

## The Birds Assemble (Conference of the Birds)

The poetic text *Mantiq al-Tayr* (*Conference of the Birds*) tells of a group of birds who gathered to consider an important question. Throughout the world, the inhabitants of every city had a king, but the feathered souls had none - how they could battle through the challenges of earthly life without a leader? As they gathered, each bird was greeted by the others, singing praises of the special features and characteristics of the hoopoe, finch, parrot, partridge, falcon, francolin, nightingale, peacock, cock pheasant, pigeon, turtle-dove, hawk, and goldfinch as they joined the assembly. Led by the wise hoopoe, they decided to seek the advice of the mythical Great Simurgh. The birds passed through a series of trials across seven climates and valleys, some of the birds falling aside at each stage of the journey, before reaching their eventual destination. Finally, a group of just thirty birds arrived at the journey's end. Coming to the great palace, they humbly requested an audience with the mythical Simurgh, their tiny shoulders heavy with the burden of their travels. Coming into his burning presence, the birds were surprised to see their own images looking back at them, as from a mirror. Seeing their reflections, they were told by the Simurgh that all they needed in life lay inside themselves, and together they found a state of peace from their weary journey.