the teacher took to his bed. “I feel so sick!” he said. “I ache all over! I have sweats! Chills!”

School was canceled.

And it was all the schoolboys’ doing.

150. The Tanner who Fainted

A tanner who worked with stinking dung and urine wandered by accident one day into the perfumers' bazaar. The smell of the perfume overwhelmed him, and he fell unconscious on the spot.

People tried to revive him, sprinkling him with rose-water. They did not understand that the rose-water was causing his sickness, not curing it.

The tanner's own brother heard what had happened and came running with some dog-dung. "We must do what wise doctors advise: give the patient what he's used to."

It worked: the tanner revived as soon as he smelled the dung.

"Thank you, brother," he said.

151. The Bedouin's Pitcher of Water

A poor Bedouin woman urged her husband to take the king a gift so that they might receive a gift in return.

“But we have no gift to give,” he protested.

“Take the king a pitcher of water,” she replied. “Water is precious in the desert, and desert water is rare.”

So the husband took a pitcher of water to the royal city. With great care, he made the long journey, not spilling a drop.

The king accepted the water kindly and, in his generosity, he returned the pitcher to the Bedouin, but now the pitcher was filled with gold.

152. The Bedouin and his Two Sacks

A Bedouin was riding along on his camel, and the camel was carrying two huge sacks, one on each side.

“What’s in those two sacks?” a man asked the Bedouin.

“There’s grain in this sack,” replied the Bedouin, “and there’s sand in this sack.”

The man was puzzled. “What do you need a sack of sand for?”

“To keep things in balance,” the Bedouin explained.

“You fool!” said the man. “You can pour out the sand, and then pour half of the grain into that sack. The weight will be balanced, and the load will be lighter for your camel!”

153. A First Time at Sea

A king was making a sea voyage, but one of his servants had never been in a boat before. Stricken with terror, this servant sobbed and shouted, annoying the king.

A wise sailor took charge: he had the servant thrown into the sea, and then dragged by the hair to where he could grab hold of the ship's rudder.

The man clung there for an hour, and then they dragged him back into the boat.

He made no further complaints.

“Now he knows what the water is like,” said the wise sailor, “and he knows the value of a boat.”

154. The Patient Fisherman

A man was fishing at a pond. He sat patiently waiting for the fish to bite, and he had caught several fish already.

Another fisherman came. His line got tangled on some lotus roots in the pond. He tugged angrily, and as a result he snapped his fishing line, so he went away with nothing.

A third fisherman grew impatient. He cursed the pond and all the fish in it, yelling loudly, and then he broke his fishing rod in two and threw it into the pond. He also went away with nothing.

The first man just kept on fishing.

155. The Woman and the Brick Wall

There was a high brick wall. On one side there was a stream, and on the other side there was a thirsty woman. She could hear the babbling of the stream, but how to get to the water? She was like a fish on dry land!

The woman managed to wrench a brick out of the wall. Then she threw it over the top of the wall into the stream.

Splash! Then another. Another. Another.

The splashing sound itself helped soothe her thirst.

Another. Splash! Another. Another.

And finally: the woman broke through the wall, and she reached the water.

156. A Man Who Gathers Stones

Far away to the east, there is a man gathering stones. He bends down over the ground, and he picks up stones, one after another after another.

He does this without stopping.

As he gathers these stones, he weeps.

As his tears fall on the ground, the tears turn into stones.

There is a man who gathers stones. He bends down over the ground, and he picks up stones, one after another after another.

He does this without stopping.

He gathers. He weeps.

Stones.

There is a man who gathers stones...

Seek.

Keep seeking.

And lose yourself in the quest.

157. A Man Seeking a House

A man moved to a new town and needed a home. He asked his cousin, who lived in that town, to help him.

The man's cousin showed him a dilapidated house. "Here's a house! If it only had a roof, you'd find it very comfortable. And if it just had another room or two, it would be big enough for your whole family. And if you get a cat, the cat would get rid of the rats."

And so on.

"My dear cousin," said the man, "I cannot live in an if. I don't need ifs: I need a house!"

158. The Prisoner and the Prayer Rug

An honest man had been wrongly imprisoned.

His wife sent him a prayer rug that she had woven herself with an intricate pattern.

Kneeling upon the rug, the man prayed. Days and months passed, and as he prayed and gazed upon the rug, he finally realized the pattern was a map of the prison.

Committing the map to memory, the man escaped, leaving the rug behind for any other prisoners who could read the signs.

When he emerged from the prison, he found his wife there waiting, sure that someday he would emerge from the darkness back into the light.

159. The Princess and the Slave

A princess fell in love with a slave. She had to see him, but how?

The princess sent her handmaidens to him, and they gave him drugged wine. Then the handmaidens carried him, asleep, to the princess.

He awoke, and the princess took him into her bed.

Before dawn, the princess sent him to sleep again with more drugged wine, and the handmaids carried him back.

When he awoke the next morning, he did not know what to think. Was it a dream? Was it real?

He spent the rest of his life remembering that one night.

It was love.

160. The Contest of the Artists

The sultan invited Chinese artists and Greek artists to a contest. He gave the Chinese artists one room, another to the Greeks.

The Chinese artists covered the walls with paintings in a hundred colors.

The Greek artists used no paint. Instead, they scoured and polished the walls until they were mirrors.

The Chinese paintings were dazzling.

But the room of the Greeks was even more dazzling.

The sultan saw the Chinese paintings reflected there. He saw himself. He saw the world.

The Greek artists had put nothing there.

That nothing was everything.

They emptied themselves, making room for the all.

161. The King Rides to Damascus

Death appeared to the king in a dream. "I must take you at sunset tonight."

Terrified, the king summoned his minister. "Interpret this dream! What shall I do?"

"Sire," the minister replied, "you must take the swiftest horse and ride where Death will not find you. Head for Damascus!"

The king rode and rode, amazed at the horse's speed. At sunset, just outside Damascus, he stopped to water the horse.

"Thank you, good horse, for running so swiftly," he said.

"I also thank your good horse," said Death, who appeared out of nowhere. "I wasn't sure you'd arrive in time!"

162. The Old Man and the Doctor

An old man complained to his doctor, “My back aches.”

“That comes from old age,” said the doctor.

“And my vision is blurry.”

“That also sounds like old age,” replied the doctor.

The old man continued, “I’ve lost my appetite.”

“That often happens to old people,” the doctor observed.

The old man wheezed. “And I have trouble breathing.”

The doctor sighed. “That’s a common complaint among the elderly.”

“Is that all you have to say?” shouted the old man. “You sound like a donkey, not like a doctor.”

“Old people are prone to lose their temper too,” replied the doctor.

163. Sharing the Cucumbers

When workers brought their landlord a basket of cucumbers from the first harvest, the generous landlord distributed cucumbers to all the workers and then to the household servants, not keeping even one for himself.

The landlord then turned to a servant who was eating a cucumber and smiling happily. "Let me have a taste," he said to the servant.

The servant gave him the cucumber and, to his surprise, it was bitter.

"How can you smile eating something so bitter?" the landlord asked.

"The memory of sweet gifts you gave us in the past made me smile," the servant replied.

164. The Mayor's Servant and the Donkey

One of the mayor's servants needed to go to the market.

"I need a horse to ride," he said to the mayor.

"You can take that donkey over there," replied the mayor.

"I don't have a horse I can spare today."

"But I don't want that donkey!" protested the servant. "I know that donkey. He's obstinate. He bucks and insists on going backwards, not forwards. He follows his rump, not his head."

"Well," said the mayor, "you can point his rump in the direction of the market, and off you go!"

Sometimes you have to turn backward to move forward.

165. The Sufi and his Father

A Sufi was taking leave of his father.

“I just don’t understand you!” the father groaned. “Your ways are so strange! I don’t know what you are.”

The Sufi said, “A farmer placed a duck egg under a hen. The egg hatched, and the little duckling grew up with the hen and her other chicks. Then, one day, they walked by a pond. The duckling jumped in the water. He swam and splashed, while the mother hen stood clucking on the shore in alarm.”

The father understood. “I will stay here on the shore,” he said, “but you must go.”

166. The Elephant in the Dark

Travelers from India had brought an elephant to put on exhibit, and they kept it in a dark room.

Curious people crowded into the room. They had heard of “elephants” but they did not know what an elephant was.

In the dark, they felt the elephant.

One felt the trunk. “It’s a water-hose!”

Another grabbed the ear. “No, it’s a fan!”

Another rubbed the leg. “No, it’s a pillar!”

Another touched the back. “No, it’s a throne!”

In the dark, they could not understand what an elephant was.

To see and understand, you must open your eyes in the light.

167. The Lost Camel

You've lost your camel! The caravan is about to leave, but where has your camel gone?

"Has anyone seen my camel?" you shout. "I'll reward whoever can give me a clue."

One man says, "I saw a camel looking for grass to eat."

Another says, "Her ears were cropped."

And another, "The saddle-cloth was brightly embroidered."

Yet another, "She had only one eye."

And one more, "She had a bad case of the mange."

Everyone wants to tell you about the camel, wanting a reward for the clues they offer you. But who is going to help you find her?

168. The Wandering Sufi and his Donkey

A wandering Sufi arrived in a distant town and went to the local Sufi house. They welcomed him there, lodging his donkey in their stable.

To honor their guest, the Sufis wanted to arrange a celebration, but they had no money, so they sold the stranger's donkey to buy the food.

The celebration was magnificent!

As they danced in the circle, the Sufis all sang, "The donkey is gone! The donkey is gone!" The stranger, caught up in the ecstasy, also sang, "The donkey is gone!"

He was dismayed to learn the next morning that his donkey really was gone.

169. The Thief who Stole a Snake

A man caught a snake. "I shall sell this snake for a great price!" he thought.

But before he could sell the snake, a thief stole the snake from him.

The thief also hoped to sell the snake for a great price, but before he could sell the snake, it bit him and then slithered off into the darkness.

When the man found the thief, he was already dead.

"I prayed that God would give me back my snake," he exclaimed, "but now I realize that God has saved me. What I thought was a loss was instead my salvation!"

170. The Frozen Dragon

A snake-catcher hunting exotic snakes in the mountains found a mighty dragon. It had died in the cold, or so he thought.

“What a marvel!” he said. “I’ll exhibit this in the city and make a fortune!”

He tied the dragon with ropes and dragged it down into the city. The people came and marveled at the rare creature.

There, in the warmth of the sun and of all those human bodies, the dragon revived. Roaring, it burst free of the ropes and started eating the spectators.

“What have I done?” groaned the snake-catcher.

Then the dragon ate him too.

171. Shelter from the Storm

A couple were sleeping in their tiny hut.

“Help! Let me in!” a man shouted.

“There’s no room,” said the wife.

“It’s pouring rain,” said the husband. “We’ll make room.”

Everybody sat; there wasn’t room to lie down.

Moments later, another voice. “Help! Let me in!”

“There’s no room,” said the first guest.

“We’ll make room as we did for you,” said the husband.

The four people sat there, squeezed very tight.

Moments later, “Hee-haw!”

“That’s my donkey! Stand up and make room,” the man said, letting the donkey in. “He’s a good donkey, very patient. You’ll enjoy his company.”

172. The Hunter's Divine Revelation

A hunter once saw a strange sight: a fox who had lost two of her legs.

“How does she survive?” he wondered.

Then he saw a tiger approach, carrying a deer in her mouth. The tiger dropped the deer, ate her fill and departed; the fox ate the rest.

“This is a sign from God!” the hunter thought. “I must trust in God.”

He no longer hunted.

He sat.

He waited.

“God will provide!” the hunter thought.

Days passed.

As he was about to faint from hunger, he heard a voice.

“Be like the tiger,” God said, “not the fox.”

173. The Dog at the River

A wandering Sufi saw a dog approach a river to drink. But then the dog saw another dog there; it was just his reflection, though the dog didn't know that.

Frightened of the other dog, he backed away.

Thirst then made the dog approach the water again, but again he was afraid and backed off.

Finally, the dog's thirst was so great that he jumped into the water, which made the other dog disappear.

The dog drank; he swam, glad to be in the water on that hot day.

"We must jump," the Sufi thought to himself, "despite our fear."

174. The Lion Tattoo

“I want a lion tattoo, here, on my shoulder,” a man said to the tattoo-artist. “Make it a big one!”

“Gladly!” replied the artist.

But when the man felt the needle’s sting, he shouted, “That hurts! What are you doing?”

“The lion’s tail,” said the artist.

“Well, leave out the tail.”

The artist resumed his work, and the man screamed again. “What’s that?”

“The legs.”

“Leave them out.”

And so it went on: no tail, no legs, no belly, no mane.

No lion.

“You’re not ready for a lion,” the artist scoffed, and he drove the man from his shop.

175. The Hunter of Monkeys

There was a monkey-hunter who knew how monkeys think.

His tools were a narrow-necked glass bottle and a piece of fruit. He would put the fruit inside the bottle and leave it for a monkey to find.

The monkey would see the fruit, stick his hand inside, and wrap his fist around the prize, but he couldn't pull his fist back out.

When the monkey whimpered, the hunter would make his move, giving the monkey no time to escape.

Thus the hunter caught the monkeys, and he still had the bottle and fruit to use again on the next one.

176. The Hypnotized Sheep

A shepherd had many sheep.

He couldn't control the herd by himself, so he decided to hypnotize them.

To some he said, "You're a lion! Don't be afraid." To others he said, "You're a tiger! No need to run away."

The hypnosis worked. The sheep really thought they were lions or tigers.

He even made some of the sheep think they were human beings, shepherds like himself.

Then, when he butchered some sheep, the others looked on and thought, "Well, he's only butchering the sheep. I'm a lion! I'm not afraid!"

One by one, the shepherd butchered all the sheep.

177. The Elephant's Child

Some pilgrims who had grown hungry on their journey saw a young elephant wandering far away from the herd.

“Let’s kill it and eat it!” they shouted.

One of the pilgrims protested. “We cannot kill and eat the elephant’s child. The mother will be angry!”

But the other pilgrims didn’t listen. They killed the young elephant and ate it, although the one pilgrim refused to eat.

Then, as they slept, the mother-elephant came sniffing. She sniffed the breath of each pilgrim. She spared the one pilgrim, but when she smelled the breath of the others, she trampled them to death.

178. The Child and the Monster

There was a child who was afraid of the dark.

“The monster will come!” he said to his mother at bedtime. “I’m scared. Leave the light on!”

“Don’t be afraid,” said the child’s mother. “If a monster comes to you in the dark, you can gather up all your strength and attack that monster. You will defeat the monster, I promise. You just have to be brave. Attack the monster without fear!”

The child looked at his mother doubtfully. “That’s what you say to me,” he said, “but what if the monster’s mother told him the same thing about me?”

179. What a Cat Can Teach

There was a cat who had spent many years chasing and catching mice. She was truly an expert. Her technique was perfect, her skills remarkable.

This cat decided she would teach other animals how to catch mice. She invited one and all to come learn from her, and she didn't even charge them for lessons.

"But just look at all those rabbits!" grumbled the cat. "Fools, every last one of them."

"What do you mean?" asked another cat.

"Here I am, offering to teach anyone how to catch mice, but there's not a single rabbit who wants to learn how!"

180. The Camel and the Mouse

There was a camel whose head-rope was dragging on the ground.

A mouse grabbed the rope and shouted, "I've got the camel's rope in my paws: I am a camel-driver! Go forth, camel, and I'll guide you!"

But when the camel reached the river, the mouse didn't know what to do. "I can't cross this river!" he squeaked.

The camel stepped into the river. "It's only knee-deep," she said.

"But my knee is not your knee," protested the little mouse. "Help me!"

"Jump on my hump, and I'll carry you," said the camel, smiling. "You can be a camel-rider instead."

181. The Mule and the Camel

A mule and a camel were traveling together through the mountains.

As they ascended and descended the rocky paths, the mule often stumbled, but the camel never stumbled.

“Why am I always stumbling while you are so sure-footed?” asked the mule.

“It’s because I see the upward heights,” said the camel, “while you see only what is below. At the top of each rise, I foresee the pass ahead, and in this way God lets me discern the shape of things to come. You can only see a few steps ahead. Holding my head up high, I can look beyond.”

182. Camel, Ox, and Ram

A camel, an ox, and a ram were traveling together. They found some grass and then quarreled about who should eat it.

“Let the one who’s lived longest eat the grass!” said the ram. “As for me, I shared a pasture years ago with the ram that Abraham sacrificed for Ishmael.”

“As a young ox, I pulled Adam’s plow!” claimed the ox.

Meanwhile, the camel stretched out his long neck, seized the grass, and started munching.

“I don’t need venerable old age to make my claim,” the camel said, “when I am so tall and have such a long neck.”

183. The Ant and the Wasp

An ant was carrying a grain of wheat. He was struggling; it was a heavy load for an ant.

The wasp looked at the ant and laughed. "Why so much work? Watch me! I take what I want."

The wasp whizzed over to where a butcher had hung a freshly killed lamb on a hook.

Just as the wasp was about to land, the butcher swung his knife, cutting the wasp in two.

The ant put down his grain of wheat and grabbed half of the wasp's body to carry to his home. "This will be even tastier!" he thought.

184. The Fly and the Beehive

Searching for honey, a fly flew into a garden where there was a beehive, but the hive was closed.

“I’ll pay a copper penny to anyone who lets me in!” shouted the fly.

Someone let the fly into the hive, and she paid with a penny.

But as soon as the fly was inside, her feet got stuck in the honey.

As she flapped her wings, she became even more stuck.

“Cruel tyranny! This is poison, not honey!” she cried. “I paid a penny to come in, but now I would pay ten pennies if I could just get out.”

185. The Donkey and the Stallions

There was a donkey bent double from years of carrying heavy loads.

The king's stable-master took pity on the donkey, and brought him to live in the royal stables with the stallions.

Looking at the fine horses, the donkey sighed. "Am I not also God's creature? Why have I suffered while they live a life of luxury?"

Then war broke out, and the army took the stallions into battle.

Many died, and those who returned were maimed and mutilated.

"I thank God for my humble life!" exclaimed the donkey. "It has kept me safe from the wounds of the world."

186. The Gazelle and the Donkey

A hunter caught a gazelle and then locked it in the stable with his donkey.

He fed the donkey with straw, and he offered straw to the gazelle also, but the gazelle refused to eat.

The donkey laughed. "You must miss your royal throne, delicate creature that you are!"

"It's true," said the gazelle. "I long to eat sweet meadow-grass and drink from crystal streams. The stench here is suffocating."

"In a strange country, anyone can boast!" scoffed the donkey. "I don't believe a word you say."

The gazelle sighed. "What would a dung-worshipping donkey know of ambergris and musk-oil?"

187. The Moths and the Candle

The moths were enraptured by the candle.

“We must learn more!” they said.

One moth flew to the window where the candle sat and came back to report what she saw.

“You have learned nothing!” said the others.

They sent another moth who touched the candle with her wings, but the heat made her retreat. She flew back and reported.

“You still have told us nothing!” said the moths.

They sent another moth who threw herself into the flame, becoming one with the candle, burning.

The moths watched from a distance. “She has learned all, but can tell us nothing.”

188. The Ants and the Pen

An ant crawled onto a piece of paper and watched a pen writing.

She went and told another ant. "This pen creates beautiful shapes. Come look!"

The other ant watched. "The pen is an instrument of the fingers," she said.

"No!" said a third ant. "The arm is what guides the fingers."

Then the wisest of the ants explained, "You are all mistaken. Think not of the material world, which is but an outward garment. The pen does not write, nor the finger, nor the arm nor any part of the body; it is the spirit who moves the pen."

189. The Three Fish

Some fishermen came to a lake.

The wisest fish was ready. "I won't ask other fish for advice," she thought. "They'll only hold me back." She escaped to the sea.

A less wise fish watched her go but didn't follow. "I should have gone with her," she thought, "but I can still die to this life." She floated in the water as if dead, and the fishermen ignored her. Thus she escaped.

A third fish had no wisdom at all. As she splashed and thrashed, the fishermen caught her, and into their frying-pan she went. The foolish fish didn't escape.

190. The Jackal and the Pot of Dye

A jackal fell into a pot of dye which stained his coat with beautiful colors.

“Behold!” the jackal shouted. “I’ve become a heavenly peacock!”

When he showed off his new colors to the other jackals, they scoffed. “You’re no peacock!” they said.

“But I am!” retorted the jackal. “I am truly a peacock.”

“Can you make the call of the peacock?” the other jackals asked.

The jackal opened his mouth, but he could not make the call of the peacock. He sounded just like any other jackal.

His beautiful new colors were only on the surface, not in his heart.

191. The Lion and the Fox

“Fetch me something easy to kill!” the aged lion said to the fox who served him.

The fox found a starving donkey.

“You look hungry!” the fox said to the donkey. “I’ll show you a pasture of fresh green grass!”

The donkey followed the fox, but the lion leaped too soon and the donkey escaped.

“Come back!” said the fox. “That was just a lion-illusion conjured by a magician. There’s no lion.”

So the fox persuaded the donkey to follow him again.

This time, the lion caught the donkey and killed him, and both lion and fox enjoyed a feast.

192. Lion, Wolf, and Fox

A lion, a wolf, and a fox went hunting and caught an ox, a goat, and a rabbit.

“Wolf, divide the spoils!” the lion commanded.

“The ox must go to the lion,” he said. “The goat’s for me, and the fox gets the rabbit.”

Enraged, the lion tore the wolf to pieces.

“You next!” the lion ordered the fox.

The fox exclaimed, “It’s all for you!”

The lion smiled. “How did you learn to divide so wisely?”

“From the wolf,” replied the fox.

“And because of your great love for me,” concluded the lion, “I now give everything to you.”

193. The Lion and the Rabbit

Every day, the lion demanded that the animals send him a victim to eat.

When the rabbit's turn came, he rebelled, and on the way he prayed, "God, help your tiny servant overthrow this tyrant."

"Why are you late?" the lion roared.

"Another lion tried to eat me along the way," said the rabbit. "I barely escaped."

"How dare he!" the lion exclaimed. "Take me to this villain!"

The rabbit took the lion to a well. "He lives here," said the rabbit.

The lion looked in and saw the lion. Enraged, he jumped in and drowned, attacking his own reflection.

194. The Elephants and the Rabbits

Elephants trampled the pond where the rabbits drank, so one of the rabbits went to the elephant-king and said, “I am the Moon’s ambassador, and the Moon says: ‘Depart! I’ll strike you down if you don’t obey. Go now!’ So says the Moon.”

And when the elephant-king put his trunk in the water to drink, he saw the Moon shaking with wrath. The more he drank, the more the Moon shook with anger.

“Run away!” shouted the elephant-king to the herd. “We must flee before the Moon destroys us.”

The elephants no longer muddied the water where the rabbits drank.

195. A Cow on an Island

A cow lived alone on an island covered with green pastures.

Every day she ate the grass of the pastures and grew fat, but every night she worried. "What will I eat tomorrow?"

This anxiety made her grow thin.

The next day she would eat the green grass again and grow fat.

And at night she would worry.

This went on day after day, month after month, year after year.

Never did the cow stop and think, "How well provisioned is my island!" Instead, she thought only, "Will there be anything for me to eat tomorrow?"

Don't be that cow!

196. The Miser

A man kept gold in a treasure chest which he buried under a floorboard.

The man died, and then a year later the man's son had a dream: he saw a mouse running back and forth, weeping pitifully.

"What's wrong, mouse?" he asked.

The mouse replied with his father's voice! "I still crave the gold I buried here."

"Father," said the son, "how did you become a mouse?"

"That is what happens to misers like myself," the mouse replied. "Have pity on me, and take care to avoid my fate: renounce the love of gold now while you still can."

197. The Bird's Advice

“Let me go,” the bird said to the bird-catcher, “and I’ll teach you three secrets.”

The man let the bird go.

“First: don’t believe anything absurd.”

The bird hopped away. “Second: don’t grieve; when you lose something, let it go.”

The bird flew up in a tree. “There’s a pearl in my stomach as big as an apple.”

The man started weeping.

The bird laughed. “Remember: don’t grieve, and don’t believe something absurd. I’m smaller than an apple myself!”

“What about the third piece of advice?”

“You’re a fool and don’t deserve it!” the bird replied, and then flew away.

198. The Man and the Bear

A man saw a bear and a dragon fighting. He rescued the bear and killed the dragon.

“I am your friend forever!” declared the bear.

The man’s family warned him. “Bears are dangerous,” they said.

The man scoffed. “You’re just jealous of my bear-friend!” he said.

One day, the man fell asleep in the garden, and the bear stood watch over him, driving away the flies so the man could sleep peacefully.

When a fly landed on the man’s nose, the bear picked up a stone, and smashed it down on the fly.

And so the bear killed his friend.

199. The Wild Parrots of India

A merchant told his pet parrot that he was going to India.

“Find my wild kindred,” she said, “and tell them of my life here.”

The merchant thus spoke to the wild Indian parrots, and as soon as he finished speaking, they fell down dead.

On his return, the merchant sadly told his parrot what had happened.

Then his own parrot fell down dead.

When he lifted the corpse from the cage, grieving for his poor pet, the parrot fluttered her wings; she was not dead at all.

“My kindred showed me the way!” she said, flying away to freedom.

200. The Cook and the Chickpea

A chickpea was boiling in the pot, and it shouted at the cook. “What are you doing? You paid good money for me in the market, but now you’re boiling me!”

“I’m boiling you to fill you with flavor!” replied the cook. “When you were green and grew in the garden, you drank water, but now you need both fire and water. You must surrender to the maker of fire and water. You came from cloud and sun and sky, and now you will become soul and act, speech and thought. Boil, chickpea, boil! Boil in time! Boil in spirit!”

Story Title Index

1. A Handful of Dust
2. Noah and Canaan
3. The Child in the Shipwreck
4. Abraham in the Fire
5. The Sound of Joseph's Cup
6. Pharaoh and the Newborns
7. Moses and Khidr
8. The Language of Animals
9. Moses and the Bearded Dervish
10. Moses and the Shepherd
11. God Questions Moses
12. Moses Questions God
13. Moses Seeks Advice from Iblis
14. Azrael and King Solomon
15. The Gnat and King Solomon
16. Jesus and the Jug of Water
17. Jesus and the Name of God
18. Jesus and the Fool
19. Jesus Went Walking
20. The Dreams of the Three Travelers
21. The Sufi Who Went to Heaven
22. The Bundles of Misery
23. The Dervish and the Ship's Captain
24. The Man of Baghdad's Treasure

25. The Haunted Mosque
26. The Sultan's Seven Years
27. Turning Lead into Gold
28. The Water of Old
29. The Stream in the Desert
30. The Bread and the Ocean
31. Qays and Layla in Love
32. Majnun and Layla's Dog
33. Majnun and Layla's Beauty
34. Majnun's Eyes
35. Majnun and the Letter-Carrier
36. Majnun and the Shepherd
37. Majnun and the Caravan
38. Majnun's Feet
39. Majnun among the Beggars
40. Majnun's Blood
41. Majnun and the Tree
42. The Beggar and the King
43. Knocking at the Door
44. The Man without a Key
45. The Traveler and the Teacher
46. The Palace with One Door
47. The King's New Palace
48. The Boy and his Candle
49. The Faithful Man's Shadow
50. The Sufi and the Gravedigger
51. The King Enslaved
52. The Dervish and the Rich Man
53. A Prayer for a Tyrant
54. The Disciple Sentenced to Death
55. The Teacher in the Tavern
56. The Wisest Man in the City
57. The Old Man and the Two Strangers

58. Seeking the Tree of Heaven
59. Advice to a Seeker
60. The Death of Socrates
61. Muhammad and the Eagle
62. Ali and his Servant
63. Ali and the Knight
64. When Hallaj Grew Pale
65. The Caliph and the Pearl
66. The King's Caravansary
67. King Ibrahim on the Roof
68. King Ibrahim Hears the Voice
69. King Ibrahim and the Needle
70. King Ibrahim and the Old Sufi
71. Rabia's House
72. Rabia and the Governor of Basra
73. Rabia's Total Devotion
74. Rabia and the Blanket
75. Rabia and the Purse of Gold
76. Rabia and the Donkey
77. Rabia Breaks her Fast
78. Rabia and the Bread
79. Rabia and the Preacher
80. Rabia's Needle
81. Rabia and Hasan
82. Rabia Instructs Hasan
83. Rabia and Hasan by the Lake
84. Rabia and Sufyan
85. Rabia and Riyah al-Qaysi
86. Rabia and the Villagers
87. Rabia and Azrael
88. Rabia's Grave
89. A Vision of Rabia
90. Finding Bayazid

91. Bayazid's Pilgrimage
92. Bayazid in Ecstasy
93. Dhul-Nun the Madman
94. The Grieving Sufi and Shabli
95. The Disciple and the Dove
96. Junaid's Disciples and the Chickens
97. Junaid's New Neighbor
98. Abu Mansur and the Sultan
99. Abu Said on the Path
100. Fruits and Thorns
101. Abu Said's Recitations
102. Abu Said and the Learned Cleric
103. Abu Said and the Straight Path
104. Abu Said and God's Secret Mysteries
105. Abu Said and the Wealthy Disciple
106. Abu Said and the Wine-Merchant
107. Abu Said and the King of the Gamblers
108. Abu Said and the Bucket of Ashes
109. Abu Said and the Bags of Filth
110. Abu Said's Horse
111. Sultan Mahmud's Golden Bracelet
112. Sultan Mahmud and his Servants
113. Sultan Mahmud Watches Ayaz
114. Sultan Mahmud and the Pearl
115. Ahmad Yasawi and the Seeker
116. Abu Ali and the Old Woman
117. Jafar Seeks a Teacher
118. Little Rumi and the Angels
119. Sanai, The Court Poet
120. Chishti the Musician
121. Nimatullah and the Stolen Lamb
122. Jami and the Would-Be Disciple
123. Jami and the Physician's Son

124. Nasruddin and the Quick Learner
125. Nasruddin and the Scholar
126. Nasruddin and the Would-Be Disciple
127. A Conversation without Words
128. God Created the Camel
129. Nasruddin's Sermon
130. Nasruddin and the Pilgrims
131. Nasruddin and the Shrine
132. Nasruddin Crossing the Lake
133. Nasruddin in a New Town
134. Nasruddin Leaves the Tavern
135. Nasruddin by Night
136. Nasruddin and the Frogs
137. Nasruddin and the Man's Bag
138. Nasruddin and the Drowning Man
139. Nasruddin and the Music Teacher
140. Nasruddin at the Baths
141. A Sign for Nasruddin's Restaurant
142. Nasruddin's Duck Soup
143. Nasruddin and the Puddle
144. Nasruddin on the Way to the Cemetery
145. A Beggar at the Door
146. The Wicked Man's Thornbush
147. The Peasant and the General
148. The Farmer and the Thief
149. The Schoolboys and their Teacher
150. The Tanner who Fainted
151. The Bedouin's Pitcher of Water
152. The Bedouin and his Two Sacks
153. A First Time at Sea
154. The Patient Fisherman
155. The Woman and the Brick Wall
156. A Man Who Gathers Stones

157. A Man Seeking a House
158. The Prisoner and the Prayer Rug
159. The Princess and the Slave
160. The Contest of the Artists
161. The King Rides to Damascus
162. The Old Man and the Doctor
163. Sharing the Cucumbers
164. The Mayor's Servant and the Donkey
165. The Sufi and his Father
166. The Elephant in the Dark
167. The Lost Camel
168. The Wandering Sufi and his Donkey
169. The Thief who Stole a Snake
170. The Frozen Dragon
171. Shelter from the Storm
172. The Hunter's Divine Revelation
173. The Dog at the River
174. The Lion Tattoo
175. The Hunter of Monkeys
176. The Hypnotized Sheep
177. The Elephant's Child
178. The Child and the Monster
179. What a Cat Can Teach
180. The Camel and the Mouse
181. The Mule and the Camel
182. Camel, Ox, and Ram
183. The Ant and the Wasp
184. The Fly and the Beehive
185. The Donkey and the Stallions
186. The Gazelle and the Donkey
187. The Moths and the Candle
188. The Ants and the Pen
189. The Three Fish

190. The Jackal and the Pot of Dye
191. The Lion and the Fox
192. Lion, Wolf, and Fox
193. The Lion and the Rabbit
194. The Elephants and the Rabbits
195. A Cow on an Island
196. The Miser
197. The Bird's Advice
198. The Man and the Bear
199. The Wild Parrots of India
200. The Cook and the Chickpea

Story Sources

For story-specific bibliography and notes, visit:

Sufis.LauraGibbs.net

Arberry, A. J. *Tales from the Masnavi and More Tales from the Masnavi.*

Arnold, Edwin. *The Gulistan; being the Rose-garden of Shaikh Sa 'di.*

Borrow, George. *The Turkish Jester.*

Chatterjee, Debjani. *Sufi Stories from Around the World.*

Edwards, A. Hart. *The Bustan of Sadi.*

Jamnia, Mohammad Ali and Mojdeh Bayat. *Under the Sufi's Cloak: Stories of Abu Said and His Mystical Teaching.*

Johnson, Mansur. *Big Tales (of Hazrat Inayat Khan).*

Khan, Adalut. *The Rose-Necklace, being the selections from the Gulistan and the Anwaar-i Suhaili.*

Mahfuzdur, Her Hakki. *202 Jokes of Nasreddin Hodja.*

Muhaiyaddeen, M. R. Baw. *Come to the Secret Garden: Sufi Tales of Wisdom.*

Nakosteen, Mehdi. *Mulla's Donkey and Other Friends.*

Neruda, Nico. *The Little Book of Sufi Parables.*

Nott, S. C. *The Conference of the Birds by Farid Ud-Din Attar.*

Nurbakshsh, Javad. *Sufi Women.*

Rahman, Imam Jamal. *Sacred Laughter of the Sufis.*

Shah, Idries. *Knowing How to Know.*

- Shah, Idries. *Learning How to Learn.*
Shah, Idries. *Seeker After Truth.*
Shah, Idries. *Tales of the Dervishes.*
Shah, Idries. *The Dermis Probe.*
Shah, Idries. *The Hundred Tales of Wisdom.*
Shah, Idries. *The Magic Monastery.*
Shah, Idries. *The Sufis.*
Shah, Idries. *The Way of the Sufi.*
Shah, Idries. *Thinkers of the East.*
Shah, Idries. *Wisdom of the Idiots.*