

THE LIVING PALM TREE

Parables, Stories
and Teachings
from the Kabbalah

Mario Satz

Translated from Spanish
by Juan Acevedo



THE MATHESON TRUST
For the Study of Comparative Religion

In the Cemetery

With a slow, ceremonious pace, four of the disciples of Rabbi Moshe Isfahani walked the yellow dust of Pir Bakan's cemetery in order to lay their memorial stones on his basalt tomb. Far away, the mountains had a salmon colour.

The sky was so blue it seemed like living lacquer, running sapphire.

"Do you remember what he told us the last day of his life?" asked Yoel of Balkh.

"I do," avowed Haim of Ghazni.

"It was a hot day," added Shaul of Shiraz.

"Swallows were flying around, and watching them from his deathbed," carried on Gad of Hamadan, "watching them fly beyond the window, he raised his voice, enfeebled by pain: 'When there is no master to guide the way, birds know only a tiny parcel of heaven and earth. But if they have a guide, even by night they can read the maps of the stars, and far in the distance they can catch sight of the eaves under which their fledglings will sleep. When a master of the flight leaves, it seems as if there is no frame or direction in our own wings, but soon enough a new swallow comes to take his place, and once more it is possible to return again and again to where you have been.'"

"That is what he said," confirmed Yoel of Balkh sadly.

"It was a hot day," repeated Haim of Ghazni.

"Hotter than today," said Shaul of Shiraz as he placed a small stone over the grave of Rabbi Moshe Isfahani.

"It is curious," observed Gad of Hamadan, whose prodigious memory they all trusted, "how he also used to say that a good

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master embodies what all his different disciples have in common, while a good disciple discovers what all beings have in common.”

One swallow went by, then another. After a while the first star shone, and later the moon, the rugged mirror of the sun.

The swallow, dror דרור, was both during the Biblical and post-Biblical periods a good example of the respect and responsibility existing between one generation, dor דור, and the next. You can return to the place from where you once departed if you carefully listen to the voice of your ancestors. In Ancient Egypt, the swallow (Hirundo rustica) was the ornithological embodiment of Isis, the goddess charged with “gathering” the dismembered parts of the body of her husband and brother Osiris.