

Pilgrimage

PILGRIMAGE

I

When my feet tire of this world's ways,
When the lights grow dim, when dust gathers
In the air and the dance draws to a close,
I hear the ancient calling in my soul
And the beckoning of unknown horizons.

When the rose of morning hangs her head in shame,
When her petals lie strewn in the dust
And strange perfumes wash in on the gathering waves of night,
I lay aside this gay dress, this gaudy attire
And prepare my oblations to the unknown God.

And distant bells are tinkling in the gloom.
Dear God, who now remembers the way to your door?
Look: single tracks in the sand, away to a dim horizon;
They go, and do not return.

When the darkness is complete, killing even
The heart's faithful glow; when the voices and laughter
And singing die into the desert howl
And my own emptiness lies naked before me,
I hear the voice of my soul
And the ancient summons to pilgrimage.

II

And so we went out, with
The waning of Summer and the first fruits.
We were young: what had we to fear?
(The way to God is paved with brick and mortar —
Crushed bones of the lover watered with his tears.)
The road was wide, and numbers our refuge,
Our Beloved a smile of indulgence for the course
We had already chosen while calling it his,
A banner to which we flock'd, a companion
Of the bright days and the light of our songs:
 " Fearless Pilgrim, Friend of the roads,
 Answer to prayers and Bearer of loads."

We sang to a Beloved Whom we knew not, but was
The accumulated sum of our many lights and loves
To which we still paid obeisance; knew not, but fashioned
After our own heart's desire, painted
With the colors of melody, wrought
And exacted to the measurements of our need.
(While across the wide plains ranges the Lion,
Ravager of cities, ruins and blood his food.)
We sang to a Beloved Who was the Ocean of a tear,
Whose overflow was the wine of our singing and our devotion.
Drunken, we did not know
Of the rose's thorn, that mountain passes
And valleys of fire divided us from our love's consummation.
(And dust, with winds howling down the narrow canyons.)
And so — the naked days of wandering, homelessness,
Nor flag nor friend, nor water hole,
Nor the clear fountain of the heart: desert days;
And the oblations, our own blood. And the pitiless Sun
The God of our questing. Death in life: our heart
Made desert, while the desert made green with our tears.

Death in Life; and pain our only joy. Who could know
That the arrow of flame was His love-caress,
That the brass-kettle sky was His Rain of Grace?

III

Long are the days of wandering.
Harsh winds across the empty places,
Shifting sands cover the ancient ways.
And swiftly the gathered treasures and empires
Which one has envisioned crumble to dust or fade
Into the darkness of dream or a haze of sunlight.
Passing, passing is this world; but Thy Face remains.

Once I set out to win to my Beloved's door.
In the early hours, when the first red fingers
Of dawn steal across the sky's star-strewn treasury
While dew-drops glitter in the grass like precious stones,
The way seemed easy, and full of promise.
But the north winds cold across the plains,
While the summers are dry and rainless;
And a far-wandering traveler has no resting place.
And soon my lights began to fail me: and the years passed;
And I was old, and weary. Once I sought
To breathe again the freshness of the high places,
To spring the water of life from the stone
Of my own heart. But all my strivings
Wrung but the two tears of pain and unfulfillment,
While my eyes stung from the sweat of weeping.
And the red fire of the westering sun set off in silhouette
The crags and craters of my own lovelessness, while
From the east a starless, dry dark night coming on.

And to bring roses from the desert? To draw
Rain from a lead sky? For this,
No work is sufficient: for it is by Grace.
One needs Him; — not only as God,
For God as God is too abstract, too formless
For those lost in form's clutch and limitation.
One needs a Friend, a Dear One, One
Whom you can love more than your own soul

And for Whom the journey is done; One
Whose smile is an Ocean of sweetness,
Whose forehead is the wide sky of aspirations
And whose seeing eyes are arrows into the heart.
One needs Love and Grace

in the form of the Beloved One: Meher Baba.

But the winds are cruel in the cold midnight
While the stony path is steep and unrelenting.
Guard well the cherished whispers of the soul,
Remember well the moonlit paths of Grace
And the rose petal of the Beloved's smile,
For this world cares not for love nor beauty
Nor gentleness; its pounding waves
Will drown the spirit and dash the soul
On stone cliffs, its violent currents
Will carry you far from the Beloved of your desire.
Only in His Love

Is there comfort; for His friendship
Is truer than the loves of men.

Long are the days of wandering,
And red the tears of love.
Passing, passing is this world, like clouds
Before the white moon of Thy Face.
But a single arrow, Beloved, or your eye
To dispel this darkness in my soul . . .

While high above
And motionless in their course, the ancient stars
Silently shine the way Home.

IV

And so I am arrived, after a million years out-faring
And the dust of countless lives, at Your Feet.

There all roads and horizons converge; there all men
Must wait — wait the turnings of the wheel and the endless night
Of calling; wait the furnaces of tears, and breath
Of sighs, and longing: Wait til the moment of Your Pleasure
and the descent of Your Grace.

O Most Beloved! Precious One.

What roads have I traveled, not knowing you are everywhere?
What desert treks, what fires, what deep descents — it
Was my own heart's desolation I journeyed;
What visions, what dreams, what winged flights —
While you, Baba, Friend as well as Lord, and Goal
Of my journeying, beside me every step of the way.
And now, what have I to offer, all being your own?
Nothing but the flower's morning smile of opening, or
The drop's self-abandonment to the sea.

The earth in its waiting dreams of the seed, while
The silence cries for a new day.
My heart longs for your feet's touch, for the gentle kiss
Of your eyes; for I know
That you are the only hope for me,
My Baba; and while the wide world and angels
Sing hymns to the coming Glory, I
Will wait silently for your entering in my soul
With the gathered harvest of love and flowers, to pour
At your white feet: that glorious Day
When in your love my heart will be made shining.

Ward Parks

© 1974 SHERIAR PRESS, INC.