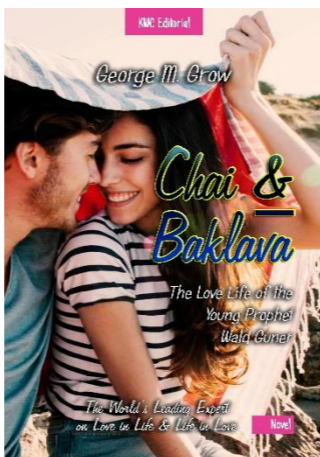


George M. Grow
Chai & Baklava
Romance

"Nobody else brings them
closer to themselves"



From the series
The Books of Life®



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The Prophecy

The heat is oppressive. For a long time, people have stopped talking about a heat wave, they worry over climate change. Under the spreading branches of the old plane tree, it is more tolerable, not to say that the situation, in which the reader is eavesdropping on us, was acceptable. Poorly entertained and with the heavy, hazy air on my neck, I concern myself with the question of whether my young friend, I knew as a man of the world till this morning, isn't obsessed by a matter that isn't adequate for him. We know how it began. It began as always, after the hero of the story has led the opulent life and wakes up in the valley of decadence: He decides to give his life a new direction and remembers that there was still another thing: the hub of meaning, the secret of life, God or whatever else one wants to call it.

Wald certainly is not the first who quests for meaning or, if you like, has found of that meaning; but while the Tao Te King jaws idleness, while the Bhagavad Gita seems to forget man in this world*, while in Goethes Faust, there is no philosophical tenor to get hold of, while Joris Karl Huysman's characters get lost in the weird depths of Aestheticism; while Jep Gambar-della sees the "great beauty" shimmering through but relapses into the prattle of his society which flaunts its frivolity and opulence; while Carlos Castaneda's characters are on an ethnologic-fictive ego trip, Hermann Hesse's Sidd-

hartha spend his life time to find meaning for himself and Paulo Coelho can at best rank himself among the kings of esoteric trash, I wish Wald that he found something that won't amount to nothing any time soon, spirituality turned from its head onto the feet of this ground, and wish for myself that we get on the text.

It is shortly after three, and I long for a cool shower. My handkerchief is dripping with sweat and my clothes stick to my skin. Despite the new dictaphone, Wald understands that I plan on taking down the next paragraph in order to reach my target for today, folds his jacket beside himself on the bench, undoes his shirt, moves into the sun and waits with his eyes closed till I've got the hang of the small electronic dictaphone and our attention falls on a howling crowd of young people inebriatedly making their way through the park. Then, after we have heard the sound of them breaking a bottle, their bawling subsides into the background noise of the town so that I press the record button and Wald returns us to a spot just in front of the bridge spanning the lake. The blinding lanterns have been becoming fewer and fewer. Only small groups, couples and individuals bustle in the street, over the lake or into their houses while a knot of people has been congregating around him. Leaving behind the major city, swimming in the vague magic of its illumination, they reach the patisserie, in which Wald had placed his order. And as if something were preventing them from ascending the arch of the bridge, the crowd

stops in the gleam of a flickering lamp post. Wald infers from their gestures and their voices that the Sihdi, the boatswains, the marshals and some other people are still undecided on where and how human will acts, although they have already concluded certain points: that all along, something has been going wrong on this planet, that, indeed, it was important to desire but that the root of all man-made sorrow was the compulsive will and it should be read not as Buddha said "All life is sorrow", but rather that all will, or even more precisely, all excessive will is sorrow; that the will demands far more than the world can give; that there is always something missing since the will knows no limit, is aimless and blind; that further wishes arise from any wish that is satisfied, while the possibilities of fulfilling them are very limited; that the will was well known as the first cause of the quarrel and the fight we experience and witness day by day while up to now almost nobody truly knew what love is (perhaps not in the desire to attract something or someone to oneself but to be drawn to it); that we could imagine this will as a universal power since almost everybody wants basically the same: to eat, drink, win, sleep, have sex and gain power and prestige, as Ibrahim notes, that the state had to care for the cultivation of this will, as Wald throws in, that the cause of bondage and the release from this bondage had to be taught in school instead of leaving the power over us and the sense of what is achievable and meaningful to the super-

apparatuses in the background; that one only can rule this will on the basis of self-sacrifice and that true humanity would not start before sacrifice and sacrificial rites have become a commonplace (for example, under Wald's slogan "Cult in Culture"); that mankind would destroy itself if we do not come to move between both metaphysics, between both extremes, between Oriente Lux and Oxidente De Luxe, between mind and matter and even some other aspects of the matrix of the will, of the liberty through self-denial and of the collective intelligence as the basis and the salvation for our hard-won liberties. And although all this has not yielded anything new or fresh, since we know at least with Freud that we shall face up to our uncomfortable feelings in the context of culture, that Dickens and Gasset taught us that we need more than the fullness of things in order to be okay, to be sure to not tumble into the void into which Nicholas disappeared (as well as Jack London, Marilyn Monroe, Romy Schneider, Klaus Mann, Brian Jones, Kurt Cobain, David Caradine, Falco, Robin Williams etc.), the Sihdi and his minions, increasing in numbers minute by minute, have been growing very pensive. Traffic has been slowing, and the old man, still linking arms with Wald, wipes his high, furrowed brow. Wald wonders how they come to be interested in the foundations of knowledge. Is it sorrow, is it guilt, is it the defense of pain as a prerequisite for truth, the ability to appreciate unpleasant facts in memory of war? Wald should be quite mista-

ken if this were not the case, but there is still more since he feels with them what it means to be part of an essential friendship, to feel the pure and entire relationship that lives only for its own sake from the gift of togetherness. He can talk with them in a friendly, rational and relevant way, without hostility, not defending their opinions against each other, but by thinking concertedly, not by simply agreeing or disagreeing, but by approaching a matter jointly, without committing themselves to any concept, negation, book or experience. Even if you are highly educated, well-read, fully versed in the philosophies, no matter which frame of mind you are of, all this prevents you from thinking jointly as soon as you start trying to. The Sihdi and the boatswains, living in the tradition of Islam, Buddhism and shamanism, have the magnanimity to set aside the differences of faith in order to encounter each other and to approach things jointly. Now they do not belong to a particular group, to a sect or to a denomination, they do not preach and do not try to impose a certain line of thinking. They work together, and when they lend him an ear, they do it attentively with care and are able to think things through and to get to the bottom of the exceptional phenomenon of life as a network of brains. They expect neither belief nor disbelief, neither the understanding of their gestures nor any label, and again and again, they look at Wald in the hope that he could shed light on the beginning of things what seems to him, who permanently fell on death ears

in Vienna soon as he commented on the root of evil, odd and strange.

“Nevertheless, it’s you who has detected the Theory for Everything,” I cannot avoid teasing him.

“This too,” he utters without opening his eyes or removing his arms crossed behind his head.

“Which is eternally valid.”

“I guess the philosophical categories won’t change much anymore.”

“And actually, why not?” I butt in.

“Since they precede effects, will and thought,” he responds and shifts over close to my side, so that the slats start to bend under our combined weight, and babbles on about a first cosmic order we can improve by using the categories well-balanced (above all diversity and unity (out of them matter and Mind, actuality and reality, states and confederation of states, federalism and centralism, partner and partnership etc.)) since, as he says in a metaphor, even good spices could not repair a bad dough. “Okay,” I stop him before the day is out, switch on, hold the dictaphone at his somewhat undersized but pretty curved mouth and hear that at least the Sihdi and his companions are all ears. Born and grown up in Kashmir, they know that no single philosophy or faith is the only light in the universe. There are many philosophies which claim to embody true thinking, but in truth, they are all affiliated to a personal will, to sociological ideals or to pragmatic ethics political motivated. To people like the Sihdi and his followers, the mesh of all possible observations, styles of thinking,

joys and facts as coherent as possible is much closer to the truth which was the basis of those pre-casual, categorial facts of matter, life and psyche, from which man could approach to his current problems directly. But there is still another thing which allows them think jointly, on which their community and common openness rests on, in which his integral thinking and the thinking at this place, a gathering point for quite a few schools of thought and belief, interlock. When namely the group has reached the highest point of the humpbacked bridge, the Sihdi, nestled himself against Wald's arm like a little, tame monkey, looks up to him in a complicated maneuver and says,

"I can see it in your eyes, my friend. You wonder how you have come to me and how I have come to you. I know you, you have to accomplish a task, but you don't yet know which!"

Wald looks at the old man and asks what he is talking about.

"I'll help you," the Sihdi rejoins and begins to speak of antique scrolls, of ancient documents found nearby the year before.

"Scrolls, what kind of scrolls," Wald asks picking up his ears. He has always been partial to archeology, since he sees archeology to be the physical counterpart of depth psychology and metaphysics.

"Ancient, partly derelict texts by an unknown author," the Sihdi responds, "a prophecy to which quite a number of people affix great hope!"

Wald smiles and asks what the prophecy foretells, although he has

a rather low opinion of prophecies. This is because he has looked too closely into the toolbox of the seers who, like the trendographers and futurologists, conceptualize practical constraints as products of a contemporary system of thinking and project them into the future. But if the system is changed or toppled, as it was the case every few decades*, the practical constraints would fall too, while Wald's timeless, immanent, axiomatic parameters of the system that is the world would remain. And while this is working its way through his mind, the Sihdi unhooks himself from his arm, clings to the bridge railing, turns about, looks with his small, closely spaced eyes directly into Wald's face and says that these scrolls, written fifteen centuries ago, were the missing link in the history of Kashmir and were proving what was handed down as a nebulous legend over centuries. To Wald's question where the documents were found, the Sihdi, Aiwaz and Uwais report that in the summer of 2006, four goatherds from Srinagar were on their way to Harran in order to drive their flock to the plateau of Tuliamulla, a route their Bedouin ancestors, as well as traders and smugglers from all over the world had travelled for hundreds of years. Then Wald turns his eyes to Ibrahim, who recounts the episode from the viewpoint of the shepherd Mohammed el-Muhaid:

“While the animals were grazing below the intermediate tent camp in the Shallah Valley,” he says, “Mohammed left his friends and climbed up the steep and rugged

slopes of the Pinasi.” “He dreamt of finding forgotten supplies or buried treasures one day,” the impalpably smaller marshal chimes in. “When he saw the opening of a cave above him,” Ibrahim proceeds, “he threw a stone into it, and, to his surprise, he heard the noise of breaking earthenware vessels. He tore his shirt to shreds climbing up to the entrance of the cave and made his way in. When his eyes had adjusted to the darkness, he saw quite a number of jugs at the walls, but the most of them were broken. On all fours, he crawled to the jugs which were still intact and pulled two bundles out of them. Completely excited, he climbed outside where he was disappointed to realize that all he had found were nearly decayed scrolls he couldn't even read.”

“I know el-Muhaid,” Uwais says. “He cannot even write his own name!”

“He was so upset and disappointed,” Ibrahim says, “that he didn't understand that he was the first one to hold in his hands the prophecies which contain the future of Kashmir, India, maybe of the world, which shall be realized this very evening.”

“What,” Wald asks, “this evening?” Then he is all smiles and says that this prophecy finally would be great compared with the promises people await in vain and will continue to await for millennia. Then he glances at his watch and says, “If this is the case, destiny had better to get a move on. There're less than six hours left till midnight. What do they foretell, the Day of Judgement? That wasn't

pretty. I still want to see the India of the old maharajas!”

The Sihdi, the men from the pier and the men and women who have joined the group along the way are exchanging peculiar looks owing to Wald, who contradicts their hopes. Their heads hang far down and the Sihdi gives Uwais, the bosun with the pipe, a sign. Then the Sihdi dips into his coat pocket, removes a small, long-handled, wooden spoon, plows it through the tobacco pouch held out by Uwais and puts it up to his widely flared nostril. “Fffft, fffft!” he draws the tobacco up through his nose, wipes his nostril, wadded with mighty silver firs with the back of his hand and pulls a huge, red handkerchief out of his coat pocket, presses his twitching nose to it and produces such an enormous sneeze that the marshals jump to his aid to prevent the small man from blowing over. “Bless you,” Wald wishes. Then Ibrahim takes the floor.

“My dear friend in Allah! Thanks to our Pir,” he says to Wald, “last winter, the old scrolls from the Shallah Valley could be deciphered. We know when and where the prophecy will be fulfilled, and we know some features by which the awaited person can be recognized.”

“It is said” the Sihdi proceeds while he is rubbing, pinching and picking his nose, “that a man with white skin and rosy hair from the far west will come to end the chaos in the world. Through this man, our view will change, and a new age will arise. Chhh, we guess, fffft, the awaited one is you!”

“Who - me?” Wald cannot do other, he must chuckle. Then he

smiles so that his nice teeth gleam in the weak light of the lanterns, looks around and realizes what he has caused: The many pairs of eyes gazing at him are disappointed eyes, and in order not to shatter their hopes completely, he replies to the Sihdi that so he knew that he hasn't tied him to a bear with his answers, a saying borrowed from German and which seems to tickle the Sihdi pink somehow. "Ccch, ffft," the old man responds, "I'd have pulled the fur over its ears as well!" And while he is bent over in laughter, his hands make the motions of skinning a bear. And when the animal is deprived of its pelt by an act of most brutal cruelty, Wald suddenly feels like death warmed over. His fun, owing to the suspicion he was the expected person, makes way for a new deluge of doubts, and these doubts give way to a void, which nullifies the bliss of the day that has been so blissful till now.

Remember, Wald jumps on the first available plane and ends up in the back of beyond among people to whom he can finally speak about things which are no things, and must state to his horror that all the friendly affection, the whole audience, every second of the attention they direct towards him is not based on him himself but on a ridiculous prophecy. And instead of having a giggle over the Sihdi's mimed skinning of an imaginary bear, a radical bitterness is gnawing at him, driving home the point that this half-hell (planet Earth) will remain infernal for a very long time. Immersed in his grief, seized with the fear that he has to think in far, far greater dimensions of time,

he rubs his temples with his head hanging down and looks up when the old, venerable fogey tugs at his sleeve and says,

“I know all this must sound odd to you, but just keep listening to what I say!”

“Don’t moan, boy,” Wald seems to read in a full-bearded man’s pair of eyes. And having come so far, he thinks of Veronica and Isabell.

“Such a thing would be completely impossible with them.” Then he looks over the darkened lake and asks, which facts lead them to dare to believe that the prophecy will come true this night of all nights. At a glance, the Sihdi loosens his grip on the parapet, drags himself swiftly from shoulder to shoulder up to him, clings to his arm, looks up and says,

“As God bids, young fellow, the prophecy will be fulfilled when the new moon rises above Srinagar the fourth time this year.” Wald knows that the new moon will rise this evening. Even yesterday, the satellite was hardly to see. The crescent was so thin and so fragile that he would not have dared to even mow the lawn with it. And because this is not a surety for being a prophecy yet since somebody who predicts the course of the stars is not one of the prophets but at best an Astronomer or an astrologer or both of them as Keppler was and he has retained a sense of proportion since his stay on his uncle’s estate, he says the Sihdi and his folks,

“Not in thousand years, there will be the civilization of inwardness. Your prophet has come too soon. The desire for his coming is like the desire to win the lottery: heave-ho

and your problems are solved. That will never do," he who has two jackpots in his pocket says. "Without utopian plans, there you can only hope to keep muddling through. Order and love as the way, the aim, the consensus and the best truth to date within the Many and the One. That's how far I have come, and now I am going to my room!" He bows, turns about, and while he is shaking hands, slapping backs and stroking the cheek of a girl, he is trying to cut his way through the crowd towards the path leading over the embankment to his houseboat in the little bay while something is weighing heavily on him. And while there are certainly many things on his mind, one of them stands out: that he has forgotten to say that prophecies can make sense, if you understand that they are not inevitable and that the next major but also indecisive historical event was expected after a disaster of large scale towards the middle of this century.* And since this thought, he said in the tone of a self-reproach to himself, does not even take a second, the Sihdi calls out instantly, "Halt, don't run off!"

"Stop" the large that is looking steeply down on him commands; and he actually stops. He certainly does not lack in courage or perseverance to run the human blockade which has bunched together like a concertina in front of him. He, indeed, just would need to step on the large's belt in front of him and jump over his shoulder, but because he, as a person defamed as a prophet, does not want to come up with the tricks he, as a

boy, copied from Jackie Chan and later from Susan's father they easily could magnified to a miracle, as for instance, "He's flying!", they all but toddle on in baby steps, don't take the shortcut over the embankment but go in a wide arc across the road and the meadow, which, to the Sihdi, is nothing but a stumbling block. And when the old man trips over a clod of soil so that he loses his grip at Wald's arm, my friend gingerly seizes the little bit of old man by his collar so that his legs dangle in the air. "Many thanks, Mr. Wittman!" he says when he has linked arms with Wald again. "I fall several times a day but as you know, a short man doesn't have far to fall!" The Sihdi has called Wald by his surname. Is he a hard-boiled fox? And since he is looking up at him with a mix of humor and curiosity, as if he expects Wald's first thaumaturgic feat, he, who is hardly to be flattered with longing glances, says to the Sihdi,

"You ought to look around for another. Take Craig the American. He is cyberneticist!"

"No, no," the small, hunchbacked man utters before he is repeatedly ramming his elbow into Wald's side. "You think we lived in years past by adhering to a prophecy, but in fact quite the reverse is true: You block the course of history. Open your eyes! You are the Prophet we are waiting for!"

"Alhamdulillah, all praise be to Allah!"

"Health, good fortune, blessings," other voices call out; and while Wald is rubbing his temples again, Ibrahim, whose hair glistens an-

gelically even in the darkness, confirms that there could be no doubt: He was the expected man, since even the symbol that the jar bears, in which the scrolls were found, fits exactly to him.

“To me, what symbol?” he asks taken aback.

“Pay attention,” the Sihdi says. Then he raises his hand and traces the symbol in the air with his finger and says while retracing this figure, “Two circles ... each with an ear ... connected by a line.”

“Looks like your glasses,” Abid the bosun with the blue kepi hollers from behind. And since Wald, who promptly sees quite a few numbers of things in this symbol, shakes his head again, to the Sihdi, all of this goes too far: Wald shall accept the signs, accept his destiny, not prim like a girl and be a man, what doesn't go down well with him. This what comes down with him even if not well is that the old fox, who is acting on him once with charm, then with severity, prods his biceps as if he wanted to break Wald's resistance by acupuncture. For some time, with the look that shall say to the Sihdi, “Take your love for the magic and the prophecy, trash the magic and the prophecy and retain the love”, Wald watches his upper arm taking a punishing. And since the needling comes to no end, he unhooks from the Sihdi's arm so that the old man immediately begins to falter, the stewards clutch him from both sides and Wald says to him,

“It was nice with you but now I must leave. Do you have Internet?”

The face of the small man in a

coat at least three sizes too big opens to a questionnaire. "What?" he asks looking around seeking help.

"Connection to the one hundred and twenty million miles of global glass fiber cable network."

"Nope," he regrets, and, though, Wald hands him his card at which the old coot casts a pinched eye while the other marshal, somewhat shorter but for that at least three or four inches fatter, holds the lantern for him. Then the magican looks up and says to my friend, "You think I'm an owl that can read it in the dark!" Then he puts the card into the outer pocket of his robe and waves at two figures running towards them. "You fools", he asks the two exhausted men, "where have you been?" Then a hand-held flashlight illumines the scene, and against the glistening light, Wald looks through his fingers at a video camera. He is angry with being confronted with the next fait accompli and asks the Sihdi, whether this on earth is necessary, at which the venerable, old man giggles, wipes his nose and says, "We'd like to capture your historical visit on camera. Fffft. I trust this won't annoy you!"

A little red blinking light signals that the camera is already on. Wald asks,

"And what will that supposed to be when it's done?" The young man at the DV camera responds,

"I figured we could name it Evening Walk. I just ask the Prophet to stand still or I will blur the shot!"

"Stand still," Wald repeats obtusely and says that in that case,

to him, Evening Walk doesn't fit. "You could perhaps only pretend to walk," the man holding the flashlight recommends; and the Sihdi, happy about this proposal, shows Wald what is expected of him. Still uncertain how he should behave towards their array, Wald mimics the Sihdi as if he was stamping sauerkraut as he saw it at a nostalgic festival in Tyrol; and stepping in place, he says to the camera that the Sihdi has impressed him since even in his old days, he is looking forward and not back. That the praised regards this compliment as something that is quite normal, since man's eyes are not at the back but on the front of his head, and superfluously points at Wald's feet and says that he, Wald is possibly the one who is marching in place and the camera is panning over his legs he immediately holds still, Wald definitely is fed up with them, kisses the diminutive old man's rugged forehead, spreads some air-kisses and drags himself and the fingerprint on his biceps over the gangplank into the salon. "What a pleasantly odd bunch," he says to himself, settling down. And when he is looking for distraction, he finds the gold digger's letters on the wall and then the brochures where they can be read in translation. He gets up, grabs a folder from the pile, paging through it as he goes into his room, is happy about the heated stove and falls asleep reading under the weak ceiling light.

* Supposedly, not the metaphysic but the plot of the Bhagavad Gita, "the most idealized book in world literature", says the very same (which was kept hidden from the Hindi eye up to now): "The duty of man is to learn and to perfect himself

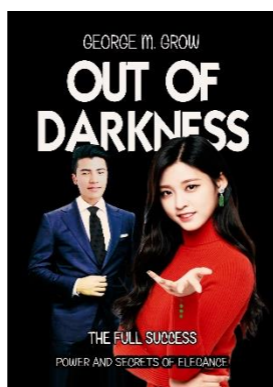
within the matter and to take an active part in the continual creation physically as mentally. Spirituality cannot be used for attaining salvation but can motivate, help for coming to the senses and giving orientation. Thus, God Krsna merely reveals the Gita to Arjuna in order to encourage him not to go for meditation into the woods but to throw himself into the battle of the king's throne.

* The fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Religious and Realm Peace of Augsburg in 1555, the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the Peace of Aachen in 1748, the revolution of 1848, the end of the Second World War 1945...

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