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*The beauty of the Rose teaches the eyes to sigh.*

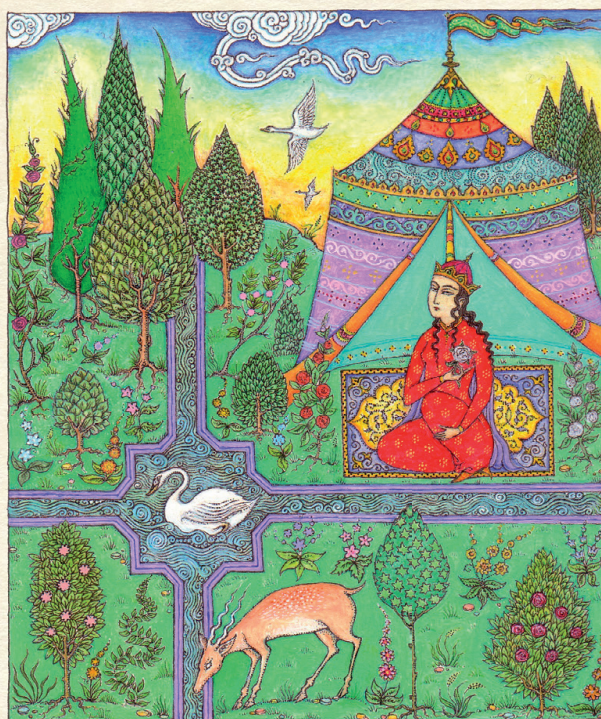
WHEN THE ROSE BLOOMS



# WHEN THE ROSE BLOOMS

*Spiritual Aphorisms by M. Ali Lakhani*

*Illustrations by Nigel Jackson*



THE MATHESON TRUST  
For the Study of Comparative Religion



When the Rose blooms,  
the Garden is everywhere.



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## PREFACE

**T**his book has been long in the making. The aphorisms were written mostly over three decades ago, then left to germinate and grow. Eventually certain groupings suggested themselves. This selection is the result. Though their presentation here suggests an order, they did not emerge that way; so, they can be read sequentially or randomly.

Thank you, Nigel Jackson, for your creative collaboration and beautiful illustrations, rich in symbolism; and Barry McDonald for your encouragement and generous Introduction, written many years ago. And to The Matheson Trust for publishing this book, and to Susana Marín for her design.

Thanks also to my wife, Nazlin, for helping me to weed the Garden and plant deep.

This offering is to the community of Friends—to all who long for the Rose to bloom.

M. Ali Lakhani  
March 21, 2021  
Vancouver, BC, Canada



## INTRODUCTION: EMBRACING THE SILENCE

Who has not known the wonder of seeing the first few stars rising in the dusk? Against the darkening immensity of the sky, though they are very far away they seem to speak of what is most near. In realms of love and pain who has not known treasures lost and found, dreamed and known awakenings that shaped one's life. And who has not felt oneself part of a vast tapestry, too large to see, sewn by a single thread running through all things seen and unseen, without beginning and without end. By such moments we are marked by an invisible, but indelible, ink. Philosophers and poets write with this ink and it is this writing, interwoven of speech and silence, which blossoms and bears fruit in the clarifying beauty of these aphorisms.

The geography of these utterances, each like a signpost, maps a vast and ancient territory in few words. Tracing the frontiers of Prayer and Silence ('If you let the silence within you sing to itself, you will become its song'); Self and Other ('We are merely translations of each other's lives'); Enclosures and Openings ('Immensity threads itself through a needle's eye'); Exile and Longing ('What we cannot hold in our arms, we hold even closer in our dreams'); Possibilities and Outcomes ('The privilege of

## WHEN THE ROSE BLOOMS

life is not to open doors, but to choose those by which to enter’); Seen and Unseen (‘Does the world disappear when we close our eyes? We are closer than we imagine to what we cannot see’); and Inwardness and Transcendence (‘The fire dies into the ashes of its flame’). A voice from the edge of silence is heard throughout this book; it is at turns metaphysical, mystical, moral, practical, wounded, healed, searching and even humorous. This voice is that of the spiritual seeker’s heart and mind laid bare and the nearly whispered words are like small whirlpools beckoning the attentive reader into the depths of our shared human experience—and, in those depths, we find God. The drowning to which it calls us means death in life; but it also means life in death.

At their highest points of tension these aphorisms synthesize entire novels, works of philosophy and spirituality, and poetry, into a few chiseled words, often wrought into a single sentence reminiscent of Blake’s seeing ‘infinity in a grain of sand’. There is a story of an ancient Chinese emperor who held a poetry contest, promising some great treasure for the winning poet. All of the famous poets of the land came from far and wide and offered the emperor their most beautiful poems. One had composed a poem using only a single word, a mysterious word lost in the history of telling this story, and it was the winning entry. The primordial simplicity which must have set that word to music resonates through the pages of this book; one is reminded of the symmetry of snowflakes, illuminating and purifying, dancing in the dark. This simplicity is close to wisdom because simplicity is the essence of unity; and in

## INTRODUCTION

the dazzling light of unity, seeing the One in the many, all wisdom is revealed. By extension, one could say that to hear God one must hear the Silence which threads through all of the many forms of sound. Silence, it is said, is a name of the Buddha.

Although I referred above to the frontiers, or themes, traced in this book it is important to note that frontiers are crossed with a single step. The themes merge seamlessly into each other; and by way of utilizing another metaphor, as the whole tapestry contains each individual thread, each thread speaks of the whole. Scholars of various spiritual traditions will no doubt detect elements of Sufism, Zen, Vedanta, and other esoteric schools of thought in these aphorisms; however, the text cannot be pinned down and classified under any specific heading. These utterances are universal in their meaning and appeal, they do not seem to be of any time or place; they speak from a center which is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. They speak to travelers on a timeless journey. One is immediately struck by the authenticity and genuine reality of these words, like jewels lit from within, sparingly used, and often directing the reader to the very precipice of what it is possible to say. 'Silence proclaims silence. Man, however, searches for something to hear'. Listening to these nearly unspoken words, one hears the lilt of sunlight on a flowing stream, the cry of a falling star, or the stories told by a grain of sand. If you cannot hear, then listen more closely. In the depth of your listening there are rewards beyond measure.

Barry McDonald  
October 2005







*The dragon you slay is a phantom,  
but the dragon that slays you is real.*



SPIRITUAL  
APHORISMS





## *Mystery*

Many things emerge from the Centre,  
but the Centre itself does not emerge.



The night has more secrets than the day can tell.



Stars shine, but only in darkness.



Everything recedes into the darkness  
from which it comes.



The Word is the breath of Silence.

## *Faith and Certitude*

Receptivity, to those who are not receptive,  
is credulity.



Faith is the surrender of intelligence to mystery.



I thought you were a step,  
but my foot discovered you were a chasm.



The foot is firm so long as the ground is firm.



The wind can never blow the sky away.

## *Intelligence and Discernment*

Intelligence is the attention needed  
to perceive the real.



One cannot truly know  
something one is not.



Knowledge is not the visible,  
but the Light that makes it visible.



The sightless see the Sun  
by knowing its effects.



One must stop looking beyond in order to see.



It is through darkness  
that one sees the light.



## *Seen and Unseen*

Does the world disappear when we close our eyes?  
We are closer than we imagine to what we cannot see.



Where can your shadow hide but within?



The eyes we lack are not our own.



We have been given eyes to see the invisible.



The choir of flowers is dumb  
only to the ears of the deaf.



There are eyes trapped inside stones,  
but we are too blind to see.



An eye that has not learned to see itself  
has not learned to see.



The pinhole must become an eye  
for the universe to be seen.



I looked for light with light,  
but discovered only darkness.

## *Real and Unreal*

The dragon you slay is a phantom,  
but the dragon that slays you is real.



Words are not ashes,  
though ink is a flame.



The Light casts shadows  
the mind deems real.



Light itself is the gift;  
all else misses the prize.



Truth has many tongues,  
but only one voice.



What is does not cease to be except  
in our perception of it.



The water and its wetness are one.



I thought reality was the flame that flickered  
till I discovered it was the eye that blinked.



It is the wilting flower that is real.



The dance is not in the dust  
but in the wind that swirls the dust.



Dust is only dust, even when  
the wind lifts it up to the sky.



The rosebud's fragrance  
blossoms in the soul.

## *Aspects and Vistas*

The maker of signs made me!



The world appears to the eyes  
according to the nature of the eyes.



In every shadow is the beauty of light.



Darkness effaces what light sharpens.



Those who live in the valley do not see  
the same mountain as those who scale its peak.



As the garden is in the seed,  
so the Beloved is in the world.



Man looks out of a window into a garden,  
and the window disappears.  
Man looks out of a window into a garden,  
and the garden disappears.  
Man looks out of a window into a garden,  
and the man disappears.