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DĀRU 'L-MASNĀVI OF THE MEVLEVİ ORDER

Guidance from the Mathnawi

Dear X,

As-salāmu 'alaykum,

Am feeling strongly to share an extraordinary recent experience. Please forgive some unusual sentences but, as you may know, it's a Mevlevi tradition to avoid using the first person singular pronoun to refer to oneself, and am wanting to do this especially now.

Just before the start of the Samâ' on December 8, 2001, when we men semazens were fully dressed, sitting down, and waiting in the dressing room, S read several verses from the Mathnawi:

"The beauty of the heart is the lasting beauty: its lips give to drink of the water of life. Truly it is the water, that which pours, and the one who drinks. All three become one when your talisman is shattered. That oneness you can't know by reasoning."

Thinking that these verses were not only beautiful in themselves, but were also special because of being read just before the Samâ', this semazen went up to ask S about them, was shown a card (with a Persian miniature painting on the back) which was on the table, read the verses to himself, borrowed a pen, wrote down the verse numbers (Mathnawi II: 716-718), and put the card back down on the table (thinking it might belong to someone who might return for it). When the Samâ' was over, we returned to the men's dressing room, this semazen got dressed back into regular clothing, and asked S about the card, and was told, "It's probably still on the table underneath that pile of khirqas (black cloaks). Why don't you take it home with you?"

The next day after returning home, this semazen did some investigating about the card: it was originally from a boxed set of laminated cards. One side of each card has a Rumi quote rendered in English by Kabir and Camille Helminski. Further investigation showed that the Mathnawi quote on this particular card was originally from "Rumi: Daylight," by the Helminskis, p. 111, a version (meaning a modernized re-Englishing) of Nicholson's 1926 translation from Persian:

"For that beauty of the heart is the lasting beauty: its lips give to drink of the Water of Life.

"Truly it is both the water and the giver of drink and the drunken: all three become one when your talisman is shattered.

"That oneness you cannot know by reasoning. Do service (to God) and refrain from foolish gabble, O undiscerning man!"

--Mathnawi, Book II: 716-718, translated from Persian by R. A. Nicholson

Three nights ago (on January 17, 2002) this student of the Mathnawi went, for the first time, to a Mathnawi class taught by an Iranian master of the Mathnawi, Parvîz Sahâbî. Dr. Sahabi, who had travelled from his home in Vancouver, B.C., teaches students the entire Mathnawi, in cycles lasting about eight years-- just as his father and grandfather did before him. Arriving late to the class after a long day at work followed by a long drive, and after driving to the wrong building, this student sat down at the back of the class, listened to Dr. Sahabi talk for about ten minutes (entirely in Farsi/Persian), and then asked the man sitting next to him, "Ko- jâst?" ("Where is it?" -- meaning, the verse which the teacher was explaining). The man opened a photocopy of a section of the Mathnawi in Persian and pointed to a chapter heading near the beginning of Book II. Then, after finding the chapter heading in his own copy of the Mathnawi that he had brought with him, this student stared at the particular verse which the man pointed to, and translated it to himself:

"You cannot know that Oneness by rational analogy and comparison...."

This student then noticed the card, still in his copy of the Mathnawi and tucked into the very same page, and realized that the exact verse pointed to was the third of the three verses on the card-- the card that was read from and then offered to him after that Samâ' . A message from Mevlana! Al-Hamdu li-llâh!

Sufis have prayed for guidance from God for centuries by using the Mathnawi. Pray for guidance, say "Bî'smi 'llâh," and close your eyes. Trust your hands to choose a particular volume of the Mathnawi, your fingers to select a particular opening between the pages of the volume, your right hand to choose the right-hand page or the left-hand page, and your right finger to choose the upper, lower, or middle part of the page and then a particular spot to settle upon. Then open your eyes and see if the selected line (or the lines near it, before or after, on the same page, or even on the other page) is meaningful to you. The results can sometimes be extraordinary, and cause you to start sobbing with tears of gratitude-- and feeling very personally guided and loved by God, the Only Beloved.

Yâ Hazrat-i Mevlânâ, Haqq-Dôst!

Ibrahim

The Three Verses

k-ân jamâl-i del jamâl-i bâqî-ast
dawlat-ash az âb-i Haywân sâqî-ast

khod ham ô âb-ast-o ham sâqî-wo mast
har seh yak shod, chûn Talism-i tô shekast

ân yakî-râ tô na-dân-î az qiyâs

bandagî kon, zhâzh kam khâ, nâ-shenâs

--Mathnawi II: 716-718

The verses may also be literally translated as follows:

For the beauty of the heart* is Everlasting Beauty; its (good) fortune* is (to be served by) the cupbearer* of the Water of (Eternal) Life.*

It is both the liquid (sipped),* the cupbearer, and the drunkard.* All three will have become one when your talisman* (is) shattered.

You can't know that Oneness by means of analogy and reasoning.* O ignorant man, don't talk nonsense, (but) serve (God)*

Notes

*the heart: means the soul, the spirit which is permanent. It is a sufi teaching that the Divine Attributes of God-- such as Divine Beauty-- are reflected in the "heart" of the saint. Related to this is the Divine Tradition (non-Qur'anic) loved by sufis: "My heavens and My earth do not contain Me, but the heart of My believing servant contains Me."

*its (good) fortune: this is what the earliest (Konya) manuscript of the Mathnawi has, which Nicholson didn't get a copy of until after he had translated all of Book I. He later corrected his translation to, "its fortune gives to drink..." (instead of, "its lips give to drink...")

*the cupbearer [saqî]: literally, "water-carrier" or "water seraver." This is a frequent term in Persian literature. It means the dispenser of pure water, or wine-- which are symbols of spiritual blessings in sufi poetry.

*the Water of (Everlasting) Life: the legendary Fountain of Eternal Youth. Whoever found this fountain and drank from it was said to have become immortal (like Hazrat-i Khizr). It is a frequent metaphor in Rumi's poetry.

*the liquid [âb] (sipped): refers to the Water (of Eternal Life), now viewed as the wine of immortality.

*the drunkard [mast]: means the mystic who has drank the "wine of immortality" and is in a state of everlasting bliss. Nicholson translated, "Truly it is both the water and the giver of drink and the drunken..." He explained: "Cf. Bâyâzîd's saying: 'I am the wine- drinker and the wine and the cup-bearer', and 'I came forth from Bâyâzîd-ness (individuality) as a snake from its skin. Then I looked and saw that lover, beloved, and lover are one, for in the world of Unity all can be one'. Mystical experience transcends the logical distinctions of subject, object, and attribute." (Commentary)

*talisman [Talism]: when your talisman (is) shattered: "i.e. 'when your illusion of individuality is destroyed'." (Nicholson, Commentary) Talismans were pieces of clay with magical inscriptions written on them. They were placed in the vicinity of treasures for magical protection. For Rumi, the talisman symbolizes the body, which when "destroyed" reveals the spiritual treasure of the spirit. Similarly, he said that treasures are hidden in ruins, so one should destroy the ruin of the body (meaning to break the power of bodily and egoistic cravings) in order to find the (spiritual) treasure.

*You can't know that Oneness by means of analogy and reasoning: means that the human intellect cannot grasp the nature of transcendent Oneness, since the mind can only perceive and understand in terms of separate objects, categories, qualities, etc. and "that Oneness" is beyond separation. This verse is similar to Mathnawi VI: 2683-- "That Oneness (is) not (that) which the intellect can understand; the understanding of this depends upon the (spiritual) death of a man."

*O ignorant man, don't talk nonsense, (but) serve (God): means, "Don't speculate about something you can't understand. Just surrender your will to the Divine Will and involve yourself in service to God."

*adapted from "The Real Beloved Is Not The Form" (8/00). Translation, i.i. commentar, and transliteration by Ibrahim Gamard (http://www.dar-al-masnawi.org/n_II_0697.html)