

NOORSHA NISTARAA

from

GURU NANAK CHAMATKAR

by

BHAI SAHIB BHAI VIR SINGH JI

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Guru Nanak Dev ji once travelled to Dacca, which is now the capital of Bangladesh. On His journey, He would often stop to sing 'Shabad' in praise of Waheguru ji. Many people would collect on hearing His sweet voice and the sound of the 'rabab' played by Bhai Mardana. After the singing, Guru ji would speak to the people, telling them about Waheguru ji and the wonderful things He had created for them to enjoy. But the most important thing was to remember Waheguru ji all the time.

Guru ji taught His Sikhs the three principles they must follow throughout their life:

1. Naam Japnaa: reciting Waheguru ji's name with every breath.
2. Kirat Karni :earning one's livelihood through honest hard work.
3. Wand Chhaknaa: sharing what we have with others.

When Guru ji reached Guwahati, the capital of Assam, He stopped in a cool, quiet glade on the outskirts of the city. Mardana was feeling very tired and hungry and taking Guru ji's permission, he set out for the city. It was a long way away, so to pass the time, Mardana began to talk to himself, "I can't understand why Guru ji did not want me to go into the city! He is above all bodily needs but I am starving and my throat is parched with thirst. For three days we have sat in the woods without food and water. How am I to sing?"

Then he began to scold himself for having such thoughts, "Oy Marjaniya (one who

deserves to die)! Have you forgotten the days when your own mother used to call you by this name? She had earlier lost four sons and then you were born. She had no hope that you would survive. But you grew up and one day, Guruji happened to pass by when He heard your mother call you 'Marjaniya'. He stopped and told her not to use that name, 'You don't know but your son is Mardana, a man among men. He will fill the dead spirits of men with the song of life!' And that is how you began to go everywhere with Guru ji, accompanying the 'Shabad' with the notes of your 'rabab'. Is this the way to repay His kindness? Have you no faith in Him? But ah! The pangs of hunger! Let me hurry."

Soon Mardana reached the town. Hurrying down the street, he looked around and muttered to himself, "What is this strange place? Everywhere there are only girls and women. How rudely they stare, and yet, no one asks if I need anything!"

At the end of the street, Mardana saw a tall building, which looked like a temple. All its doors were shut tight. On each side of the main gate sat two ferocious lions. Mardana froze, expecting any minute to be attacked and torn to pieces. When the animals did not move, he realized they were statues. He heaved a sigh of relief and wiped his brow. Just then he heard the sound of a window being opened but when he looked, there was only the blank wall.

“How odd,” he thought, “I can hear movements yet I can’t see anyone. Let me knock on the door. But... but what has happened to my feet? Why can’t I move them?” and he looked anxiously down at them. “Guru ji had warned me against coming here. ‘Go,’ He had said, ‘But be very careful! You are a sensitive soul. Be on your guard.’ What was Guru ji warning me against? And what is happening to

me? I should have obeyed my master and stayed with him. But I am weak, my faith is weak. Oh! What am I going to do? Help me, Guru ji, help me!”

Just then the main door opened. Mardana found himself in a large, empty courtyard. Then, as if by magic, a carpet appeared with a snow-white cloth spread in the middle. A large dish of steaming hot rice was placed on this by invisible hands. The fragrance of the rice tickled Mardana's nose and he ran towards the dish eagerly. The main gate shut behind him with a big thud but he was aware of only the tempting dish. He stretched out his hand to pull it nearer but was stunned when he touched nothing. The dish and the cloth had vanished.

Mardana looked around in bewilderment. He let out a scream when he saw a human skeleton dangling from a hook in the wall. Turning away from this fearful sight, he

gave a nervous start when he saw two young tigers snarling and baring their fangs at him. When he saw that they were securely chained to the pillars, he relaxed but barely had he heaved a sigh of relief, when he heard a sharp hissing sound. Jerking his head around, he let out a strangled cry as two huge, black cobras went slithering between his feet and disappeared into one of the rooms.

After a while, Mardana opened his eyes, wondering what fresh horrors awaited him. To his amazement, the courtyard was empty, except for a white marble table on which rested the same dish of steaming rice. A beautiful girl came and placed a glass of cool water near it. Another girl brought a stool, draped in rich velvet and signalled to Mardana to come and sit. A third girl placed a silver bowl full of sweet milk on the table. Inviting him to eat, the girls vanished.

The feeling of hunger which had been forgotten, now became sharper than ever and Mardana quickly sat down on the stool, said, “ Dhan Guru Nanak” and began to eat. As he finished one dish, another one appeared mysteriously on the table. With his hunger appeased, he began to feel sleepy. But then he remembered that Guru ji was waiting for him and he turned to go out. But there was no gate. Only a deeply cushioned couch stood invitingly nearby. He decided that he would rest awhile and then go back. Curling up on the couch, he fell into a deep slumber.

When Mardana awoke, he found himself in a large room. The walls were studded with precious jewels and lined with glittering mirrors. The ceiling was decorated with gold carvings and on the floor was a rich carpet. He was lying on a golden couch. A delicate perfume filled the room.

“How lucky are the owners of this place! What beauty and comfort! But why are the lamps lit? Is it night already? What must Guru ji be thinking? I had told Him that I would get back in the shortest time. I must go now,” he thought.

As he scrambled off the couch, a woman came up to him and knelt beside him. In a sweet, soft voice she asked, “Sir, what is your wish?”

Mardana : “Please, show me the way out. I must go.”

Woman : “Where do you wish to go?”

Mardana : “To the woods outside the city.”

Woman : “Why?”

Mardana : “My Master is waiting for me.”

Woman : “And if he were to come here?”

Mardana : “He may because I am very late. He must be looking for me.”

Woman : “Once he comes, he too will stay. Don’t worry”

Mardana was reassured by the woman's soothing words.

"If after so much traveling, one can get comfortable sleep and good food, surely there is no harm in that," he consoled himself. "Guru ji says we are God's messengers, but to carry these messages to near and far-off places, one must be physically fit. I shall rest tonight and leave very early in the morning."

The next moment Mardana sat up and began to scold himself, "What an ungrateful wretch I am! Only thinking of myself, stuffing my stomach with food and sleeping on velvet cushions! And all this while my Master, my Saviour has been sitting amid thorns and stones, in the dark, without food or water. Shame on me and shame on my selfishness! Forgive me, O Lord, forgive me!" Tears began to fall from his eyes.

Woman : “Why are you crying? If you want anything just tell me and I shall bring it.”

Mardana : “I am thinking of my Master, sitting hungry and thirsty in the woods.”

Woman : “Is that all? Do you think we are so careless? Before serving you, we had already sent a hot meal for your master.”

Mardana was very relieved and pleased at this thoughtfulness. He was about to thank the woman but stopped when he heard a very sweet voice begin to sing. He loved music and could appreciate its beauty. Like one mesmerized, he got up and followed the sound to a room where a young woman was singing. He sat down staring raptly at her. Suddenly, she stopped singing but continued to sit and stare into Mardana’s eyes without blinking. A round lamp was slowly revolving behind

her head and its light was falling directly into Mardana's eyes. He sat as if turned to stone.

Singer : "Who are you?"

Mardana : "I don't know."

Singer : "Are you a singer?"

Mardana : "Yes."

Singer : "Sing!"

Mardana began to sing.

Singer : "Are you a man?"

Mardana : "Yes."

Singer : "No, you are a woman."

Mardana : "Yes."

Singer : "Are you a goat?"

Mardana : "Yes."

Singer : "Then bleat like a goat."

Mardana : "Baa-baa."

Singer : "Very good. Now sit here and go on bleating."

Turning to her companions, she said in an angry voice, "What a nuisance he has been! I wonder who his master is whose

thought kept him from falling under my spell for so long. Wasted a whole day!"

This woman was Noorsha. She was a rich and powerful sorceress who used her magical powers to enslave people and take over their wealth. The people of her state were extremely afraid of her and kept out of her way as much as possible.

Now, to show her powers, she paraded Mardana throughout the palace. He was like a puppet and obeyed her every command. She gave him chillies saying they were sweet and he ate them happily. Then she gave him a banana and when he took a bite, she told him it was bitter and he promptly spat it out. Getting bored, finally, she tied him to a wooden post and went to her room.

The sun was beginning to set and Mardana had still not returned. Guru ji knew He had been sent here to rid the city of some great

evil and He wondered if Mardana had got trapped in it. He decided to go and find out.

Soon Guru ji reached the same mansion where Mardana was imprisoned. The door was open and He saw a tall, well-built woman with large, staring eyes, standing in the courtyard. Behind her were two lions chained to pillars. A couple of serving women stood nearby. Mardana was sitting against a wall in a corner, fast asleep.

One woman said to Noorsha, “O powerful one, have pity and awaken him from his sleep. I don’t think he will cause any trouble now. He will stay and serve you and he sings well too.”

Noorsha : “Oh no, I am not releasing him just yet. He is not ordinary like the others. Let him stay like this for the next 3 days and nights at least. Only then will he be able to really forget who he is.”

Second maid : “With respect, Mistress, he looks so pathetic. We feel so sorry for him.”

Noorsha : “Sorry for him? Why? Am I ill-treating him? There he sits most comfortably happy to obey me. Just now when I said, ‘Eat your food’ he began to chew on an empty mouth. Now I’ll tell him to bleat.....”

Mardana : “Baa-baa.”

At this all of them began to laugh.

Noorsha stopped laughing suddenly and looked around nervously. She felt as if her heart had missed a beat. This was a new feeling for her as she was used to making other people’s hearts flutter in fear.

From the direction of the main gates a sweet but stern voice rang out, “Sat Kartar”

(God is Truth). A dignified figure stepped through the doorway.

Noorsha took one look and quickly lowered her eyes. There was something so awe-inspiring about the figure that she did not have the courage to look at Him. She wanted to get away to the safety of her rooms, but she could not move. With great effort she signaled to one of her maids, who ran inside and brought a silver dish filled with delicacies which she placed in front of Guru ji.

Guru ji stood still and unmoving, His eyes alight with a strange glow, His lips tightly shut and His forehead shining with a divine radiance. He cast a look of loving pity on Mardana and then turned a stern eye towards Noorsha. In a ringing voice He spoke, "Take it away! It is not for this that I have come here."

Hardly had the food been removed than two girls came bearing golden bowls full of pearls, diamonds and other precious gems. Guru ji imperiously waved away these too saying, "I have no need for these. Return this man to us. It is not wise to play mischief with men of God."

As Guru ji looked at Noorsha she seemed to shrink. She was very pale and her throat was parched. Slowly she sank to the ground as if she was in great pain.

Guru ji spoke to her of the evil she had been doing by her magical powers, for which she would have to pay a heavy price in the Lord's court. He ordered her to release all those she had enslaved.

Licking her dry lips Noorsha turned her head with great difficulty and in a hoarse voice said, "Go! You are all free!"

From all the rooms men, women and children rushed out. Laughing loudly they poured out of the palace to a life of freedom.

Mardana shook himself as if waking from a deep sleep. He had completely forgotten the strange events of the day. When he caught sight of Guru ji, he ran forward and threw himself at His feet. “Lord, Lord! Where are we?” he cried.

Guru ji patted him on the back and with a loving smile said, “Never mind. Let’s go, we have far to travel yet.”

Noorsha became a changed person. She was a highly educated woman. Now she began to use this learning for the betterment of the people. She had been shown the spiritual path by Guru ji and she spent her days in prayer and in serving the people.