

# *Spirituality & Community*

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*www.spiritualityandcommunity.com*

## **Commuting and Enlightenment**

**Dr. Stewart Bitkoff**



## **Zoroastrianism The Gathas**

**Jarvis the Duck**

**The Series      The Comic Strip**

**Kurt Venables**

*If*

**Rudyard Kipling**

# Contents

<b>Who We Are</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Zoroastrianism</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Gathas</b>	
<b>Commuting &amp; Enlightenment: Is it Possible?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Dr. Stewart Bitkoff</b>	
<b>Jarvis the Duck</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>The Series: The Enchanted Lake</i>	
<b>Kurt Venables</b>	
<b>Jarvis the Duck</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>The Comic Strip</i>	
<b>Kurt Venables</b>	
<i>If</i>	<b>15</b>
<b>Rudyard Kipling</b>	

# Who We Are

[www.spiritualityandcommunity.com](http://www.spiritualityandcommunity.com)

***Welcome!*** Seeking spiritual fulfillment? True happiness and mental wellness? Well, that's what we're all about. Spirituality & Community is a magazine, web site, and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. ***We are dedicated to promoting spirituality, true happiness, mental wellness, and appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.***

## A New Age of Light

***Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment.*** We are concerned with what lies within the heart. ***We believe that within everyone lies a pure love that we call the Light or the Lord within. We believe that one must open one's heart to the Light to attain spiritual fulfillment and that only this brings true happiness and mental wellness.*** The Light is the essence of humanity. ***Ultimately, we find our way by casting our gaze inward.*** We will search this inner world over until we find our home:

***We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding***

***We believe that mankind is entering a new age, an Age of Light.*** We see a growing spiritual crisis in the world today. Our culture has brought us unprecedented material well being, but we seem further away than ever from true spiritual wholeness. We also perceive an increase in mental health issues in our society and believe this to be linked to spiritual detachment. Many wander endlessly in search of the material gratification that will bring them happiness. Many have lost faith in religions and traditions. Others sincerely believe in traditional religions but remain unfulfilled spiritually and unhappy. Unfortunately, too many are so close-minded they refuse to ask what is missing from their lives. Yet, many hunger for spiritual wholeness and are searching for answers. ***We believe that we are entering a new age of enlightenment in which genuine spiritual progress will be made and that spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.*** An appreciation for diversity of belief provides us with a fresh view of the beliefs of others, allows us to take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and enables us to synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. When we view the beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. We look with the highest regard to traditional beliefs and religions for guidance, and we also look forward. ***We believe that the past is not the end but the beginning.***



## What We Do

*Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas.* We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine*
- Features on the site*
- Online chats* (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. *We sincerely hope that you will find truth within, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!*

# Zoroastrianism

## The Gathas

(excerpts)

Translated by L.H. Mills (1887)



Faravahar, a primary symbol of Zoroastrianism, is believed to be a depiction of a guardian spirit.

Zoroastrianism is an ancient monotheistic religion that originated with the prophet Zoroaster in ancient Persia. The life of Zoroaster (Zarathustra below) is dated to roughly 1000 BC, and the religion was both contemporaneous with and thought to have influenced both Vedic Hinduism and early Judaism. Modern day adherents live in parts of Iran and India. Zoroaster proclaimed his devotion to the one, benevolent God, Ahura Mazda. The sacred texts attributed to Zoroaster himself are known as the Gathas, and the Gathas are included in the sacred Zoroastrian collection known as the Yasna. The central concepts of Zoroastrianism include a strong focus on human free will and the belief that good thoughts, good words, and good deeds are necessary for happiness. In addition, fire and the sun are prevalent symbols of God's energy. For more, see: [www.sacred-texts.com/zor/sbe31/index.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/zor/sbe31/index.htm).

### Yasna 28

1. (A strengthening blessing is the thought, a blessing is the word, a blessing is the deed of the righteous Zarathustra. May the Bountiful Immortals accept and help on the chants. Homage to you, O sacred Gâthas!)
2. With venerating (desire) for this (gift) of gracious help, O Mazda, and stretching forth my hands (to Thee) I pray for the first (blessing) of (Thy) bountiful Spirit; (that is, I beseech of Thee that my) actions (toward) all (may be performed) in (the Divine) Righteousness; and with this I implore from Thee the understanding of Thy Benevolent Mind, in order that I may propitiate the Soul of the Kine (our herds and folk, which cries so bitterly to Thee).
3. And therefore, O Great Creator, the Living Lord! (inspired) by Thy Benevolent Mind, I approach You, (and beseech of Thee) to grant me (as a bountiful gift) for both the worlds, the corporeal and (for that) of mind, those attainments which are to be derived from the (Divine) Righteousness, and by means of which (that personified Righteousness within us) may introduce those who are its recipients into beatitude and glory!
- ...
11. And therefore do Thou, O Lord, the Great Creator! fill up and satisfy (my) desire with these attainments (of the grace) of Thy Good Mind, which Thou dost know to be derived from Righteousness, (and) which (are verily) sublime, for I have known Thine instructions to be never void of their effect (in the struggles) for our (daily) food, and therefore worthy objects of desire.
12. (Yea, I approach Thee with my prayers, I) who by these (great gifts of grace) will protect ((Thy) Divine Righteousness, and (Thy) Good Mind within us) for ever. And do Thou therefore, O Ahura Mazda! teach me from Thyself, yea, from Thine own mouth of spirit, that I may declare it forth to (these Thy waiting people) by what (powers and according to what laws) the primeval world arose!

### **Yasna 30**

2. Hear ye then with your ears; see ye the bright flames with the (eyes of the) Better Mind. It is for a decision as to religions, man and man, each individually for himself. Before the great effort of the cause, awake ye (all) to our teaching!

3. Thus are the primeval spirits who as a pair (combining their opposite strivings), and (yet each) independent in his action, have been famed (of old). (They are) a better thing, they two, and a worse, as to thought, as to word, and as to deed. And between these two let the wisely acting choose aright. (Choose ye) not (as) the evil-doers!

4. (Yea) when the two spirits came together at the first to make life, and life's absence, and to determine how the world at the last shall be (ordered), for the wicked (Hell) the worst life, for the holy (Heaven) the Best Mental State,

### **Yasna 31**

3. And that keenness, that deciding satisfaction, which Thou hast given by (Thy) Spirit, and (Thy) Fire, and by Thy Righteousness (itself) to the two battling (sides), do Thou declare unto us, O Ahura! that vow which is for the seeing (as those endowed with mental light). Yea, do Thou declare this that we may know it, O Mazda! With the tongue of Thy mouth do Thou speak it (that as I preach its mighty truths) I may make all the living believers!

4. And when the Divine Righteousness shall be inclined to my appeal, and with him all those (remaining ones who are as) Mazda's (own) Ahuras then with the blessedness (of the reward), with (my) Piety and with Thy Best Mind (active within me), I will pray for that mighty Kingdom by whose force we may smite the Lie-demon.

...

8. Therefore, as the first did I conceive of Thee, O Ahura Mazda! as the one to be adored with the mind in the creation, as the Father of the Good Mind within us, when I beheld Thee with my (enlightened) eyes as the veritable maker of our Righteousness, as the Lord of the actions of life!

9. Thine, O Ahura! was Piety; yea, Thine, O Creator of the Kine! was understanding and the Spirit, when Thou didst order a path for her (guiding). From the earth's tiller (aided) she goeth (in that allotted way), or from him who was never tiller. (Thy path hath given her choice.)

### **Yasna 43**

1. Salvation to this man, salvation to him whosoever (he may be)! Let the absolutely ruling Great Creator grant (us, He) the living Lord, the two eternal powers. Yea, verily, I ask it of Thee (O Ahura) for the maintaining Righteousness. And may'st Thou also give it to me, (O inspiring) Piety! splendour (as it is), holy blessings, the Good Mind's life.

2. Yea, to this one may the man endowed with glory give that best of all things, the (spiritual) glory. And do Thou likewise (Thyself) reveal Thine own (gifts) through Thy most bountiful spirit, O Mazda! (And do Thou teach us) Thy wonderful thoughts of wisdom, those of Thy Good Mind, which Thou hast revealed (to us) by Thy Righteousness (within us) with the happy increase of (our joy), and on a long life's every day.

...

14. Yea, as the man enlightened (in Thy law), and who has possessions, gives to his friend, (so give Ye) me, O Great Creator! Thy rejoicing and abounding grace, when through Thy sovereign Power, and from (the motives of Thy cause of) Righteous Order, I stand forth to go out to, or to arouse, the chiefs of Thy (pure) proclamation, with all those (others) who recite Thy well-remembered Māthra word.

15. Yea, I conceived of Thee as bounteous, O Ahura Mazda! when with the Good Mind's grace Thy Sraosha (Obedience) approached me, (and said): Let the quiet and long-enduring better mind with understanding teach (thee); let not a foremost man conciliate the wicked (as sycophant desiring aid), for with that (quiet mind of faith), Thy saints have brought full many a sinner unto Thee (as convert, and in penitence).

16. Thus, O Ahura Mazda! this Zarathustra loves the Spirit, and every man most bounteous prays (beside him): Be Righteousness life-strong, and clothed with body. In that (holy) Realm which shines (with splendour) as the sun, let Piety be present; and may she through the indwelling of Thy Good Mind give us blessings in reward for deeds!

# Commuting & Enlightenment: Is it Possible?

By Dr. Stewart Bitkoff

## *Introduction*

This discussion is about using the mind in a different way to overcome a tiresome activity. It is about using spiritual capacity to transcend the ordinary.

One day I found myself using a meditative technique to free my mind from the drudgery of commuting to work. It just sort of happened and came about naturally. This has helped me survive and transcend my daily drive on a monster of a highway- The Major Deegan Expressway.

## *The Ride Begins*

Last year while on vacation in New Mexico, one of my friends remarked, “you know, for someone who has spent most of his life in New York City, you’re not as neurotic as some of the other easterners we meet. They’re always in a rush and rude.”

My friend continued, “a few weeks back, when I was visiting NYC and driving to the airport on the Major Deegan Expressway, I almost lost my mind. It was 90 degrees; the traffic was backed-up. I had to open my windows and turn off the air conditioner. All around me were large trucks and buses. Exhaust was coming into my window and I couldn’t wait for the quiet of New Mexico. How can anyone not go crazy and find peace in that environment?”

I replied, “over the last few years, I had gone crazy at least half dozen times. . .”

When I returned to NYC, I traveled the same route my friend described to work. As I looked about and saw dirt, exhaust and endless rows of vehicles, I realized something; over the years, I had learned to see beyond the Deegan Expressway. While part of me was busy driving the highway another part was doing something else.

Sure I got pissed-off when traffic was backed-up at the approach to the George Washington Bridge and I was going to be late for work. Somehow I learned to still this part of me for the most part and listen to that quiet inner voice which sang of another realm and put things in perspective

## *Enlightenment Driving to Work?*

Daily millions commute to work. Once you’ve been at it awhile you learn ways to adjust. Depending upon your mode of transportation, commuters read, sleep, listen to the radio, share a conversation, eat breakfast, shave with electric razor, fix their hair, order a drink and curse their job.

Necessity teaches we are many things and it is possible to do more than one task at a time. While traveling the highway you see it every day.

The Sufi’s have a saying, ‘the apparent is the bridge to the real.’ In part what is meant by this is that we need things of the world to help us experience or see the underlying unity. This reality is the Truth or perception of the next world.

As I thought about our conversation in New Mexico describing the difficulties of traveling the Major Deegan Expressway, I wondered if it was possible to attain enlightenment traveling to work every day. Particularly if the highway was as crowded, dirty and in need of repair as the Deegan?

Of course it was! A little unusual, perhaps, but anything was possible.

### *Enlightenment*

In some traditions, enlightenment is attained in one glorious moment of insight which is transcendent and unifying. It is an experience which changes the course of the person's life. Most seek to repeat this experience over and over. Some with success. Others not as successful.

In other schools enlightenment is reached through a gradual building of impacts. These are smaller visions or tastes of the Divine. This is a slower process but the goal is similar.

Mystic schools teach each person is capable of learning to put aside the normal stream of consciousness, in order to allow the higher self to emerge. In fact this is the goal of the mystical process; stilling the world so the higher consciousness may operate. Once the student learns to do this, quiet every day thoughts so something else might happen, the student is ready to travel alone.

During the course of the mystic's training various exercises and tasks are prescribed. One of the most familiar is meditation; this is an exercise/activity where the worldly consciousness is quieted by using a word, short phrase, or point of visual concentration. By focusing attention with a device (word, lighted candle) and redirecting attention as it wanders, back to this focus point, eventually, the every day mind quiets. In time with this exercise and others, the higher consciousness emerges. The higher consciousness is a subtle essence and our desires and daily thoughts often cloud our ability to perceive in this manner.

### *Back to the Ride*

Somehow as I drove to work focusing on the movements of the cars, trucks and buses my soul learned to sing. In time this driving activity developed into a visual meditation.

Part of me was busy trying to avoid the other cars, yet, another part sang of its place in the cosmos. While my eyes focused on the road, and my hands guided the wheel and shifted gears, the higher consciousness awoke. It was like listening to public radio, it had its own agenda and helped me realize anew, we are more than the guy who sweats and curses the building traffic.

Do not let me mislead you often my commute is boring and repetitious. Many days, I do not want to drive in the rain and snow. I would prefer to stay in bed. That is what life is like. Some days are better than others. Some commutes are easier; but you have to make do with what you are given. Often it is a matter of attitude.

Freeing your mind of your negative thoughts and fixing on the moment is how the journey to freedom begins.

## *How To Do It*

In this article, I have been making reference to using your mind in another way while driving to work. This is accomplished through a gradual preparation and this preparation includes using a meditative technique while driving your car.

Obviously, this particular technique is done with your eyes open and requires practice. For those who are unfamiliar with meditation and have never tried it, I would suggest familiarizing yourself with meditative practice over a period of time and use it sparingly at first while driving.

Make sure you have mastered this technique in a safe environment before trying it behind the wheel of a moving car. Also I would suggest attempting this under routine and stress free driving conditions. If you are going someplace for the first time and are worrying about getting there safely this is not the time to try this exercise. It should be on a road and under stress free conditions you are familiar with. Also make sure to turn-off the radio and begin to still yourself. Remember you must be in the right frame of mind, fully aware and driving safely to do this.

- For me I focus upon the license plate of the car ahead and begin repeating, silently, my focus word. A focus word is a word, short phrase, visual image, or short prayer from your personal belief system that you are familiar with and enjoy. Examples include: Jesus, God, Allah, Joy and Smile.
- As I continue repeating the focus word and begin to relax, slowly, I feel my consciousness shift and expand. Gradually the higher consciousness awakens and I am one with the moment. Continually I repeat my focus word until I enter a more peaceful, higher state of consciousness.
- As I am distracted by driving conditions, without self criticism, I refocus using the technique described above.

Remember I have been at this many years and for me this technique is now natural and easy to accomplish. Practice at home in your quiet place, and when you feel ready begin to use it on the road.

## *Don't Limit the Possibilities*

Is it possible, really possible, to reach higher and do more than one thing while driving to work? Of course it is. We see it all the time but give it no thought. While driving people listen to the radio, have conversations with passengers, worry about their problems and dream-up wonderful solutions to these problems.

We begin to limit our own capacity and the possibilities when we believe something is nor possible. With the correct preparation and practice, why can't someone experience another higher dimension of their mind while driving a car? Unfortunately we see this with those who have had a drink or use illegal drugs and get behind the wheel. They have altered their state of consciousness.

Why can't this be done in a more positive way- using a simple meditative technique?

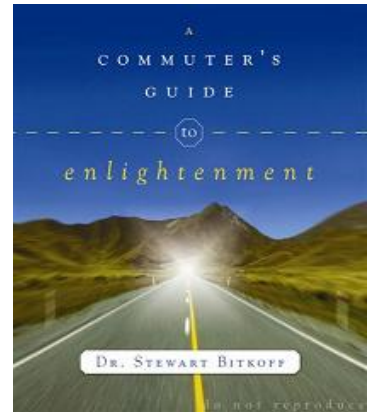
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If you have ever wondered at the interrelatedness of man,  
consider the effect of one stalled car on the expressway at rush hour.

\* \* \*

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For more tips, exercises, information, and traveling wisdom,  
purchase “A Commuter’s Guide to Enlightenment” by Dr. Stewart  
Bitkoff, due 3/1/08 and published by Llewellyn Worldwide, Inc. To  
contact the author visit: [www.thedeeganproject.com](http://www.thedeeganproject.com).



# Jarvis the Duck

Kurt Venables

## The Enchanted Lake

*Jarvis is a young duck that lives on a small pond in The Great Poplar Forest. These are the chronicles of his adventures.*

The party flew due north. Three weeks had passed since they first saw the Harpies. The air had taken on a biting chill, and snow now covered the ground. The forest had changed, from the poplars of the southern forest to a dense blanket of pines and firs. It had become distinctly darker. They had seen Harpy Eagles many more times. They usually caught sight of them at a safe distance, but twice more, they had close calls with rapidly moving small groups of male Harpies, which they had dubbed “patrols”.

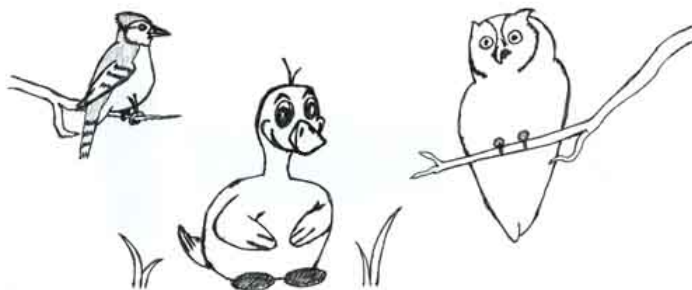
“It’s so quiet and peaceful, and the snow is so beautiful,” said Jarvis one morning as they awoke to the first rays of dawn striking the snow around them.

“Would you like me to recite some poetry or compose a few lines, perhaps ‘Ode to the Snow’,” replied Jay with his good natured sarcasm.

“Come on, Jay,” Jarvis responded, “it is beautiful.”

“I know, dude, I’m just giving you a hard time.”

“That’s what I like about you, Jarvis, you’re not afraid to say what’s in your heart,” said Angeldown, catching Jarvis’s eyes with hers. Jarvis gave her a little smile.



“Beautiful, indeed,” agreed Talon, “we are nearing the northern lands where I grew up.”

After bowing to Ra at sunrise, the party flew for several hours. Just after midday, they spotted a beautiful lake and flew down to try to find some lunch. The lake was partially frozen, with thin ice near the shore and open water towards the middle. Dense reeds and bulrushes surrounded the lake. The party split up a little as they foraged for tidbits. Angeldown was working her way through the reeds when she was startled by a beautiful white swan nestled in the growth, a young female.

“Hello!” said the swan kindly.

“Oh, ... hello,” replied Angeldown. “Do you live on this beautiful lake?”

“No, but I visit it often. It is so beautiful,” replied the swan. “It is a favorite of Coventina, the Lady of the Lake.”

“Coventina?” asked Angeldown, somewhat perplexed.

“Yes, Coventina, a goddess; at least that is what she is called in these parts, although I think she is known by other names. She loves the water- lakes, ponds, springs. She particularly seems to like to visit this lake. It’s easy to see why.”

“Have you seen her? Have you seen a real goddess?” said Angeldown, still somewhat confused.

“Yes, many times. She comes and talks to the trees and the brush, but I hear her sometimes.”

“What does she talk about?” said Angeldown, not knowing if the swan was being truthful or just a few cards short of a full deck, though she seemed very peaceful and kind.

“She talks of many things, of light and fog, of joy and confusion, of deceptions of the mind.”

“I’m not sure if I’m following you,” replied Angeldown.

“She says that the mind is biased towards this world, that it is fundamentally materialistic. She says that without great wisdom and diligence, the mind has difficulty properly accounting for affairs of the heart, for spiritual things. She tells a story of long ago. A bird lived near a beautiful strawberry patch. The strawberries were gorgeous, large, sweet, and juicy, but they were also poisonous to the heart. They would make a bird who ate them depressed and unhappy. So Coventina told the bird to eat the many nuts, seeds, and insects around the patch but not to eat the strawberries because they would make him unhappy. In spite of her warnings, when the bird grew hungry, he always ate the strawberries. In fact, most birds in that part of the woods did. And they suffered greatly because of it.”

“So the birds’ minds were so captivated by the strawberries that they couldn’t see how bad they were for them,” summarized Angeldown.

“Exactly, Coventina says that we must learn to temper our material impulses and listen to our hearts, for love is the key to life- the love and joy within the heart is what makes life worth living.”

“You should talk to my friend Jarvis; he says things like that,” said Angeldown.

“Is Jarvis your boyfriend?” replied the swan with a smile.

“No, not my boyfriend,” said Angeldown as she blushed a little and looked away.

“Coventina tells another story of how her love saved the life of her husband. Long ago, her husband had been killed by an evil god. In her grief, she bent down to kiss him one last time. As she did so, her breath returned life to the body of her husband. However, this was only because she loved him more than her own life. Her pure love for him rekindled his life. Love is life, Angeldown.”

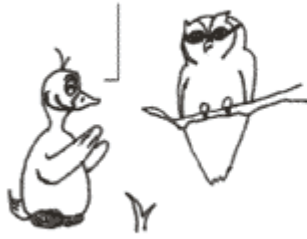
As the swan uttered these last four words, a vague something drew Angeldown’s attention away from the swan, a something that was not there when she looked. As she heard the last word, Angeldown’s gaze returned to where the swan was. “How did you know my ...” started Angeldown, but the swan was gone.

# Jarvis the Duck

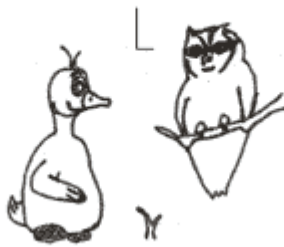
## The Comic Strip

### Kurt Venables

Sage, an optimist is one who sees the beauty of the ordinary.



Beautiful, man. Let me think about that one.



Okay, now that's making my head spin ...  
Of course, for me it doesn't take much.



*If*  
**Rudyard Kipling**  
(1865- 1936)

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream -- and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think -- and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two imposters just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with kings -- nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run --  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And -- which is more -- you'll be a Man, my son!