



**Program — The Meditative Rose**  
April 2003

**Mystery glows in the rose bed,  
The secret is hidden in the rose.**

- - *Farid un-din Attar*, twelfth-century Persian poet.

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**How could such sweet and wholesome hours be  
reckon'd but with herbs and flowers.**  
- Andrew Marvell (1621-78)

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***This Program is dedicated to  
celebration of two momentous events,  
two millennia apart,  
in two gardens***

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**PROGRAM**

**MEDITATIVE ROSE**

- - LIVE PERFORMANCE BY SARAH & ANDREW
- - Legends of Rose

**RED ROSE OF SORROW**

- - No 12 —The Master’s Choice
- - Easter Sunday by Marzieh Gail
- - Festival of Ridvan

## **MEDITATIVE CHANT BY MOBIN**

### **WHITE ROSE OF JOY**

- - No 5 —The Master’s Choice
- - Supreme Awakening of Buddha
- - A Song Offering by Rabindranath Tagore
- - Taken from the Writings of Baha’u’llah

### **GOLDEN ROSE OF GLORY**

- - No 4 —The Master’s Choice
- - Called out of Darkness by Thomas Merton
- - Excerpts from the Tablet of Ridvan by Baha’u’llah

## **FINALE**

- - LIVE PERFORMANCE BY SARAH & ANDREW

## **The Meditative Rose**

**T**he rose, probably the most celebrated and persistently used adornment of human civilization, existed long before the advent of man. Fossils of rose plants millions of years old have been found in America, Europe and Asia. Evidence suggests that all roses were originally native to the northern hemisphere; they were taken south of the equator by man.

Nearly every culture seems to have had its own folklore about the rose, and almost all regarded it as the queen of flowers. According to one Roman Poet, ‘the rose was either born from a smile of Cupid or else it fell from the hair of Aurora as she combed it’. The Greeks provide some of the most picturesque myths, many of them associated with Aphrodite, or Venus, as the Romans called the goddess of love. In one story Venus was hurrying through a thicket when she stepped on a thorn . From her blood sprang the first red roses.

### **MEDIEVAL LEGENDS –**

According to medieval belief, the first roses appeared in answer to a maiden's prayers. A girl from Bethlehem, unjustly condemned to be burnt at the stake, prayed for help. God answered by turning the already smouldering embers into red roses and the unburnt sticks of wood into white ones. Another legend holds that a white rose bloomed in the Garden of Eden – it blushed when Eve kissed it and turned into a red one.

The Arabs had their theories, one of which was that the rose grew out of the sweat of the prophet Mohammed. More picturesque is the story of the flowers' complaint to Allah that the queen of flowers, the lotus, slept at night. So Allah created the white rose. The story did not end there. The nightingale fell in love with the white rose and during a passionate embrace was pricked by its thorns; the drops of blood which fell from the nightingale stained the white rose red.

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In Persia, roses were evidently grown from an early period and King Kyros 11 of Persia took the rose as his official symbol of power in the sixth century BC. The main rose-growing areas were always in the north of the country. According to an Englishman writing in more recent times, 'in no country in the world does the rose grow in such perfection as in Persia; in no country is it so cultivated and prized by the natives. Their gardens and courts are crowded by its plants, their rooms ornamented with roses...and every bath strewn with the full-blown flowers... The image of the rose appears from time to time in Persian literature.

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*The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah*

O YE PEOPLE THAT HAVE MINDS TO KNOW AND EARS TO HEAR!

The first call of the beloved is this: O mystic nightingale! Abide not but in the rose-garden of the spirit. O messenger of the Solomon of love! Seek thou no shelter except in the Sheba of the well-beloved, and O immortal phoenix! Dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness. Therein is thy habitation, if on the wings of thy soul thou soarest to the realm of the infinite and seekest to attain thy goal.

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*VIRGIN'S SORROW*

*There are many saints associated with roses. St Dorothy, for example, was martyred for her Christian beliefs. As she was led to her*

*death she declared that she was on her way to her wedding and that her fiancé was Jesus Christ. Theophilus, a scribe who was standing by, jeered at her and suggested she should send some 'roses or apples' from her bridegroom's paradise. Shortly after her execution a young boy appeared, on a cold February day, with a basket containing three apples and three roses in full bloom. He gave them to Theophilus, who was converted to Christianity and eventually became a martyr himself.*

*The Virgin Mary must lay claim to more associations with the rose than any other figure. She is said to have appeared at Fatima and at Lourdes from a circle of roses. The origin of the rosary is traditionally associated with her gift of a chaplet of beads, perfumed with roses, to St Dominic.*

*Absorbed into the liturgy as a title of Mary, Mystical Rose, the flower became the symbol of a paragon, or one without equal, and of Christian purity. Red roses symbolize the Virgin's sorrow, white roses her joy and gold roses her glory. In other Christian symbolism the rose is also associated with the blood of martyrs, the wounds of Christ and the crown of thorns.*

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## Red Rose of Sorrow

About 2,000 years ago this Easter day Mary Magdalen had bought spices to anoint the body of Jesus the Christ. She went to the sepulchre in the garden and found it empty. The linen that had wrapped Him lay in the tomb, and the cloth that had bound His head – but His body was gone –

The light that leaps out of darkness, the fire that comes from stone, symbolizes Christ's conquest of death. He, who is the source of all life, could never remain in death, could not see corruption. Death is not a reality, but the absence of a reality. And in Him there is nothing unreal.

The blessing of new fire is then a keynote of the whole Easter Vigil – the new fire (says the prayer) is to enflame our hearts with heavenly desires, in order that we may be able with pure minds to enter into the feast of eternal light.

- - *Thomas Merton*

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Today is the Bahá'í Festival of Ridván. Ridván may be translated as 'the paradise of the good pleasure of God.' On this day in 1863 Bahá'u'llah proclaimed His mission – in a garden of Baghdad, called by Baha'is the garden of Ridvan.

Baghdad is a city of brown rivers and domes and palm trees. The garden of Ridvan is a hospital now. It is shadowy and cool, and all day long there you hear doves – thousand of doves.

And so this Easter coincides with another scene in another garden – also in the East, for all religions come from the East – but this time the garden was in Baghdad. It was during the season of roses. Visitors came to Baha'u'llah from all over Baghdad to say good-bye to Him – for He was about to be exiled again. And early in the mornings, the gardeners would pick the roses and pile them in the centre of Baha'u'llah's tent – and He would give them to various of His followers to

take to His Arab and Persian friends in the city.

Baha'u'llah was a nobleman, exiled from Persia - and shortly prior to His Declaration He began to give forth - reveal - remarkable teachings. His companions knew that some great thing was about to happen. The historian says that 'Many a night would (His amanuensis) gather them together in His room, light numerous camphorated candles, and chant aloud to them the newly revealed odes and Tablets in his possession. Wholly oblivious of this . . . world, completely immersed in the realms of the spirit, forgetful of the necessity for food, sleep or drink, they would suddenly discover that night had become day, and that the sun was approaching its zenith.'<sup>3</sup>

It is hard to tell anything adequate of all this. It is like the Persian story of the holy man or mystic who was sitting under a tree, lost in meditation. His disciples sat around him and when he returned to himself they asked: Out of that garden whence you have come, what gift did you bring us? He said: 'I had in mind when I should come to the rose-tree, to hold out my skirt and fill it with flowers as a gift to the friends. But when I reached there, the scent of the roses so ravished my senses that my robe fell away from my hands.'

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Il est d'étranges soirs où les fleurs ont une âme.  
*There are strange evenings when the flowers have a soul.*  
- Albert Samain (1858 - 1900)

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## *White Rose of Joy*

Buddha's birth is also recorded to be in mid April in 565 BC

### **Supreme Awakening!**

Through the round of many births I roamed without reward, without rest, seeking the house-builder. Painful is birth, again and again.

House-builder, you're seen! You will not build a house again. All your rafters broken, the ridge pole destroyed, gone to the Unformed, the mind has come to the end of craving.

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### **A Song Offering**

He it is, the innermost one, who awakens my being with his deep hidden touches.

He it is who puts his enchantment upon these eyes and joyfully plays on the chords of my heart in varied cadence of pleasure and pain.

He it is who weaves the web of this maya in evanescent hues of gold and silver, blue and green, and lets peep out through the folds his feet, at whose touch I forget myself.

Days come and ages pass, and it is ever he who moves my heart in many a name, in many a guise, in many a rapture of joy and of sorrow.

-Gitanjali by Rabinranath Tagore

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**O MY SERVANTS! IT BEHOVETH YOU TO REFRESH AND REVIVE YOUR SOUL THROUGH THE GRACIOUS FAVOURS WHICH, IN THIS DIVINE, THIS SOUL-STIRRING SPRINGTIME, ARE BEING SHOWERED UPON YOU. THE DAY STAR OF HIS GREAT GLORY HATH SHED ITS RADIANCE UPON YOU, AND THE CLOUDS OF HIS LIMITLESS GRACE HAVE OVERSHADOWED YOU. HOW HIGH THE REWARD OF HIM THAT HATH NOT DEPRIVED HIMSELF OF SO GREAT A BOUNTY, NOR**

FAILED TO RECOGNIZE THE BEAUTY OF HIS BEST-BELOVED IN THIS,  
HIS NEW ATTIRE.

- TOKEN FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHA'ULLAH

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## *Golden Rose of Glory*

### CALLED OUT OF DARKNESS

The brightness of the eternal light is so great that we cannot see it, and all other lights become darkness by comparison with it. Yet to the spiritual man, all other lights contain the infinite light. He passes through them to reach it. And as he passes, he no longer hesitates, comparing one finite light with another, one empirical object with another, concept with concept. Travelling with haste, in the unerring security which transcends all objects, instructed by the Spirit Who alone can tell us the secret of our individual destiny, man begins to know God as he knows his own self. The night of faith has brought us into contact with the Object of all faith, not as an object but as a Person Who is the centre and life of our own being, at once His own Transcendent Self and the immanent source of our own identity and life.

- Thomas Merton

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### Excerpts From the Tablet of Ridvan

Hear Me, ye mortal birds! In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a

thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your soul, the full fervor of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory. Who so followeth this counsel will break his chains asunder, will taste the abandonment of enraptured love, will attain unto his heart's desire, and will surrender his soul into the hands of his Beloved. Bursting through his cage, he will, even as the bird of the spirit, wing his flight to his holy and everlasting nest.

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Say: This is the Paradise on whose foliage the wine of utterance hath imprinted the testimony:" He that was hidden from the eyes of men is revealed, girded with sovereignty and power!" This is the Paradise, the rustling of whose leaves proclaim: "O ye that inhabit the heavens and the earth! There hath appeared what hath never previously appeared. He who, from everlasting, had concealed His face from the sight of creation is now come." From the whispering breeze that wafteth amidst its branches there cometh the cry: "He who is the sovereign Lord of all is made manifest. The Kingdom is God's," while from its steaming waters can be heard the murmur: "All eyes are gladdened, for He whom none hath beheld, whose secret no one hath discovered, hath lifted the veil of glory, and uncovered the countenance of Beauty."

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The everlasting Candle shineth in its naked glory. Behold how it hath consumed every mortal veil. O ye moth-like lovers of His light! Brave every danger, and consecrate your souls to its consuming flame. O ye that thirst after Him! Strip yourselves of every earthly affection, and hasten to embrace your Beloved. With a zest that none can equal make haste to attain unto Him. The Flower, thus far hidden from the sight of men, is unveiled to your eyes. In the open radiance of His glory He standeth before you. His voice summoneth all the holy and sanctified beings to come and be united

with Him. Happy is he that turneth thereunto; well is it with him that hath attained, and gazed on the light of so wondrous a countenance.

-Baha'u'llah

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Ce n'est que songe et fleurs dont nos âmes ont faim.

*The only hunger of our souls is for dreams  
and flowers*

- *Paul-Jean Toulet (1867 - 1920)*