

MASNAVI I MA'NAVI

Teachings of Rumi

THE SPIRITUAL COUPLETS OF
MAULANA JALÁLU-'D-DÍN MUHAMMAD I RÚMÍ

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EXPLANATION

A series of imaginative stories of the Prophet told for didactic purposes - that is to teach a specifically Sufi spiritual lesson.



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STORY XV. *Counsels of Reserve given by the Prophet to
his Freedman Zaid (p. 87).*

At dawn the Prophet said to Zaid,
"How is it with thee this morning, O pure disciple?"
He replied, "Thy faithful slave am I." Again he said,
"If the garden of faith has bloomed, show a token of it."
He answered, "I was athirst many days,
By night I slept not for the burning pangs of love;
So that I passed by days and nights,
As the point of a spear glances off a shield.
For in that state all faith is one,
A hundred thousand years and a moment are all one;
World without beginning and world without end are one;
Reason finds no entrance when mind is thus lost."

The Prophet again urged Zaid to deliver to him a present
from that celestial region, as a token that he had really
been there in the spirit. Zaid answered that he had seen

¹ Syad Abu'l Wafa, an unlettered Kurd, found a paper with the words *Bismillāh* upon it, and, after spending the night in prayer, found himself able to understand Arabic (Lucknow Commentator).

the eight heavens and the seven hells, and the destinies of all men, whether bound to heaven or hell. The body, he said, is as a mother, and the soul as her infant, and death is the time of parturition, when it becomes manifest to what class the infant soul belongs. As, on the day of judgment it will be manifest to all men whether a soul belongs to the saved or to the lost, so now it was plain and manifest to him. He went on to ask the Prophet if he should publish this secret knowledge of his to all men, or hold his peace. The Prophet told him to hold his peace. Zaid, however, proceeded to detail the vision of the last judgment, which he had seen when in the spirit; and the Prophet again commanded him to pause, adding that "God is never ashamed to say the truth,"¹ and allows His Prophet to speak forth the truth, but that for Zaid to blab forth the secrets seen in ecstatic vision would be wrong. Zaid replied that it was impossible for one who had once beheld the Sun of "The Truth" to keep his vision a secret. But the Prophet in reply instructed him that all men are masters of their own wills, and that he must not reveal what God has determined to keep secret till the last day, in order to leave men till then under the stimulus of hope and fear, and to give them the credit of "believing what is not seen."² More honour is given to the warder of a castle who faithfully executes his trust at a distance from the court than to those courtiers who serve constantly under the king's own eye. Zaid submitted to the Prophet's injunctions, and remained self-contained in his ecstatic visions. Anecdotes of the sage Luqman, of King Solomon, and of a conflagration in the days of the Khalifa 'Omar complete the section.

The Prophet's final counsels of "Reserve" (p. 91).

The Prophet said, "My companions are as the stars, Lights to them that walk aright, missiles against Satan. If every man had strength of eyesight

¹ Koran xxxiii. 53.

² Koran ii. 2.

To look straight at the light of the sun in heaven,
What need were there of stars, O humble one,
To one who was guided by the light of the sun?
Neither moon nor planets would be needed
By one who saw directly the Sun of 'The Truth.'
The Moon¹ declares, as also the clouds and shadows,
'I am a man, yet it hath been revealed to me.'²
Like you, I was naturally dark,
'Twas the Sun's revelation that gave me such light.
I still am dark compared to the Sun,
Though I am light compared to the dark souls of men.
Therefore is my light weak, that you may bear it,
For you are not strong enough to bear the dazzling Sun.
I have, as it were, mixed honey with vinegar,
To succour the sickness of your hearts.
When you are cured of your sickness, O invalid,
Then leave out the vinegar and eat pure honey.
When the heart is garnished and swept clear of lust,
Therein 'The God of Mercy sitteth on His throne.'³
Then God rules the heart immediately,
When it has gained this immediate connection with Him.
This subject is endless; but where is Zaid,
That I may tell him again not to seek notoriety?
'Tis not wise to publish these mysteries,
Since the last day is approaching to reveal all things."
Now you will not find Zaid, for he is fled,
He sprang from the place where the shoes were left,⁴
Scattering the shoes in his hurry.
If you had been Zaid, you too would have been lost,
As a star is lost when the sun shines on it;
For then you see no trace or sign of it,
No place or track of it in the milky way.
Our senses and our endless discourses
Are annihilated in the light of the knowledge of our King.
Our senses and our reason within us

¹ I.e., the Prophet.

² Koran xviii. 110.

³ Koran xx. 4.

⁴ I.e., the vestibule of the house.

Are as waves on waves "assembled before us." ¹
When night returns and 'tis the time of the sky's levée,
The stars that were hidden come forth to their work.
The people of the world lie unconscious,
With veils drawn over their faces, and asleep;
But when the morn shall burst forth and the sun arise
Every creature will raise its head from its couch;
To the unconscious God will restore consciousness;
They will stand in rings as slaves with rings in ears;
Dancing and clapping hands with songs of praise,
Singing with joy, "Our Lord hath restored us to life!"
Shedding their old skins and bones,
As horsemen stirring up a cloud of dust.
All pressing on from Not-being to Being,
On the last day, as well the thankful as the unthankful.

ONE

The Prophet (peace be with him) said, "The worst scholar is one who visits princes, but the best prince is one who visits scholars. Happy the prince at a poor man's door; wretched the poor man at a prince's gate."⁶⁰

People have taken this saying at its face value to mean that it is not fitting for a scholar to visit a prince lest he become a bad scholar. It does not, however, mean what people imagine. Its true meaning is that the worst scholar is one who receives support from princes, whom he must fear in order to gain his livelihood. Such a man's primary aim in the pursuit of learning is for princes to bestow gifts upon him, to hold him in high esteem, and to grant him official positions. Therefore, it is on their account that he betters himself and exchanges his ignorance for learning. When he becomes a scholar, he learns proper etiquette out of fear of them and their power to punish. So, willy-nilly, he conducts himself as they would have him do. Therefore, whether outwardly it be the prince who visits the scholar or the scholar who visits the prince, such a scholar must conduct himself as a guest while the prince acts as host. On the other hand, when a scholar dons the robe of learning, not for the sake of princes but rather first and foremost for God's sake, and when his conduct and comportment are along the path of rectitude, as his natural inclination should be, and for no other reason—like a fish, which can live only in water—then such a scholar is so ruled by reason that during his time all men stand in awe of his presence and are illuminated by his reflected radiance, whether they are aware of it or not. If such a scholar goes to a prince, it is he who acts as the host and the prince the guest, because the prince will be receiving assistance and will be dependent upon the scholar. The scholar is quite independent of the prince; he will shed light like the sun,

⁶⁰The prophetic hadith (*shirâru 'l-'ulamâ'*) is given in Ghazâlî, *Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-dîn*, I, 116 (juz' i, bâb vi). A similar hadith (*abghadu 'l-khalq*) is given in Suyûtî, *Jâmi' al-saghîr*, I, 85.

whose only property is to give and bestow. The sun turns ordinary stones into rubies and carnelians and earthen mountains into mines of copper, gold, silver, and lead;⁶¹ the sun makes the earth green and fresh and produces various fruits on the trees. Its only function is to give and bestow; it does not take anything, as the Arabs say proverbially, "We have learned to give, not to take." Such scholars are therefore hosts in any situation, and princes are their guests.

It occurs to me to interpret a verse of the Koran, even if it is not pertinent to this discussion. Anyway, since it occurs to me now, I may as well say it out. God said: *O prophet, say unto the captives who are in your hands, If God hath known any good to be in your hearts, He will give you better than what hath been taken from you; and He will forgive you, for God is gracious and merciful* [8:70]. The reason for the revelation of this verse is as follows. The blessed Prophet had defeated the infidels. Having slain and plundered, he took many prisoners and had them bound hand and foot. Among these prisoners was his uncle Abbas. All night long the prisoners wailed in their fetters and bemoaned their miserable, wretched condition. Having given up all hope, they were waiting for the sword to end their lives when the Prophet saw them and laughed.

"You see," they said, "he does have humanity in him. The claim that he is not human is untrue, for here, seeing us in these bonds and fetters as his prisoners, he rejoices exactly as a carnal man would rejoice in glee if he had conquered his enemy and seen him vanquished."

The Prophet, however, read their thoughts and said, "Oh, no, I am not laughing because I see my enemies vanquished or because I am rejoicing at seeing you at a loss. I am laughing because with my inner eye I see myself forced to drag with chains and fetters a group of people out of hell's fiery furnace

⁶¹ According to the physical theories of antiquity adopted by Islamic science, precious stones were thought to be produced by the effect of sunlight on ordinary rocks, which, after exposure to the sun, sink into the mountains, where they are incubated into gems.

and black smoke into the eternal garden of heavenly paradise.⁶² They are bewailing and lamenting, saying, 'Why are you taking us away from this place of perdition into that asylum and rose-bower?' That is why I am laughing. Since you still do not have the power of vision to comprehend and see clearly what I am saying, God commands me to say this to you: 'First you gathered many hosts and much might and, relying totally upon your own strength, valour, and might, you told yourselves that you would do thus and so and would utterly vanquish the Muslims. You thought no one was stronger than you. You could not imagine anyone mightier than yourselves. Now that all you had planned has turned out otherwise, and now that you lie trembling in fear, you have not repented of your malady and are in desperate straits. You still cannot conceive that anyone could be more powerful than you are. It is therefore necessary for you to see me in my might and power and yourselves as subject to my wrath in order that things may be made easy for you. Do not despair of me in your fear, for I am able to deliver you from this fear and lead you to safety. He who can bring forth a black cow from a white one can bring forth a white cow from a black one. *He causeth the night to succeed the day, and He causeth the day to succeed the night* [35:13]. *He bringeth forth the living out of the dead, and He bringeth forth the dead out of the living* [30:19]. Now in your present state as prisoners, despair not of my presence in order that I may take you by the hand, for *none despaireth of God's mercy, except the unbelieving people* [12:87]."

Then the Prophet continued, saying, "Now God says, 'O prisoners, if you turn away from your former belief and perceive Me in both states of fear and hope⁶³ and realize that

⁶² Cf. the prophetic hadith (*ajiba rabbunâ*), "Our Lord is amazed at people who must be led into paradise in chains," given in Badi'uzzaman Furuzanfar, *Ahâdith al-mathnawî*, p. 103, #305. Where possible, all prophetic and divine *hadith* quoted by Rumi in this book will be referred to Prof. Furuzanfar's work, hereafter abbreviated as *FAM*.

⁶³ The stages of fear (*kharaf*) and hope (*rajâ*) are integral to the mystic "path" and are technical terms of Sufism. "Fear" represents the stage wherein

you are subject to My will in all conditions, I shall release you from this state of fear. I shall restore to you all your property that has been plundered and lost, nay I shall restore it to you many times over. I shall pardon you, and to your wealth in this world I shall join the wealth of the next world also."

"I repent," said Abbas. "I have turned away from what I was."

"God requires a token of this claim you make," said the Prophet.

It is easy to lay claim to love,
But the proof of it remains otherwise.

"In God's name," asked Abbas, "what token do you require?"

"Give to the armies of Islam," said the Prophet, "all the wealth you have left. If you have truly become a Muslim and wish well to the religion and community of Islam, give in order that the army of Islam may be strengthened."

"O Apostle of God," he said, "what have I left? Everything has been plundered. I have not so much as an old straw mat left to my name!"

"See," said the Prophet, "you still have not become righteous. You have not turned away from what you were. Let me tell you how much wealth you have, where you have hidden it, to whom you have entrusted it, and in what spot you have buried it."

"Oh, no!" cried Abbas.

the mystic's heart is severed from the calm of security by the expectation of a possible evil emanating from the carnal self. When the mystic fears all that is other than God and puts his hope in God alone, God guarantees his faith. According to Junayd, "hope," the complement of "fear," means to be confident that good will come from God's grace and generosity. See Sajjadi, *Farhang*, pp. 252-54, 228. What Rumi stresses here is that the believer should not be so preoccupied with fearing what is other than God—or with hope of security—that God is forgotten in the process.

"Did you not entrust a certain amount to your mother? Did you not bury it under a wall and stipulate that if you came back she was to give it to you, and if you did not return alive she was to spend it on a certain thing, give so much to a certain person, and keep a certain amount for herself?"

When Abbas raised his finger and professed the faith sincerely, saying, "O Prophet, in truth I used to think that you had good luck through the machinations of fortune, as did many ancient kings like Haman, Shaddad, and Nimrod. However, when you told me what you said, I knew for certain that this good fortune is mysterious and divine in origin."

"You speak the truth," said the Prophet. "This time I heard that girdle of doubt you wore inwardly snap. The sound of its breaking reached that ear of mine that is hidden in the depths of my soul. Whenever anyone's girdle of doubt, polytheism, or infidelity snaps, I can hear the sound of it breaking with my inner ear, my soul's ear.⁶⁴ Now you have truly become righteous and professed the faith."

*

All this I said to the Parvana. I told him, "You, who have become the head of Islamdom, have said, 'I sacrifice myself and my intellect and all my power of deliberation and judgment for the continued existence and spread of Islam.' But since you have relied upon yourself and not looked to God to realize that everything is from Him, God has caused that very endeavor of yours to be the cause for the diminution of Islam. You have united yourself with the Tatar, whom you aid to annihilate the Syrians and Egyptians and thus to lay waste the realm of Islam.⁶⁵ The very thing that was to be a cause for the

⁶⁴ Cf. the two "cries for protection" attributed to the Prophet in Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani, *Tamhidat*, p. 214: "O God, I seek refuge in Thee from polytheism (*shirk*) and doubt (*shakk*)" (p. 76) and, "O God, I seek refuge in Thee from infidelity (*kufr*)."

⁶⁵ Rumi alludes to the diplomatic posturing of the Parvana vis-a-vis the Mamluk sultans of Egypt and Syria and the Mongol Ilkhanids of Iran. He may well have invited the Mamluk Baybars to invade Seljuq Anatolia in

expansion of Islam has become the cause for its diminishment. Therefore, in this state, which is a fearful one, turn to God. Give alms that He may deliver you from this evil condition, which is fear. Do not despair of Him, even if He has cast you down from a state of obedience into disobedience. Because you thought your obedience was in and of yourself, you have fallen into disobedience. Even now in this disobedience, despair not but turn humbly to God, for He is almighty. If He turned that obedience into disobedience, He can turn this disobedience into obedience and give you repentance. He can provide you the means to strive anew on behalf of the propagation of Islam and to be a strength for Islam. Despair not, for *none despaireth of God's mercy, except the unbelieving people* [12:87]."

My purpose was to make him understand, give alms and humble himself before God, for from a most exalted position he had come to a low state, even in which he should be hopeful.

God works in mysterious ways. Things may look good outwardly, but there may be evil contained inside. Let no one be deluded by pride that he himself has conceived good ideas or done good deeds. If everything were as it seemed, the Prophet would not have cried out with such illuminated and illuminating perspicacity, "Show me things as they are!"⁶⁶ You make things appear beautiful when in reality they are ugly; You make things appear ugly when in reality they are beautiful. Show us therefore each thing as it is lest we fall into a snare and be ever errant." Now your judgment, however good and clear it may be, is not better than his, and he spoke as

1276. In the spring of 1277 the Mamluk did invade, inflicted a crushing defeat on the Mongol army of occupation at Abulustan, and immediately withdrew. The Mongol defeat brought the Ilkhan Abaqa himself to Asia Minor, and the Parvana was summoned, tried, and heinously executed in 1277. See Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, v, 361.

⁶⁶ The prophetic hadith (*arinâ 'l-ashyâ*) may be found in *FAM* 45 (116).

he did. Don't rely on your every thought and opinion, but humble yourself before God and fear Him.

Such was my purpose in speaking to the Parvana. However, he applied this verse and this interpretation to his own strategy, saying, "At this time, when we are moving our troops, we must not rely on them. Even defeated, we must not despair of Him in time of fear and helplessness." He applied my words to his own design, whereas my purpose was as I have said.

TWO

Someone said, "Our master is not saying anything."

"Well," I replied, "this person has been projected up to my presence by a mental image of mine. This image of mine did not ask him, 'How are you?' or 'How do you do?' My mental image attracted him here without the use of words. If my reality attracts him without words and can remove him hence to another place, what is so strange about that?"

Words are but "shadows" of reality. They are, as it were, a branch of reality. If the "shadow" can attract, how much more so can the reality attract!

Words are just pretexts. It is the element of sympathy that attracts one man to another, not words. If a man should see a thousand prophetic or saintly miracles, it will profit him nothing if he does not have sympathy with the prophet or saint. It is that sympathetic element that unsettles and disquiets. Were there no element of sympathy to amber in straw, then straw could never be attracted by amber. The sympathy between them is hidden, however; it cannot be seen.

The mental image of anything brings man to that thing: the image of "garden" leads him to a garden, the image of "shop" to a shop. There is, however, a deception hidden in these images. Don't you see that often, when you go to a place, you are disappointed and say, "I thought it would be better. It wasn't what it was supposed to be"? These images are like shrouds, and one can hide beneath a shroud. When the images are dispelled and the realities appear without the shroud of the