

The River and the Rope

A companion to “Learn Persian through a Rumi Story” —for a Daughter of Iran

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Dear Sara

This letter is a companion to the video [Learn Persian through a Rumi Story!](#) by Sara — *Daughter of Iran*: a beginner Persian lesson built on the Masnavi’s fable of the mouse and the camel. Her words are quoted from the lesson (rendered in English); the fable’s ending is Rumi’s own, from Book Two of the Masnavi.

What a lovely lesson—and what a sly choice of story. Your students believe they are simply learning vocabulary: camel, mouse, wolf, rope, river. In truth, you have smuggled in one of the Masnavi’s sharpest fables, pausing at the perfect cliffhanger: everyone stands at the river’s edge, unable to cross.

The mouse holds the rope, and because it rests in its paw while the camel follows, the mouse concludes that it is leading. In your telling:

I am a champion. I am a great champion. I pull a camel — I pull a big camel.
So I am a champion.

— Sara — *Daughter of Iran*, [Learn Persian through a Rumi Story](#)

It never occurs to the mouse that the camel is simply willing. Scripture has a word for this precise arithmetic—even employing Rumi’s own category, the measure:

Romans 12:3, WEB · For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think reasonably, as God has apportioned to each person a measure of faith.

It also names where such boasting leads, one river before the bank:

Proverbs 16:18, WEB · Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

Then comes the river. Here lies the fable's genius: the same water is nothing to one and death to another; the difference is not courage, but size. The mouse stops; the wolf stops. In your telling, the story rests right there, and I want to tell you what lies on the far side of that pause. Every son and daughter of Adam eventually reaches this bank. There is a river at the end of every life where our champion-talk goes quiet. Into that very scene, the God of Israel speaks a promise no fable dared to dream:

Isaiah 43:2, WEB · When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle on you.

You know how Maulana finishes the story: the camel finally speaks—"this water that would drown you is only knee-deep to me. Know your measure—and climb up." The proud little rope-holder is not destroyed; it is carried. The strong one bends down and takes the small one across on its own back. Maulana meant it as a lesson in humility, and it is. Yet, read it beside these words, spoken by the strongest One who ever bent down:

Matthew 11:28-30, WEB · "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

That is the fable's ending, now with its true name. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"—the mouse humbled is the mouse carried:

First Peter 5:5-6, WEB · Likewise, you younger ones, be subject to the elder. Yes, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to subject yourselves to one another; for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time;

There is One for whom the river at the end of every life is merely knee-deep—He went through it and came back out, and He lets the small climb on. I wrote to you once before about your telling of the king and the vizier: [The Call of Return](#). The study of the ache behind all of Maulana's rivers is free to read in both our tongues: [Olam in English](#) · [Olam in Persian](#). Teach on—and come and see.

How this was made

This is the author's own work. It was composed with [junifye](#) and an AI assistant, drawing its Scripture and original-language work (Greek, Hebrew, cross-references) from [Darash](#) (Hebrew *darash*, “to seek, inquire, study”), a tool and reference work for the Bible in its original languages.

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