**The Master Gardener \***

**Once upon a time, a Sufi story tells, three men seeking guidance lived on a caravan route in the middle of the desert. These men had no knowledge of gardening, so they eked out a living trading whatever trinkets they happened to find in the sand. Deep in their hearts, each of them had a secret dream: to become a gardener and grow their own trees, flowers, and plants.

One day it was announced that the Master Gardener would be passing through on the next caravan.

The first seeker greeted the news with indifference. All the guidance he needed could be found in books, he told himself, or through his own efforts.

The other two men were more excited by the prospect of the Master Gardener's visit and they eagerly awaited his arrival.

When the caravan reached the town, the Master Gardener visited the house of the first man and soon discovered that this man was content to follow his own counsel.

So the Master Gardener went to the house of the second seeker, who begged to be initiated into the secrets of growing a garden. The Master Gardner was a kindly man, and he agreed, but only on one condition: that the second seeker follow his directions exactly.

The Master Gardener then asked to be left alone for several days on the site of the second man's future garden. When he finished his mysterious work he gave the seeker strange and unexpected instructions. Instead of delivering a dissertation on the principles of gardening, he showed the seeker a wheel near the wall of the garden, and told him to turn this wheel faithfully and without fail every day for a few minutes. Then he left without further explanation.

Now, as it turned out, this second seeker was a man of modest faith, and he was disappointed by these odd directions. He had expected to be told cosmic secrets of growth and fertility. Instead he was asked to perform an act that seemed irrelevant, even nonsensical. Though he did what he was told in the beginning, after a while he stopped turning the wheel, and eventually forgot about it entirely. Nothing ever grew on his dry plot of land. When people asked him about his gardening lessons he replied that he had been duped by a charlatan.

Meanwhile, the Master Gardener continued on to the house of the third seeker. This man too was disappointed by the Master's instructions. But he turned the wheel faithfully, as instructed. What the third seeker did not know was that this wheel was connected to a skillfully hidden irrigation system that the Master had buried under his plot of land.

One day while the third seeker was inspecting his garden site he noticed that a few tiny shoots had broken through the soil, brought to life by the hidden irrigation system. The man's joy was mixed with dismay, however, for he did not know what to do next. Thinking on the matter for a while, he decided to simply keep following the instructions and turn the wheel as told.

Then one morning he made a discovery that changed his life. Looking down at the growing shoots, he saw tiny words written on the leaves of each new plant. Rubbing his eyes in astonishment, he looked again and read. To his joy and astonishment, these words presented detailed instructions on what to do next and how to tend and care for every aspect of his garden.

The third seeker continued to work and study, and gradually he learned all the secrets of the wheel, the plants, and of agriculture in general. Eventually his home was surrounded by a paradise of refreshing greenery and abundant fertility.

"It all happened so naturally," said the third seeker when the people came to see.
"I tried to have no expectations, I simply persevered."**

**\* Title not an original part of the story.**

**This is a Sufi legend, found in *The Five Stages of the Soul***

**by Harry R Moody and David Carroll.**