

AT THE WELL OF LIFE

In this beautiful analogy from village life in India, this world has been compared to a well, and the people of this world to the women who come to the well with their pitchers to fill them with water. Just as there is a continuous stream of women who come to the well, so also people come to this world and depart from here in an unending succession.

In another simile, the poet says that just as the decoration of a bride adorned with ornaments and jewelry is all futile, if her husband does not look at her, so also the worldly position and status of a man are quite useless, if the Lord does not accept him. Such persons, with all their wealth and power, lose the game of life, in the words of Bulleh Shah, because they fail to attain the real purpose of human existence, namely union with the Lord.

Pani bhar bhar gayyan sabbhe

They all filled their pitchers,
and departed turn by turn.

More have come, some have filled and are leaving;
Some are waiting with arms outstretched.
With garlands, necklaces round their necks,
Their arms tinkle with bracelets.
Earrings hanging from their ears,
Jhumars¹ falling on their foreheads,
Lend perfection to their vanity.

1. An ornament consisting of a number of chains forming a fringe, which is attached to the top-knot of a woman's head and falls on the forehead.

But the Husband does not turn to look back;
Their proud ostentation is futile.
They all filled their pitchers,
and departed turn by turn.

With henna on hands, henna on feet,
A plait of hair on her temples,
Perfumes and scented oil on her person,
betel in the mouth, missi¹ on her teeth,
Were the secret call to come,
All her household chores would be forgotten!
They all filled their pitchers,
and departed turn by turn.

O Bullah, if you follow His footsteps,
You'll discover the path.
You asked for a win, you got utter defeat.
Having lost the game of life,
You have become deaf, dumb and mad.

They all filled their pitchers,
and departed turn by turn.

Nazir Ahmad, Kalam-i-Bulleh Shah, p. 22

1. A powder that stains the gums red.