

Concept of spiritual lessons in attar's the conference of the birds and ramis's g...

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



The concept of spiritual lessons, or events that teach one about ways to better their spirit or soul, is a common theme throughout all works reviewed during this term. However, I will focus on two main works in which I could relate to and understand this concept on the most profound level.

Throughout *The Conference of the Birds* by Faruddin ' Attar and *Groundhog Day*, a 1993 film directed by Harold Ramis, spiritual lessons are covered and used in both similar and different ways, especially through the theme of love. In the end, both works present similar, subtle guidance on how life can and should be lived through spiritual lessons, even though their origins differ across cultures, locations, and a span of over 800 years.

In ' Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*, the birds that follow the hoopoe on the journey to find the Simorgh, their " leader," learn spiritual lessons along the way, metaphorically discovering the Sufi Way of life: realizing God's true nature. Both these birds and Phil, the main character of *Groundhog Day*, continuously learn about ways to live better through trials and tribulations on their respective journeys, on which the birds seek the Simorgh and Phil seeks escape from the endless *Groundhog Day* cycle. I think the way the metaphorical stories are structured into *The Conference of the Birds* makes them seem included as an afterthought by ' Attar, but in my interpretation, I would like to speak from the notion that the hoopoe relays the stories to the birds as further support and explanation of his answers. In this case, the hoopoe's answers to the birds' questions and the descriptions of the Valleys are reinforced by these more relatable, easy to understand examples. ' Attar uses these stories after every section where a lesson arises as a supplement, in order to clarify and add depth and face to the meaning of the lesson:

inherently, what Groundhog Day is, as a standalone lesson. Phil's story seems to be closer to a broad, non-religious example of a story ' Attar includes.

To me, ' Attar's stories were brought to mind while watching Groundhog Day. The movie seems to provide thoughts on a way to live through the example of Phil's evolution as a person, learning lessons slowly but surely through the story. Again, to me, Groundhog Day was like a more broad, contemporary version of what ' Attar uses for the stories he includes after the hoopoe speaks. I include the word broad mainly because the stories ' Attar includes are typically more narrow in their scope of lesson learning, focusing on one or two themes, answering a more specific question that a bird asks, rather than several themes throughout a more simplistic one-story method as is exemplified in Ramis's movie. For example, the story ' The king who ordered his beloved to be killed,' included after the birds arrive at their destination, draws many parallels about the theme of love specifically that help elaborate on lessons found in that section the Valley of Love (' Attar 186-7, 237-245). Meanwhile, in Groundhog Day, Phil's story encompasses many themes at once that intertwine and recur over his entire journey, rather than focusing on small intricacies of themes separately like in The Conference of the Birds. Additionally, there is another difference between the works in this respect. As Davis explains about ' Attar's stories in his introduction to The Conference of the Birds, it is " a good idea to take a story that seems recalcitrant to interpretation as an allegory of the soul's relationship with God" (xv-xvi). He goes on to explain that one main character might be seen as God and

another as the human soul. Though this can connect to Groundhog Day in some ways, perhaps, there did not seem to be a metaphorical representation of God and the human soul in the film, aside from the fact that once Phil aligned himself on the proper path of life, his seemingly magic-induced misery was ended, marking the possibility of divine intervention in his soul's journey to a better life.

In fact, in comparison to Groundhog Day overall, The Conference of the Birds is to some extent more metaphoric in its lesson giving. It seeks to teach people how to live on a Path to God, the Sufi Way, by use of a story about birds embarking on a journey, including the additional stories within that format. In this sense, it actually is an example of a story used to teach spiritual lessons on how to live well, similar to the character of Phil's journey to end the repeating cycle of Groundhog Day. Phil, however, is a blatant representation of a human that must learn various lessons day after day to live a good life, using a process of trial and error in order to do so. He mainly uses trial and error in an attempt to woo women, specifically Rita, thinking that will lead him to living well and breaking the cycle. Eventually, through mistakes like this, Phil evolves, realizes that his decisions are not making him happy, and alters his daily actions to show genuine care for others. The birds journeying to the Simorgh represent people who wish to follow Sufism and learn the Path to God and the Sufi Way, learning through the hoopoe's guidance and describing their hesitance to begin, fears during difficulties along their journey, and the general questions they ask the hoopoe about spiritual topics. Clearly, this poem is a much more metaphoric way to guide a

Sufi follower than Phil's story was to someone wanting to learn how to live a better, more fulfilling life. Past these comparisons, there are examples across both texts that specifically depict and represent thematic similarities and differences between *Groundhog Day* and *The Conference of the Birds*.

A major point of comparison I find interesting is all of the facets of the theme of love, including self-love and importance, across both texts. At the beginning of the journey, the nightingale tells the hoopoe of his love for the rose, and the hoopoe answers him, part of his response including that "The superficial love which makes you quail is only for the outward show of thing." ('Attar 46). Watching *Groundhog Day*, I was strongly reminded of this when Rita metaphorically tells Phil that he loves himself and isn't concerned about anyone else. She quotes Sir Walter Scott to describe him, "'The wretch, cocentered all in self, Living, shall forfeit fair renown, And doubly dying, shall go down to the vile dust from whence he sprung, Unwept, unhonored, and unsung.'" (*Groundhog Day*). Later on, she says, "if you'd just drop the attitude and act like a decent human being..." which, in context, is telling him how self-obsessed he is, or that he is at least acting that way, "for the outward show of things," like the in *The Conference of the Birds* ('Attar 46). In this way, before they both embark on their respective journeys, Phil compares to the nightingale: only desiring superficial, self-pleasing ends. Throughout his journey, Phil makes many mistakes, ranging from being negative and rude to people all the way to engaging in a car chase with the police. Through Rita, who I think serves as Phil's hoopoe, he begins to learn that engaging in such behaviors accomplishes nothing, and slowly learns

that by being kind to people and simply appreciating everything around him, he can genuinely fall in love with life, and subsequently Rita with him.

Both Phil and the birds learn lessons about love along their journeys, but going through the Valley of Love the birds learn about love in a way that, to me, is more religious in nature than Phil, as *The Conference of the Birds* is a religious text, while *Groundhog Day* is a contemporary entertainment text. In the Valley of Love, the concept of love is seemingly defined as passion or high regard for something, whether it is love for oneself, an idea, another person, or an object. Essentially, during the Valley of Love, the birds learn that love is extremely irrational, risky, and should not be counted on. To me, the understanding that the lesson in the Valley of Love aimed to convey is that desire will burn you, “ Love’s valley is the next, and here desire Will plunge the pilgrim into seas of fire” (‘ Attar 186). The religious meaning of this, in my interpretation, would be that desire for anything except God will lead you astray and burn you. However, if you stay constant and focused in your love of God and following spiritual lessons, then you can continue successfully on the path to achieving the best way to live for God, once all Valleys are overcome. Clearly, religious guidelines do not manifest themselves in *Groundhog Day*, however, as explained earlier, Phil still learns how to use love “ properly” to live well just like the birds do, but it is a non-religious way to live well. Again, in his case, after making mistakes and with the help of Rita, he had to change his love for himself and superficial things he thought would make him happy to genuine love for others and to make

the best of everything happening around him, leading him to lead his life properly and ending the painful cycle of living the same day.

The lesson of how to love, thus live, properly is again apparent in *The Conference of the Birds* where the hoopoe tells a bird that is satisfied with his state, “ Your arrogance deceives you, and you stray Further and further from the spirit’s Way...Your love a self-induced absurdity” (‘ Attar 162), parallel to where Rita quotes Sir Walter Scott to describe Phil’s character as being “ cocentered all in self” (*Groundhog Day*). Rather than focusing on the self as deserving all love and importance, love should be directed elsewhere. For *The Conference of the Birds*, it should be directed in the pursuit of God, towards the “ spirit’s Way” (‘ Attar 162). For *Groundhog Day*, Phil learns through his mistakes that love should be directed in care for others in order to live a fulfilling life.

Overall, throughout each work’s lessons, many similar philosophies on how to live life well are revealed. Though humans are considered diverse across a range of characteristics, human nature and the accepted ways to live well, either religiously or non-religiously, seem to have remained rather constant and enduring across time, space, and culture, perhaps linking us all back to one great Creator: a notion of major Sufi doctrine, inherent throughout *The Conference of the Birds*. *Groundhog Day* and *The Conference of the Birds* were written around 815 years apart in different historical and social contexts, explaining the variations in how and what spiritual lessons are taught, yet both involve an element of storytelling to teach these lessons. Both also involve the timeless and cross-cultural theme of love and its

importance in spiritual lessons and thus learning to live well. Personally, I relate to and prefer Groundhog Day over The Conference of the Birds because I tend to look outward, treating others with respect and care and stressing love in this format rather than in a more religious perspective. This interestingly ties into the Jesuit ideals at Boston College; God and religion are not forced upon anyone, but having values and treating others well are concepts that are stressed, similar to the lessons Groundhog Day reveals to its audience.