

Serving Others



Randolph's Spiritual Quest and Search for Meaning

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Serving Others

Tania ap Siôn

Illustrated by Phillip Vernon



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The Travels of Randolph the Wise

Randolph the Wise sat in his chair, scratched his old grey head, and thought about the very big question.

“What *really* matters?” he asked the empty room in a deep, booming voice. As usual, there were no other voices to answer him.

The question ‘what *really* matters?’ had been puzzling Randolph the Wise very much. He had spent many days thinking about it, but he knew that he would not find answers by staying in his room.

“I will go out into the world!” declared Randolph the Wise. “I will find and bring back here some answers from there.”

Randolph the Wise put on his coat and hat, picked up his bag, and gripped his staff. Then, turning his face towards the rising sun, he set out on his journey through Wales.

It was in this way that Randolph the Wise began his spiritual quest and search for meaning.

1 On the Street



Randolph the Wise walked towards the busy road junction and stopped. In front of him, cars, vans, buses and lorries were whizzing by. The smells and sounds of the city filled Randolph's senses. It was a cold afternoon and the light was beginning to fade. It had been raining, making the road a darker shade of grey. Shallow pools of water had formed on the pavements and people's eyes looked downward to avoid splashing through the larger puddles. Spanning one of the roads was a railway bridge, colourfully clad in posters advertising journeys to different places.

Below the railway bridge, Randolph noticed that something was happening on the street. Feeling a damp chill in the air, Randolph wrapped his coat more tightly around him before moving closer to get a better look.

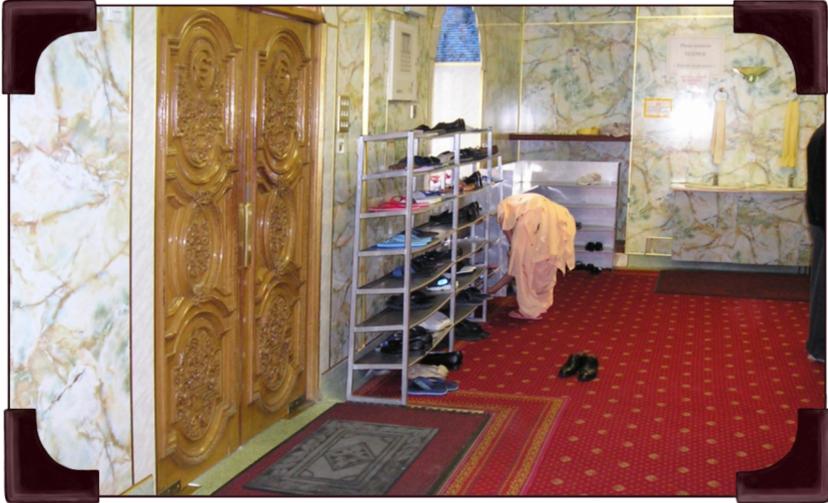
There, on the city street, Randolph found people queuing by a long table. Some were young and others were much older. Some were men and others were women. Each person was waiting patiently for a space at the table.

Behind the table, some Sikh men and women were standing in a row and serving them. One was spooning out fresh hot food. Another was handing out drinks of water and juice. Another was offering coats and blankets to those who needed them. Many of these Sikh men were wearing dark blue or black turbans. As he watched this unusual scene, Randolph recorded his observations in his notebook.

Why were these people queuing for food and clothing, and why were these Sikh men and women giving so freely to them?



2 The Door to the Guru



As Randolph explored the city, he kept thinking about the scene below the railway bridge. Then, something familiar caught Randolph's eye. Set in front of a large building was a tall pole on which a saffron and blue flag flapped with every gust of wind. On the flag, the circle and swords symbol could be seen clearly. This was the same symbol that Randolph had spotted earlier that day. This must be a Sikh gurdwara, thought Randolph.

When some people entered the Sikh gurdwara, Randolph followed them inside. The foyer was quite busy. A woman was removing her shoes and placing them on a large shoe rack. A man was washing his hands at a sink. Another woman was adjusting the veil that she had just put on her head. When she was ready, she waved to Randolph, inviting him through the large double doors.

On the other side of the double doors, Randolph gazed across a vast open space. People were sitting cross-legged on an enormous white sheet covering the floor. Randolph noticed that they were all facing a richly decorated platform at the front of the room. He watched as people approached the platform, bowed down, and left an offering. Some left fruit and others left money. Curious, Randolph moved closer so that he could get a better look.

Now, Randolph could see that the platform was for a large book. The book was supported by cushions and sheltered by a canopy. Sitting behind the book, a woman read aloud in Punjabi. As she read, she waved a fan of animal hair over the book. Randolph wondered at the book and why it was treated with such great respect.





Soon, a small group of musicians started playing the harmonium and the drums. When they began singing, some people joined in while others listened quietly. The voices sang,

“O tongue, sing the glorious praises of the Lord.
Each and every moment meditate on the Lord,
Har, Har, Har.

Do not listen to any other, and do not go
anywhere else.

By great good fortune, you shall find the Saadh
Sangat, the Company of the Holy.

Twenty-four hours a day, O tongue, dwell upon
God, the unfathomable Lord and Master.

Here and hereafter, you shall be happy forever.”

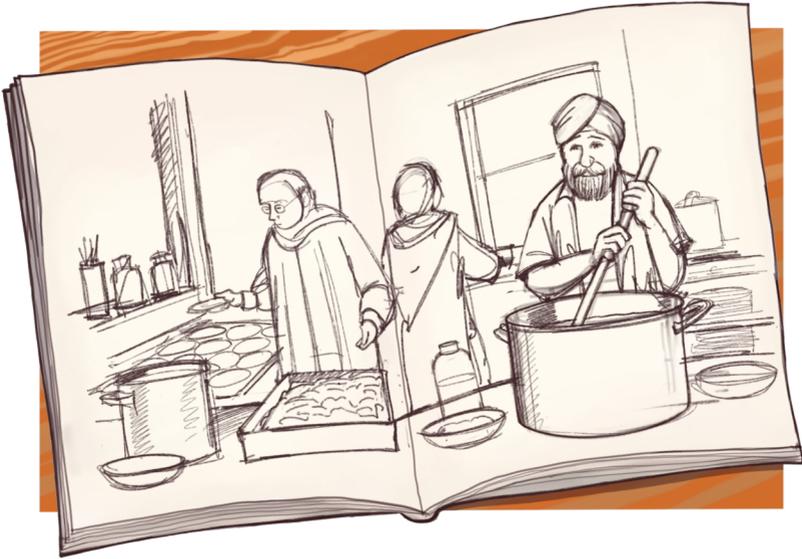
At the end of the service, with cupped hands, each person received some sweet prashad. As people began to leave, Randolph approached the woman who had invited him in. “What really matters to you here?” Randolph asked her.

The woman said, "This place is a gurdwara, which means the 'guru's house' or the 'door to the guru'." Then, she pointed to the book, which still lay open on its cushioned throne. "That is the Guru Granth Sahib, our guide and teacher," she said. "Before the Guru Granth Sahib, we had a line of ten human gurus. Our tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, appointed this book as his successor. Just like a human guru, this book points to God and reveals God's Word to us. There is only one God and everything we do is about serving God."

Then, the woman gave Randolph a brass Ek Onkar symbol. "This is what really matters to me here. Please take this gift back with you," she said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued his search.



3 A Free Kitchen

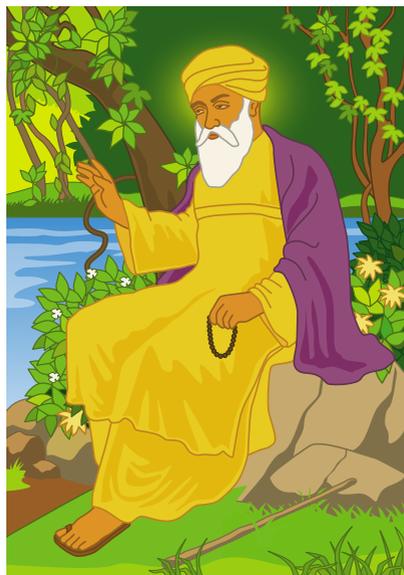


After the service, Randolph followed everyone to a dining hall with a large kitchen. As Randolph walked past the kitchen, he could see a woman cooking chapatti breads on a griddle and stacking them high. Nearby, there was a man stirring a lentil and vegetable curry in an enormous cooking pot. Another man was responsible for the rice. At the front of the kitchen, food was being shared out into individual serving trays. Then, these were taken to the men, women and children sitting together in rows on the floor of the dining hall. All this was being given freely.

Randolph sat beside a young girl and her older brother. "Please, tell me again the story about our first guru, Guru Nanak, and what he did with his father's money," said the young girl, pleading with her brother.

Randolph listened as the girl's older brother began to tell the story. He imagined life in the Punjab, centuries ago. Like many fathers, Guru Nanak's father wanted his son to do well in life. This meant earning good money and being able to live comfortably in a fine house with enough food to eat. As part of this plan, Nanak's father gave his son an important job to do. He gave Nanak a large amount of money and asked him to go to the city. "Use this money for trading," he said, "and when you come back home, let's see how much profit you have made."

So, the young Nanak set out to the city with his two friends, Bala and Mardana. On the way, they passed through many villages before they came to a jungle. Here, in the jungle, the plan changed.





In the jungle, Nanak found some holy men praying to God. He could see that these holy men were very thin and undernourished. They were not eating enough food. This bothered Nanak greatly. Nanak and his friends prayed and talked with the holy men. They discovered that they had no money to buy food and nobody gave them any.

Suddenly, Nanak knew what he had to do. He had his trading money in his pocket and a different idea of what it meant to do well in life. So, he spent all his money buying food for these hungry men. When Nanak returned home with nothing, his father was furious. "Today, the way we freely serve others in this kitchen goes back to Guru Nanak and the Gurus who came after him," concluded the young girl's brother.

Randolph turned to the people around him. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked them.

One person said, "I'm not Sikh. When I have no money to buy food, I come for a hot meal. I feel welcome here and no one judges me." Another person said, "Nobody is greater than anybody else. To God, we are all equal. We learn and practise this in the kitchen through the service that we give. We call this service, 'sewa'. We take our turn serving others. Tomorrow, I'm washing up." Another person agreed, and said, "How we eat together says a lot about what we value. Throughout time and across the world, the way people eat together shows the divisions between people. Here, we try to break down these divisions."

Then, they gave Randolph some chapatti bread and a picture of Guru Nanak. "This is what really matters to us here. Please take these gifts back with you," they said with a smile. Placing the gifts in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued his search.

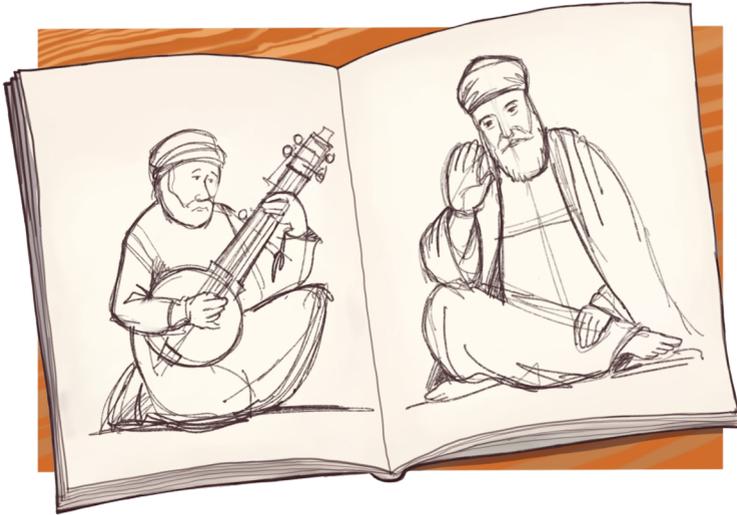


4 Something for Everyone



Randolph found his way back to the foyer at the entrance to the gurdwara. There, he was surprised to find a small boy and a girl busy at work. The boy was cleaning the shoes in the shoe rack. He worked quickly but carefully along the rows of neatly stacked shoes. The girl was carrying a pile of clean towels, which she placed neatly by the sinks. After she had finished this task, she began tidying the box where the head coverings were stored.

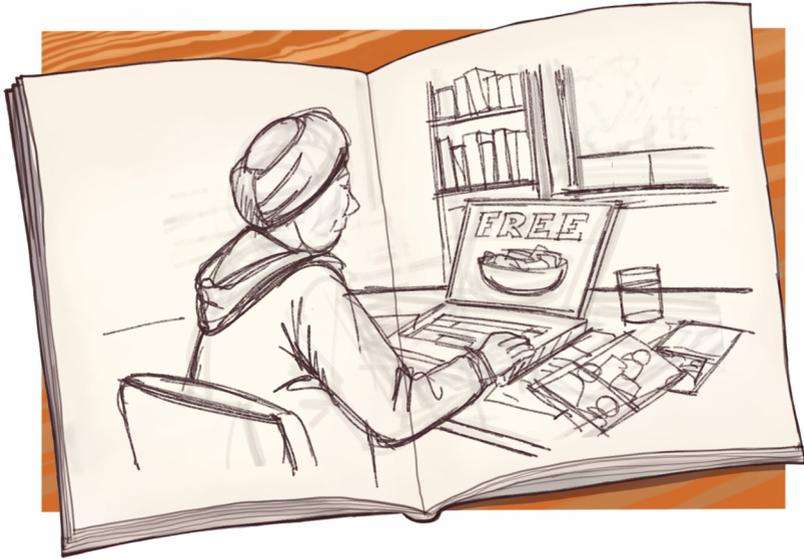
An older woman walked past, and nodded her approval. "You are good Sewadars," she said. "You are serving others well." Then, the woman disappeared through the large double doors leading to the prayer hall. Randolph followed her.



In the prayer hall, the woman was talking with a small group of people. As Randolph made his way towards them, he glanced at the platform where he had seen the sacred book earlier that afternoon. Now, the platform stood empty – the Guru Granth Sahib was in bed safely for the night.

The scattered instruments were gathered together. There were the harmoniums and the drums. As they tidied the floor, they talked about the music lessons happening during the week. They also discussed the music for the next service. “It is good to see some new musicians being trained,” said the woman. “Sharing our musical gifts is an important way of serving.”

Randolph noticed a colourful picture on the wall beside him. It showed the first guru, Guru Nanak, sitting in a garden. Next to him was a man playing a stringed instrument. Randolph wondered at the gift of music and the part it played in service.



After leaving the prayer hall, Randolph was attracted by a light in an office along the corridor. Peering through the office window, Randolph could see a young man hunched over a computer screen. The young man had a large diary open in front of him, and he was selecting photographs to put on the gurdwara website. Randolph thought that he recognised some of the photographs as they rapidly flashed before his eyes. Was that the street where the Sikh men and women were feeding people and giving out coats and blankets? The website caption read, "Serving homeless people and all in need".

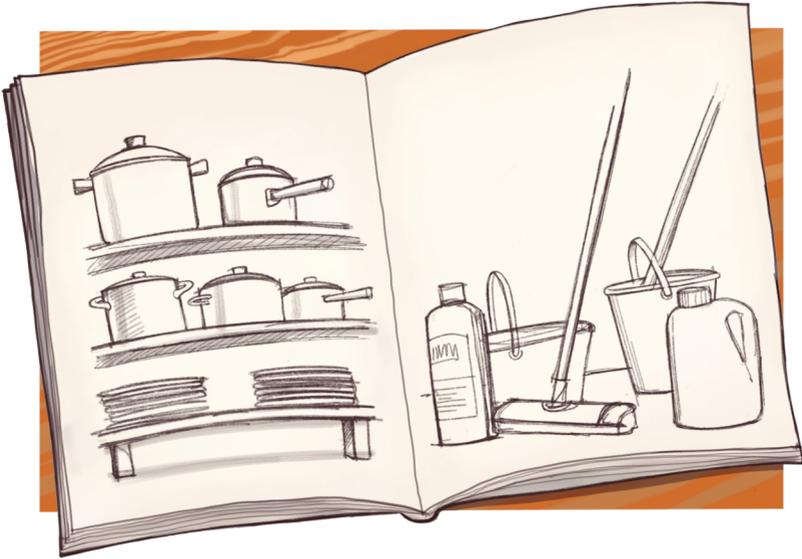
When the young man had finished working on his computer, Randolph approached him. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked him.

The young man thought for a moment before replying, “I manage the gurdwara website and I also design posters and other things. I am studying Information Technology at college so I am happy to share my skills here. This is my sewa, which means this is one way that I offer service. There are many ways of serving. It can be physical, mental or material service. Just look around this gurdwara – people are serving others in all kinds of ways.”

Then, the young man gave Randolph a poster advertising the serving of free meals on the street. “This is what really matters to me here. Please take this gift back with you,” he said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued his search.



5 Serving Well



Randolph returned to the dining hall to find people clearing up. The floor was being swept and mopped. The dishes were being washed, dried and put away. The remaining food was being carefully stored.

Looking around the emptying room, Randolph recognised the young girl who had been with her older brother at the meal earlier. The young girl was sitting next to her grandmother, waiting to be taken home. “Please tell me a story about serving well,” she pleaded with her grandmother.

Her grandmother smiled, and said, “This is a favourite of mine and I think that you have heard it before. One day, a rich man called Bhai Lehna went on a journey to visit our first guru, Guru Nanak. He wanted to learn from Guru Nanak and to serve him.”

Now, Bhai Lehna would normally make a journey on horseback but instead he chose to travel to the Guru on foot. He knew that the Guru had a free kitchen, which fed many people. So, Bhai Lehna decided that he should take something to help with the kitchen, as a gift for the Guru. Packing as much salt as he could physically carry on his head, he began his journey.

When Bhai Lehna arrived in Kartarpur, he left the heavy salt in the Guru's kitchen and went to search for the Guru in a field. In the field, there were some grass bales that the Guru wanted his sons to take home for the animals. The Guru's sons, though, thought that they were too important for this lowly work. Seeing Bhai Lehna approach, they thought that he could do it instead.





Bhai Lehna was very happy to have this opportunity to serve so soon. Immediately, he took up the grass bales and carried them to the Guru's home. Bhai Lehna did not care when his expensive, fine clothes became muddy and spoiled.

Randolph heard how Bhai Lehna became an example of how to serve well. He was always looking for ways to serve, and serving others filled him with joy. He never thought about himself when he served, only his love for God. This helped him to serve well.

"So, you see, service is good," said the grandmother, "but learning selfless service is what it's really about." When the grandmother had finished speaking with the young girl, Randolph approached them. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked them.

The grandmother said, “Doing service well is very important, and this is so hard to do. It can be difficult to serve others without thinking about yourself and your own interests. We all get tired, busy and stressed, and we all get distracted. To help me serve better, I practise meditating on God’s name every morning. This makes me calmer and more focused on how to serve God well.”

Then, the grandmother gave Randolph a small bag of salt. “This is what really matters to me here. Please take this gift back with you,” she said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell.

Randolph then frowned and pondered. He could see that serving others really mattered. He knew that this was part of his spiritual quest and search for meaning. “But what do other people in different places say about this?” asked Randolph.



6 A Christian Partnership



Randolph trekked north and then south, east and then west. His search led him by mountains and valleys, through cities and towns, around coasts and lakes. Then, on a city high street, he finally stopped. In the shelter of a doorway, Randolph spotted a sleeping bag beside an assortment of bulging plastic bags. Slightly further along the pavement, he discovered a pop-up tent with its doors zipped shut. As Randolph looked around, he began to notice even more signs of people living on the streets.

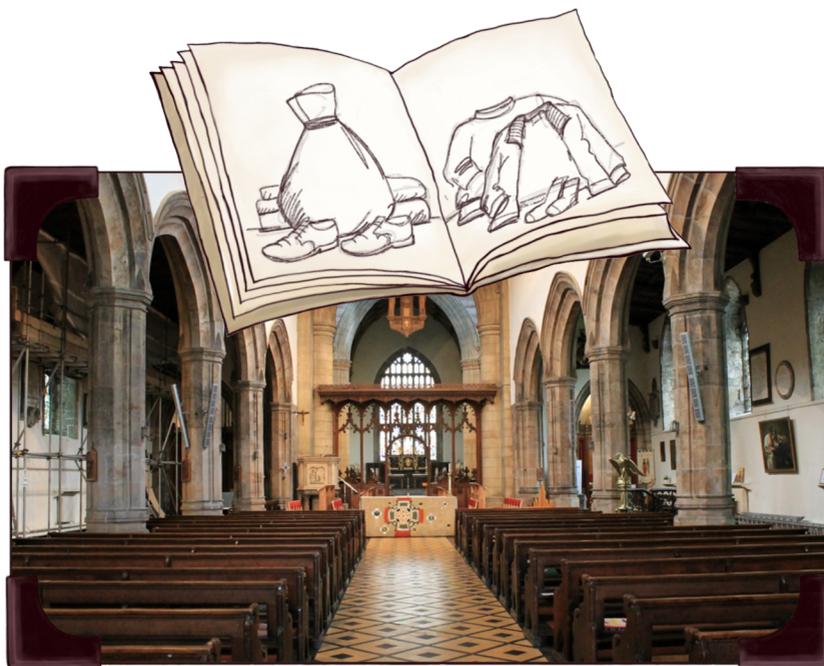
Soon, something else caught Randolph's attention. Quietly, a man dressed in black walked slowly down the high street. From time to time, people greeted him or he stopped to talk with someone. When the man had finished his walk, he entered the large open doors of the cathedral.

As Randolph followed the man inside, he pondered, "I wonder what a Christian can tell me about serving others?"

Inside the cathedral, clothes were being bundled into large black sacks by a small group of people. Soon, they would be taken to a local hostel for homeless people. “We have received so many donations,” said the man dressed in black. “I have taken three carloads of clothes to the hostel this week already.”

Randolph listened carefully. It was not only clothes that were given to help people on the street. Depending on what was really needed, sleeping bags and pop-up tents were given too, as well as other kinds of care.

Randolph wondered at life on the street, and how people can make a difference. When the clothes sacks were ready to go, Randolph asked the question, “What might a Christian say about serving others?”





One person remembered how the cathedral's work with homeless people had started. She pointed towards the man dressed in black. He was now talking with a young lad who was sitting crumpled on the floor outside the West Door. "That's the High Street Chaplain," she said.

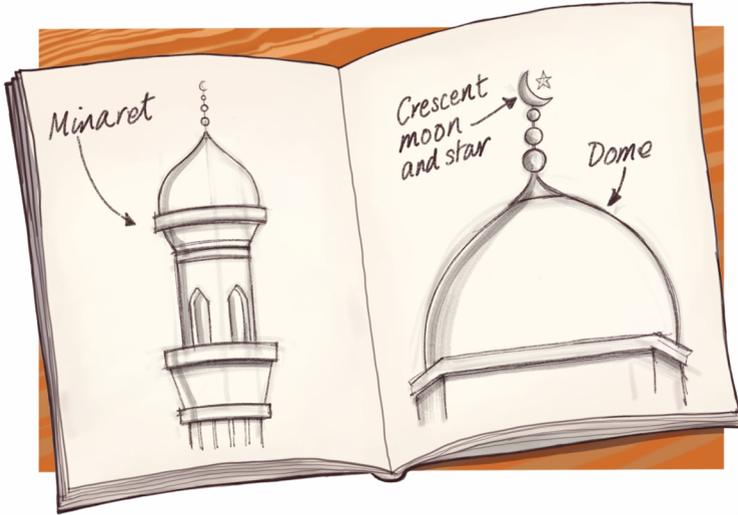
Many years ago, the High Street Chaplain noticed a different kind of visitor coming into the cathedral. They often came asking for money. So, he asked the question, 'How can the cathedral best serve these people?' To find an answer, he spent time with them and began to understand their complex needs. He discovered that things change quickly on the streets, and the step between life and death is very small. There is little support for these people to access quickly so the High Street Chaplain found the answer to his question. The cathedral could best serve these visitors by helping to provide simple, immediate responses to their needs.

The woman continued, saying, “So, you see, serving others is important to us as Christians too. A cathedral is a special place. Its huge doors are open to all. Many different people accept this silent invitation and walk in. I believe that God meets people as they are and knows their most urgent needs. So, our work with homeless people began with providing food and developing a partnership with a local housing organisation. This partnership helps us to identify immediate needs, and these needs change. Right now, we fund accommodation for homeless people leaving hospital. They need warm, dry places where they can recover. Others give generously to the Cathedral Partnership, which makes all this possible.”

The woman then gave Randolph a sleeping bag. “Please, take this back with you,” she said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued on his journey.



7 Muslim Charity



Randolph trekked on and on, braving the sun and the rain, then the gales and the snow. He did not stop until he was standing outside a mosque. This mosque could be identified easily by its tall minaret and dome. Inspecting the building more closely, Randolph also noticed a crescent moon and a star.

Then, at that moment, the mosque doors were pushed open and people flooded out after their morning prayers. Randolph felt the lightness and excitement of celebration in the air. Surely, this was no ordinary day?

“Eid Mubarak!” a man called out to a friend. “Khair Mubarak,” came the reply, before they both embraced each other warmly.

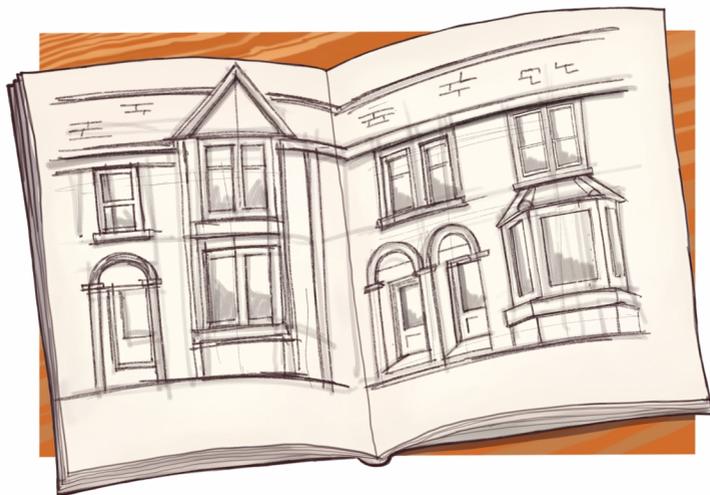
As Randolph watched the two friends talking and laughing together, he muttered, “I wonder what a Muslim can tell me about serving others?”

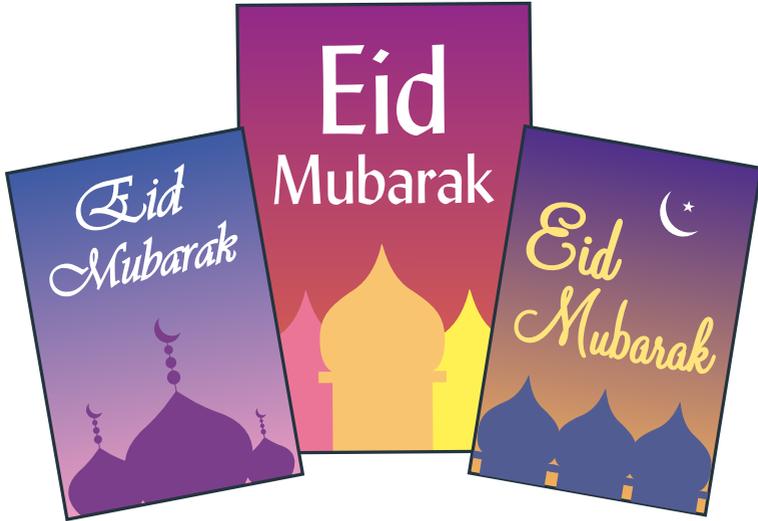
Randolph followed the two friends on their journey home. As the men chatted, Randolph heard all about the month-long fast that they had just completed. It must be hard not to eat or drink during daylight hours for a whole month, thought Randolph.

One of the men said, “During this Ramadan fast, I have really felt how difficult it is for those who have so little. So many people are struggling just to live.” His friend nodded in agreement, and replied, “We can be thankful for God’s abundant gifts.”

The men arrived at a small gate leading to a smart terraced house. The curtains in the front room swayed noticeably and then there was a rush of small feet. The front door flew open. “Eid Mubarak!” the children shouted, as they welcomed their father and friend home.

Before the men stepped inside, Randolph asked the question, “What might a Muslim say about serving others?”





Randolph was invited into the house. The smell of food cooking was coming from the kitchen. Cards were displayed along the windowsill. One card read, “May this special day bring peace, happiness and prosperity to everyone. Eid Mubarak!” On the dining room table, there were signs of recently unwrapped presents. Now, a young girl was passing around a bowl of sweets.

Sitting on the sofa, the father thought about Randolph’s question. He said, “Today, we are celebrating the festival of Eid al Fitr, which marks the end of our fasting. This is an important time of giving to others. This month, we have given more than we usually do. Life is difficult for many people at the moment, and it is our duty to help if we can. My eldest daughter didn’t want Eid presents this year. Instead, she asked me to give the money to a Muslim charity working with people suffering because of natural disasters.”

The father continued, saying, “So you see, serving others is important to me as a Muslim too. Everything comes from God. It is right that I share what I can afford with others who need it. This is one of the Five Pillars of our faith, which have been given to us by God. So, by serving others in this way, I am serving God.”

Then, he picked up the Eid card from the windowsill, with its special message, and he gave it to Randolph. “Please, take this back with you,” he said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued on his journey.



Can you help Randolph?

Randolph the Wise has been given many gifts on his travels. He has also made many notes in his notebook. But the quest is not yet over. There is still space in his bag for more things to help him reflect on 'serving others' as something that really matters.

Randolph needs your help.

What other places could Randolph visit to find out about serving others?

Who could he ask in those places?

Do you think serving others is something that really matters?

How do you serve others?

What gift would you give Randolph to take home with him?



FREE FOOD



Randolph the Wise Returns Home

As the sun set, a weary Randolph the Wise returned to his room, where he carefully unpacked his bag. One by one, he placed in front of him *all* that he had collected on his journey through Wales.

Then, Randolph the Wise sat in his chair, scratched his old grey head, and thought about the very big question.

“What *really* matters?” he asked again in a deep, booming voice. This time, *all* that he had collected on his journey answered him.

Randolph the Wise listened carefully and smiled.

“This is an essential part of my spiritual quest and search for meaning!” he said. “People serve others in many ways. Serving well makes a difference to both the server and the served. Serving others is something that *really* matters.”





Eid
Mubarak

My gift to
Randolph

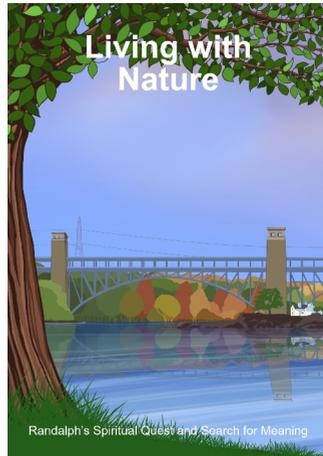
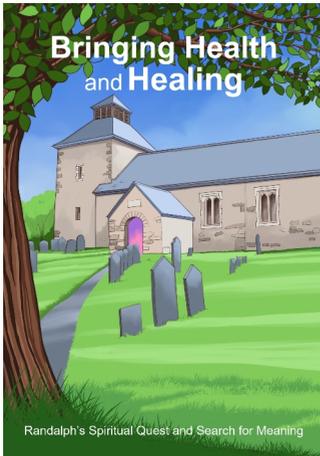
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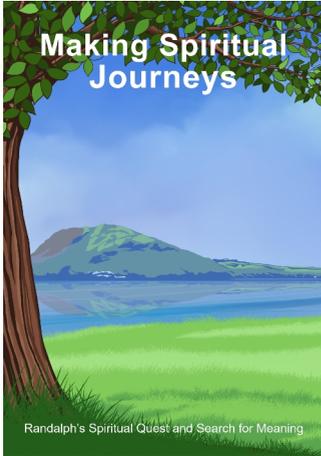


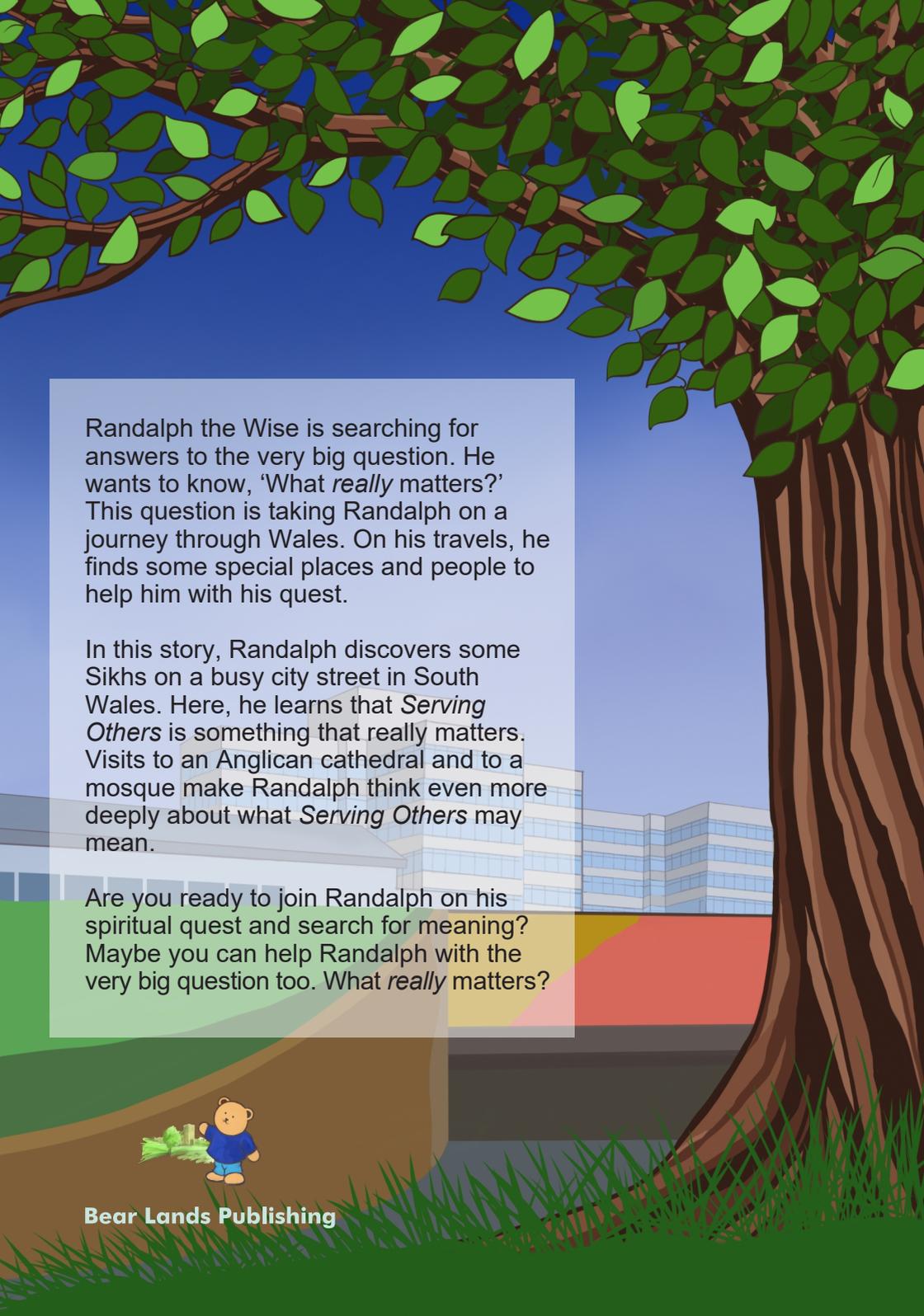
Read more...

Join Randolph the Wise on some of his other travels around Wales.

All storybooks are published in both Welsh and English. Open access copies are available on the Welsh Government 'Hwb' website (hwb.gov.wales) and on the St Mary's Centre website (st-marys-centre.org.uk). Teachers' guidance material, films and music are also provided.







Randolph the Wise is searching for answers to the very big question. He wants to know, 'What *really* matters?' This question is taking Randolph on a journey through Wales. On his travels, he finds some special places and people to help him with his quest.

In this story, Randolph discovers some Sikhs on a busy city street in South Wales. Here, he learns that *Serving Others* is something that really matters. Visits to an Anglican cathedral and to a mosque make Randolph think even more deeply about what *Serving Others* may mean.

Are you ready to join Randolph on his spiritual quest and search for meaning? Maybe you can help Randolph with the very big question too. What *really* matters?