

The Merchant, the Parrot and the Best Gift

A Tale from Rumi's Masnavi

A merchant had a parrot. One day the merchant wanted to go to India. Everyone in his family wanted him to bring back a gift. The merchant asked his parrot, "What should I bring you as a gift?" The parrot, who had been in his cage for a long time, answered, "I don't want anything from you except when you are in India say hello to the wild parrots for me." The merchant agreed and he left to India.

After he was finished with his business, he went to the jungle and sent his parrot's regards to the parrots living there. When the merchant had finished one of the parrots started shaking and fell from the tree to the ground. The merchant became very sad and regretful. He returned to his home and brought a gift for each member of his family. The parrot asked him, "Did you see the wild parrots and send them my message?"

The merchant answered, "Ay, don't ask me anything my parrot! I regret sending your message to them and have become very sad!" The parrot said, "But what happened to make you so sad? Please tell me." The merchant answered, "When I gave them your message, one of the parrots shook, fell out of the tree, and died."

As soon as the merchant finished talking, the parrot shook in its cage and fell to the floor. The merchant was very upset and thought that his parrot had died so he opened the cage door and took the parrot's body to the garden. As soon as the parrot saw he was free he flew off and onto a branch of a nearby tree. The merchant didn't know what to say and he stood amazed with his mouth open. The parrot turned to face him and said, "Thank you very much! You brought me the best present, freedom! You see that wild parrot taught me how to free myself." The parrot then flew off in the direction of the wild parrots.

Translation by Larry Klein