

SIMORGH
The Quest of the Birds
By Mory Ghomshei ©

My dear friends,

Today, I will tell you a story from the past. Our lives will also become a tale for the people of tomorrow.

Let's live a marvellous tale.

Our story is about the quest of the birds,
those feathered creatures who walk on the ground and fly in the air.

We are all birds. We descend to this dust to fill our stomachs. Then we fly to the heaven of desire so high that our shadows eclipse the Moon and Jupiter. Alas, some of us lose our wings. We stay too long on the ground, digging for gold and diving for pearls, till we forget the art of flying.

My dear friends,

thousands of years ago the birds were like us, bored with life, constantly nagging, never singing and never dancing. Yet they lived a comfortable life, enjoying the routine, having no ambition or adventure save eating and drinking, sleeping and snoring, till one day a glorious bird named Simorgh flew over their nests.

Simorgh came like a comet on a dark night.
Over the land of China, he made a majestic flight.
All slumbering birds missed the sight
of that luminous marvel which was light upon
light,

save a small bird named Hoopoe who was
awake;
she lived that momentous moment. At daybreak,

she flew to her fellow birds crying with frenzy,

“We have a king!” The birds said, “Don’t be crazy.”

“It was late at night when I saw him.
A feather of his fell somewhere on the rim,

towards the east where the moon of the night
waltzes with the sun in broad daylight.”

The Prophet said, “Paradise is not far away.
It is just a journey from night to day.”

The wakeful Hoopoe urged the birds to find the Simorgh’s feather.

At dawn, all birds assembled in a vast plain and searched for that majestic sign till dusk. At last, the radiant plume found them at the twilight of their despair.

“This feather must be from our king,” they cried.
“Yes, we have a king! A glorious bird who came to our land. Let us depart and find him.”

The birds flew in search of their king. But alas, years passed and no trace of that luminous bird was ever found.

At last, the seekers realized that the king was beyond their vigilant flight and they should set their hearts for an unknown voyage of trust.

But such a journey needed a guide. After much debate over who should be the leader, they drew a name. Amazingly, the game of fate picked the wakeful Hoopoe. So the little loving bird assumed the leadership and started her discourse on this note:

“O my fellow birds, come and listen to the good news.
Wake up to the color of joy, forget the grays and blues.

I have flown over oceans and beyond mountains.
I know the horizon where Simorgh reigns.

That majestic bird is named Simorgh. He lives in a land far away, on top of a high mountain known as Ghaaf. Our journey is a difficult one. We shall fly over deserts and seas, deep valleys and rugged mountains. We shall travel together, day and night, without provisions.

Prepare for an austere journey, should you want to see Simorgh.

In our progress, we shall overcome seven arduous valleys where we lose our feathers of pride and break our beaks of greed.

Yet our souls will be polished. The crude will be cast out. The lazy will perish. Only the accomplished ones are allowed to enter the court of Simorgh.

Fasten your belts and be ready. Buckle up my fellow birds.

Hooray, my bold friends!
Hooray, singing birds!

Hooray, O nightingale!
Come and sing for us the music of migration,
the song of longing on the note of belonging.
Why grieve? You can see the glorious Simorgh.
In that shining face, all perished roses will bloom again.

Bravo! O raven, stubborn learned bird!
Come along, tell us what to bring on this flight.
O falcon, you are a bird of chase.
Come along to the real hunt.
Don't be a slave to man. Your king is calling you.

O finch, little bird with big dreams!
Don't look at your small body. You measure up to your desires.
O eagle, leave this pride and vanity.

In our quest, we fly with wings of humility.

O bird of ambition, your food is not a dead mouse.
Come along. Let's start the chase for dignity.

Listen to this story:

Once an eagle was flying high in the sky.
Full of vanity, he said to himself,

"The whole world is beneath my wings.
My majesty is the envy of all kings.

No one can fly as high as I do.
No one can see as far as I do.

I catch the fish in the ocean and the fowl in the
sky.
No other bird is as respected and feared as I."

While drunk with pride, an arrow pierced his
heart.
He looked with much hate at that ugly dart.

The infernal spear was but an eagle feather.
Yes, by the plume of vanity man will wither."

"Come along! O my fellow birds," continued Hoopoe,
"O seagull! You fly over the seas and oceans.
You are so elegant and graceful while in the sky
but clumsy and inept when seen on the ground.
Your abode is the vastness of the sky.
Greed pulls you down from your height.
The sky is as large as your ambition to fly but the earth is only the size of
your stomach.

Let the journey of love begin.

Come along, O my fellow birds,” Hoopoe encouraged them all.

At last, the feathered creatures agreed to travel with Hoopoe to Mount Ghaaf. On the day of departure, all the birds gathered on the branches of a splendid cypress and Hoopoe gave her last discourse before the journey began:

“Yes, my fellow birds, we shall go through seven valleys. We shall fly over deep canyons and over high mountains. We will encounter difficulties and experience austerities. But for the passionate lovers of Simorgh, the seven dreadful valleys will become the seven wonderful cities of love.

So be prepared!

The lazy ones should stay home, snoring in their nests.

Those with no dreams can enjoy the comfort of this cypress tree.

Only the brave ones should set out for this esoteric escapade.”

All the birds cried:

“We are all ambitious birds.
We all have crowns on our heads.
We are burning with passion.

Speak not of the valleys of austerity!
Tell us about the cities of love!”

Thus Hoopoe went on:

“Quest is the first of seven cities of love,
a journey from these ghettos to the gardens
above.

We are all one when we have a quest.
Quest is the light, darkness is the rest.

The city of passion is our next stop.
The sun has risen, O friends, wake up!

Gallop to the gates of passion in haste and rush,
fill up the cup of life with power and panache.

Then follows the city of knowledge and insight.
The lantern of wisdom is light upon light.

The fourth is the freedom from pettiness,
wealth in modesty, grace in a simple dress.

Next comes the eternal joy of unity.
Separation has no place in that city.

The sixth is bewildering exhilaration,
wine with no cups, joy with no limitation.

And the last city is total negation
of ego in the kiln of annihilation.

Ego is a heavy stone on a phony crown.
From the heights of happiness, it brings you
down.

Then shall we reach together the gate of our
king.
There we embrace our goal like jewels in a ring.”

With this discourse, all birds, overwhelmed with excitement, left the cypress
tree.

They flew days and days, nights and nights, over deep valleys and high mountains. Inside the canyons, the lazy birds stopped their progress. Others returned home when they saw the height of the mountains.

In the deadly valleys of despair, Hoopoe encouraged,
“Fellow birds,
if you press on, Simorgh is ahead.
Vultures are following, should you fall behind.”

“Stay together,” cried another bird, “Mecca is in sight, O friends! Endure!
Bandits stalk the stragglers.”

At last, thirty persistent birds were all that remained of the flock. They flew non-stop, neither distracted by the charm of the cities of love nor discouraged by the challenge of the mountains and canyons.

They soared till they reached the top of Mount Ghaaf where they were stopped at the gate of the palace by the guards of the glorious Simorgh.

“Who are you?” shouted a guard.

“We are nobody,” responded the birds,

“We left our dust deep in the valleys and our egos on the mountain tops.

We lost the seeker and became the sought.
We left the bird; what remains is the flight.”

“Where do you come from?” questioned another guard.

“From the land of love,” responded the birds with joy.

“What do they venture in the land of love?”

“They sell sorrows and buy smiles.”

“What gifts have you brought for His Majesty?”

“None but hearts filled with desire and eyes thirsty for sight.”

“What do you want from the King?”

“Nothing but to give us more wanting.”

“Stop! What have you done to deserve the King’s audience?” interrupted the chief guard.

“We have suffered days and nights, flying over deep canyons and high mountains.” complained the birds.

“So return to your canyons of depression and seek the audience of the mountains of pride,” said the chief guard, “You are not yet ready to see the King. Those who travel with passion will not remember their sorrows and sufferings. Go back to your nests, you tiresome birds!” roared the chief guard of glory.

But harsh words did not discourage the pilgrims. The birds apologized for their crude response with great humility and respect.

They continued, “We are lovers and lovers say crazy words. We did not mean to complain but to state our great excitement.”

“If you are true lovers, you should know that your King has never left you in your difficulties,” kindly interceded the chief guard of beauty. “The King flew over your land to inspire you to leave the comforts of your nests.”

“Now, come in! You lovers of Simorgh!” he entreated.

Thus the guards of glory removed the seventy veils of darkness and the guards of beauty removed another seventy veils of light.

The flock was overwhelmed with the sight of Simorgh which was glory upon glory, light upon light, and beauty upon beauty.

The birds were thrilled with amazement and exhilaration when they saw the great Simorgh who was, in himself, thirty birds unified in a single body. They looked at themselves. They were also thirty birds unified in love and glorified with quest.

Thus the King spoke,

“Simorgh is my name.

The name means ‘thirty birds’.

You are my name, you are my claim,

your dignity is my crown,
your heart is my throne.
I exist for you.
In your face is my beauty remembered.”

Ecstasy and laughter flew from the Thirty-Bird to the thirty birds. The shade disappeared in the sun and the light left no place for shadows.

The birds returned to their land.
Still after thousands of years, they sing and dance as every blossoming rose reminds them of the beauty of Simorgh.

A lifetime of pain shall pass but a moment with the beloved will remain forever.

END

