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DĀRU 'L-MASNAVĪ

OF THE MEVLEVI ORDER

Asking Forgiveness in the Qur'an and the Masnavi

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We are asked to pray with total sincerity: "Astaghfiru 'Ilâh" ["estafurullah", in Turkish]. This means in Arabic, "I seek [asta-] the forgiveness of God [ghfir-Allâh]!" --for myself and others. We ask God to cover and purify us from the effects of our wrongdoing through His divine attribute, the Most Forgiving [al-Ghafûr-- a word which occurs ninety times in the Qur'an].

In the Holy Qur'an, this phrase takes two forms. We are commanded to ask God's forgiveness: "and [wa] ask the forgiveness [astaghfir] of God [Allâh]." And we have the example of the Prophets (peace be upon them all), who prayed to God: "and [wa] forgive us [aghfir la-nâ]!" In the Masnavi, Mevlana does not use these words, but instead combines Persian verbs with the word "istighfâr," which occurs once in the Qur'an: "And Abraham asked (God's) forgiveness for his father. . . " [Qur'an 9:114].

"And ask the forgiveness of God [wa 'staghfiri 'Ilâh]. Truly, God is Most Forgiving [Ghafûr], Merciful" [Qur'an 4:106].

"Know that there is no divinity except God [lâ illâha illâ 'Ilâh], and ask forgiveness for your sins (wa 'staghfir li-dhanbi-ka), and for the (sins of all other) men and women who believe" [Qur'an 47:19].

"So be patient (in adversity), for the promise of God (always comes) true. And ask forgiveness for your sins [wa 'staghfir li-dhanbi-ka]. And celebrate the praises (Hamd) of your Lord in the evening and the morning" [Qur'an 40:55].

"Celebrate the praises [Hamd] of your Lord, and ask His forgiveness [wa 'staghfir-hû], for truly He is Turning" (in Mercy toward those who repent) [Qur'an 110:3].

"O our Lord! Forgive me [rabba-nâ 'ghfir lî] and my parents and (all) the believers on the Day when the Reckoning is established!" [Qur'an 14:42].

"And all they said was: 'O our Lord! Forgive us our sins [rabba-nâ 'ghfir la-nâ dhunûba-nâ] and our excesses in our affairs'. . . " [Qur'an 3:147].

"O our Lord! We believe (in You), so forgive us [fa 'ghfir la-nâ] and have mercy on us! for You are the Best of the merciful ones!" [Qur'an 23:109].

"O our Lord! Perfect for us our light [nûr], and forgive us [wa 'ghfir la-nâ]. Truly, You have Power over all things!" [Qur'an 66:8].

"O our Lord! Don't make us bear what we lack the strength for! Blot out (our sins) from us and forgive us [wa 'ghfir la-nâ] and be merciful to us. You are our Supreme Master!" [anta mawlâ-nâ -- Qur'an 2:286].

--translated from the Arabic by Ibrahim Gamard (with gratitude for the translations of Yusuf 'Ali, Muhammad Asad, Muhammad 'Ali, and Mohammad Pickthall)

"Why do you bring dark deceits in (your) arguing before the seeing ones? (For) whatever deceptions and secrets you keep are open and clear like the day to us. Learn from (your) father: for Adam in (his) sin came down agreeably to the (lowest) stepping place. When he saw that Knower of the Secrets, he stood up on his two feet for the sake of seeking forgiveness [istighfâr]. He sat upon the ashes of remorse; he did not jump from branch to branch due to (claiming) excuses. He said, 'O our Lord! Truly we did wrong!' [Qur'an 7:23] when he saw the (angelic) guardians in front and behind."
--Masnavi IV: 321-22, 324-26)

"At the time of illness, there is regret and wailing, (and) the time of illness is entirely wakefulness. (At) the time when you become ill, you pray for forgiveness [istighfâr] from sins. The ugliness of sin is shown to you (and) you make the intention to return to the (right) way. You make promises and agreements that after this you won't choose any action except obedience (to God). Therefore, this has become certain: that your illness gives you awareness and wakefulness. So know this principle, O seeker of the source: whoever has pain, takes on its scent. Whoever (is) more awake (is) more suffering, (and) whoever (is) more aware (of God) (is) more sallow of face."
--Masnavi I: 623-629)

"The God-conscious person is the one who has become fed-up with the way of Pharaoh and has become like Moses. Become like the people of Moses (and) drink this (river) water; make peace with the Moon and see (beautiful) moonlight. . . . The mountain (of unbelief) will never go into the hole of a needle, unless it becomes a single thread. Make the mountain a straw by seeking forgiveness [istighfâr] and happily grab the cup of the forgiven and drink joyfully. (But) since God made it forbidden to the unbelievers, how will you drink from that (river) with this (Egyptian-like) deception?. . . . Become like the people of Moses, for there is no profit in deceit; your deceit is (like) measuring empty wind. Will the water maintain (defiant) boldness against the Command of the Eternal and become watery (rather than appearing as blood) for the unbelievers?. . . . Do you think that when you read the words of the Masnavi you can hear them free of charge? Or that words of wisdom and hidden secrets will come easily into (your) ears and mouths? It comes in, but (is) like fables; it shows the husk, not the berry-kernel. A sweetheart has drawn a veil upon her head and face (and) has made her face hidden from your eyes. From (your) insolence, the (entertaining fables of the) Shâhnâma or Khalîla have become like the Qur'an for you. The difference between the truth and the superficial is when the medicine of (Divine) Grace opens the eyes. Otherwise, sheep dung and musk are both the same to someone with a diseased nose, since there is no sense of smell.

He keeps himself busy (in this way) because of boredom; his purpose is to (keep away) from the Word of the Lord of Glory. . . . But if you become aware of this pure water, which is the Word of God and full of spirituality, temptation will be entirely destroyed from (your) soul, (and your) heart will find the way to the rose garden."
--Masnavi IV: 3446-47, 3451-53, 3455-56, 3459-66, 3470-71)

"If the fire of your nature causes sorrow, its burning is caused by the command of the KING of religion. (And) if the fire of your nature gives joy, the KING of religion puts joy into it. When you experience sorrow, ask forgiveness [istighfâr], for sorrow is effective in (changing) the command of the Creator. Whenever He wills, the nature of pain becomes joy (and) the nature of bondage becomes freedom."
--Masnavi I: 834-837

"Troop by troop, the army of our (mental) images comes quickly toward the fountain of the heart. They fill (their) jars and go; they keep appearing and disappearing. Know that thoughts are (like) the stars of the heavens, (but) circling in the spheres of another sky. If you meet good fortune, give thanks (to God and) share generously. (But if) you meet misfortune, give charity and ask forgiveness [istighfâr] (from God). . . . Deliver (my soul) from (false) imagination, doubt, and false opinions; deliver it from the well and the tyranny of the rope (which held and captured Joseph), so that from Your beneficial comforting Love, a heart (like mine) may raise its wings and fly up from (this body of) water and clay!"
--Masnavi VI: 2782-85, 2788-89

--translated from the Persian by Ibrahim Gamard (with gratitude for Nicholson's 1926-34 British translation)