

6. The dark hell of Saturn

The Ocean of Blood

“Brave traveler, do you see that planet which stole tail of a comet and made it a girdle?” Rumi asked me, pointing at Saturn.

“This planet moves so slow that it almost appears static,” he continued. “All good becomes bad here and countless angels are whipping it with thunder since the day of creation. This is a world rejected by the heavens and dim sunlight darkens its day. It is the abode of spirits who will not be resurrected ever again, such as those two monsters who killed the soul of their nation for the sake of their own comforts. I mean Jaffar of Bengal and Sadiq of Deccan—shame for humanity, religion and country. Through their treachery India became slave to foreigners and the Muslims, who had freed other nations from tyranny became subjects of tyranny themselves.”

I cannot describe what I saw. My senses begin to fail me whenever I think of it again. It was an ocean of blood, vast and extensive, and overridden by storms inside and out. Instead of sharks it had winged snakes in its air with heads as black as the night and silver hair. The waves of the ocean were leaping forward like leopards and their fear had killed the sharks, which now lay dead on the coasts. Even those coasts weren't peaceful because the rocks were continuously falling on them. Amid the waves of blood I saw a boat. There seated in it were two men whose faces were pale, bodies naked and hair scattered.

Suddenly, the sky split open and out came a beautiful celestial bride. Glow and magnificence of God was shining on her forehead while her eyes were the pride of the heavens. The fiber of her dress was made of rose petals and was more delicate than clouds. However, she was chained like a slave and crying out for help in a painful voice.

“This is the soul of India,” Rumi said to me. “Her cries are heart-rending.”

“The Indians are not bothered about the dignity of their land anymore,” the bride was crying out. “They are unknown to themselves. They have fixed their glance on their past and expect heat of passion from an extinguished flame! I am chained because of them, and distressed. They have emptied their existence of their pride and have formed prisons of ancient customs. Beware of practices that deprive you of the world. God save us from making patience a habit! Oppression is poison to the oppressor and the oppressed both. When will the day of freedom dawn upon India? Jaffer died but his soul is alive!”

One of the two men in the trembling boat in the ocean of blood started lamenting. “Sigh! Life and death alike have rejected us,” he was wailing. “After our death we arrived at the doors of Hell in pain but it refused to burn us. ‘I want my blaze to be pure of these infidels,’ it said. We traveled to the other end of the heavens to Death, but it said, ‘The soul is among my secrets. You must ward off for the soul of a traitor will not find peace in death.’ O strong wind! O Ocean of Blood! O Earth! O blue sky! O stars! O Moon! O Sun! O Pen! O Preserved Tablet! O Book! O white idols! O lords of the West! Is their no master who would take a



traitor as his slave?"

Suddenly a frightful voice was heard. The oceans and the deserts had been slit open. Every joint was loosened and rocks started falling on each other. Mountains flew away like clouds, as if the end of the world had come unannounced. Lightning and thunder descended the ocean of blood with all rage, waves rose higher than themselves and sheets of blood covered everything.

The caravan of stars looked at this all and passed by unconcerned.

7. Beyond the skies

The Paradise

I kept moving on until I reached the farthest corner of the universe. Everywhere I saw life triumphing over death and experienced different speeds of time. A year of our worldly time would pass like a month at one place and like a flash of a moment at another. I saw that the laws of nature were different for each world.

At the farthest end of the universe I saw a man whose voice was filled with tragedy. His eyes were sharper than a hawk while his face was radiant with the fire in his breast and on his lips was this song:

Neither Gabriel nor paradise
Nor heaven's damsel nor for God I cry:
I crave a mould of dust that is consumed
By a yearning soul.

Rumi told me that this was the German philosopher Nietzsche who revealed the secrets of the Western civilization and was treated like a madman. Hallaj was crucified but this modern mystic while saving his life from the hands of the clergy forfeited it to the physicians who killed him with sedatives. "His station is between the two worlds," Rumi told me.

I stepped beyond, and set my foot on the world that has no dimensions and lies outside the space. I cannot describe it. Just as a bird cannot fly in a cage, the reality



of that world cannot be contained in words. You can understand it if you consider the reality of your heart. You cannot measure the distance between your feelings and yet they all exist. In the same manner, that other world also exists without left and right, or day and night. You imagine something there and immediately you find it present before your eyes. The buds blossom there with the breath of the angels.

“O prisoner of thought!” Rumi addressed me. “Step outside the world of your senses. The palaces you see around you are not made of bricks and cement but of good deeds.”

An exceptionally beautiful palace there belonged to one Sharfunisa, as Rumi told me.

She was a noble maiden from Punjab who kept a sword by her side while reading the Quran and ordered the two to be placed on her grave when she died.

“The word of truth, and the power to protect it,” Rumi said to me, “These are blessings in-deed.”

Both were taken away from her grave when Punjab slipped from the hands of the Muslims.

I started missing my friends on the mention of my province. Just then I heard a



voice from the banks of the *Kausur*, the venerated stream of Paradise.

Someone was singing in a beautiful voice:

Of straw I searched
A handful just to burn myself; the rose
Suspected I shall build with it my nest.

This was the famous poet from Kashmir, Ghani, sitting here in the company of Syed Ali Hamadani, the saint who turned Kashmir into a little Persia. Rumi beckoned me to ask a few questions to the enlightened saint, and the first question I asked him was about good and evil. "Why did God create Satan while He wanted us to stay away from evil?" I asked. The saint replied, "The human soul finds strength by refuting the temptations of Satan."

I then asked him about the fate of Kashmir. The people of that unhappy valley had suffered from oppression for a very long time and their miseries had increased ever since the British sold the valley and its inhabitants to a Hindu Rajah for seven and a half million rupees (which amounted to less than ten rupees per person!). While I was talking about the woes of the people of Kashmir I saw a man in frenzy appearing all of a sudden and singing a sad song. This was the same Ghani of Kashmir whom I had heard a while ago. Now he was singing:

O breeze! If thou dost pass
By Geneva sometime,
To League of Nations take
This sad and gloomy rhyme.

Each rill, each garden, field
Each farmer too they sold,
A nation for a price
That makes my blood ice-cold.

Syed Ali now turned to me and said, "Son! Let me tell you a secret. An enlightened person distinguishes between dust and soul. Such a person is willing to die for the sake of the Truth, for such death is but a gateway to another life."

I asked him about the secrets of government and he told me that government could only be earned by the virtue of power. Ghani the poet now spoke again to point out that Nehrus – Motilal and his son Jawaharlal – who are struggling for the freedom of India have also descended from Kashmiri stock. A land that produces freedom lovers cannot be held in chains for long.

I was then asked to recite some song of my own and I offered the following:

"Does not this world of ours
Suit thee?" He asked one day,
I said, "It never did,"
"Then break it up We say!"

If reason be thy guide
Throw it from self away,
Drink from the cup of love
With men who know the way.

These scarlet tears of mine
 Out of my heart are born,
 Pick up these rubies bright
 Thy ring with them adorn.

Bhartari Hari, kings and the *houris*

Beautiful maidens of heaven were looking at me from every nook and corner of palaces that surrounded us in Paradise. These were the *houris* and my song had captivated them.

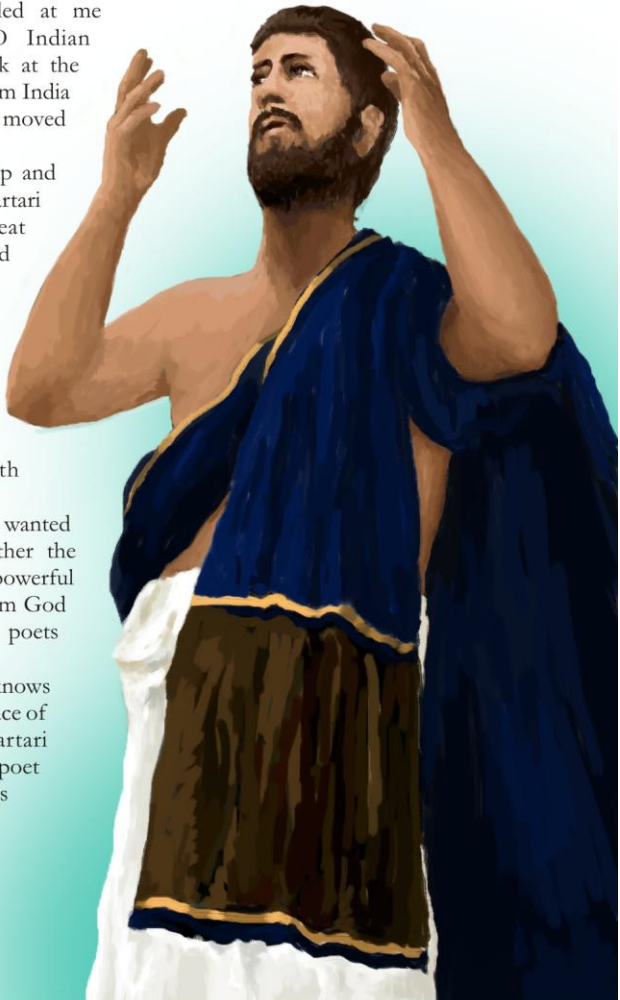
Rumi smiled at me and said, “O Indian magician! Look at the fellow poet from India who has been moved by your song.”

I looked up and found that Bhartari Hari, the great Hindu poet had come out of his heavenly *a b o d e*. Rumi and I rose in his honor and I *h a d a n* interview with Bhartari.

Above all I wanted to know whether the essence of a powerful verse came from God or from the poets themselves.

“Nobody knows where is the place of a poet,” Bhartari said to me. “A poet lives in the ups and downs of the notes of a song.”

I then asked him to reveal the truth



about God, since this was a time when the people of his homeland needed it most. Bhartari sang one of his songs in response to my question:

All sapless are thy prayers
 Bereft of action's fire,
 For actions, good or bad,
 Do shape this life entire.

The world thou seest is not
 The handicraft of the Lord;
 From thee alone emerge
 The spinning wheel, the cord.

Before the law of actions
 Bow, from the rest be free;
 They are deed's reflections
 Hell, heaven, purgatory.

I wrote his words on my heart and then listened to Rumi who was telling me to move on. "You have seen the company of the dervishes," he was saying, "Now look at the glory of the kings."

We arrived upon a grand palace, more beautiful than any words can describe. Its height could not be measured and it was all made of moonstone, so that it seemed to be containing the skies in its lap. The breeze was so rejuvenating that it could turn a petal red in no time. The flowers in the surrounding gardens were changing their colors every moment.



Inside, we saw a grand court where *houris* with golden girdles around their waists were standing in attendance upon three kings. They were Nadir of Persia, who strived for reconciliation between the Shias and the Sunnis in his empire; Ahmed Shah Abdali, the founder of Afghan nationalism; and Sultan Tipu, the martyr who died for the freedom of the East. They asked questions about their countries after Rumi had introduced me as a great poet.

We discussed the conditions of Persia, Afghanistan and India. I regretfully informed them that the people of Iran were thinking of themselves as Persians first and Muslims later while Afghanistan was wrought with dissensions and internal conflicts. India, however, was struggling against the Western colonialists. "A people cannot accept a foreign rule forever no matter how good that rule may be," I said.

The spirit of a great poet of classical Persian, Nasir Khusro, appeared while we were having this discussion. He sang a song and then disappeared.

His song was this:

If thou hast let the sword or pen
Be of thy hand the rider fair;
Then if thy body's steed be lame
Or it be nimble – have no care.

Nor quill nor sword can art produce
When handled by mere faithless men,
And no intrinsic worth remains
Devoid of faith in sword or pen.

Abdali made a profound remark about the European civilization. "Their power does not lie in wine, night clubs and skimpy clothing of women," he said. "It lies in their knowledge and enlightenment. O Youth of the East! Knowledge comes with brains, not with Western clothes."

Tipu told me that once, when he recited my verses to the Holy Prophet in Paradise, the Prophet asked him whose verses were these and remarked that they contained the spark of life. Tipu then asked me to use that spark of life and take his message to the River Kaveri that runs past his tomb in Deccan. His message was, "O Kaveri! Slow down for a while and listen to me, for I am your sovereign who was wide-awake when the rest of the East lay in deep slumber. Don't come to life unless you are prepared to always move on, for do you know what is the rule, religion and creed of life? It is this: to live like a lion for a moment is better than a hundred years of living like sheep. A true believer is the predator of death."

I was deeply touched by the words of the martyr king when Rumi asked me to move on.

With a grave heart I headed for the gates of the palace and found a gathering of the *houris* there. They were asking me to stay with them for a while.

"True love doesn't stop until it reaches the presence of God Almighty," I said to them. "Love starts with admiration of physical beauty but it must rise above that level."

The *houris* then asked me for a song, and this is what I sang to them:

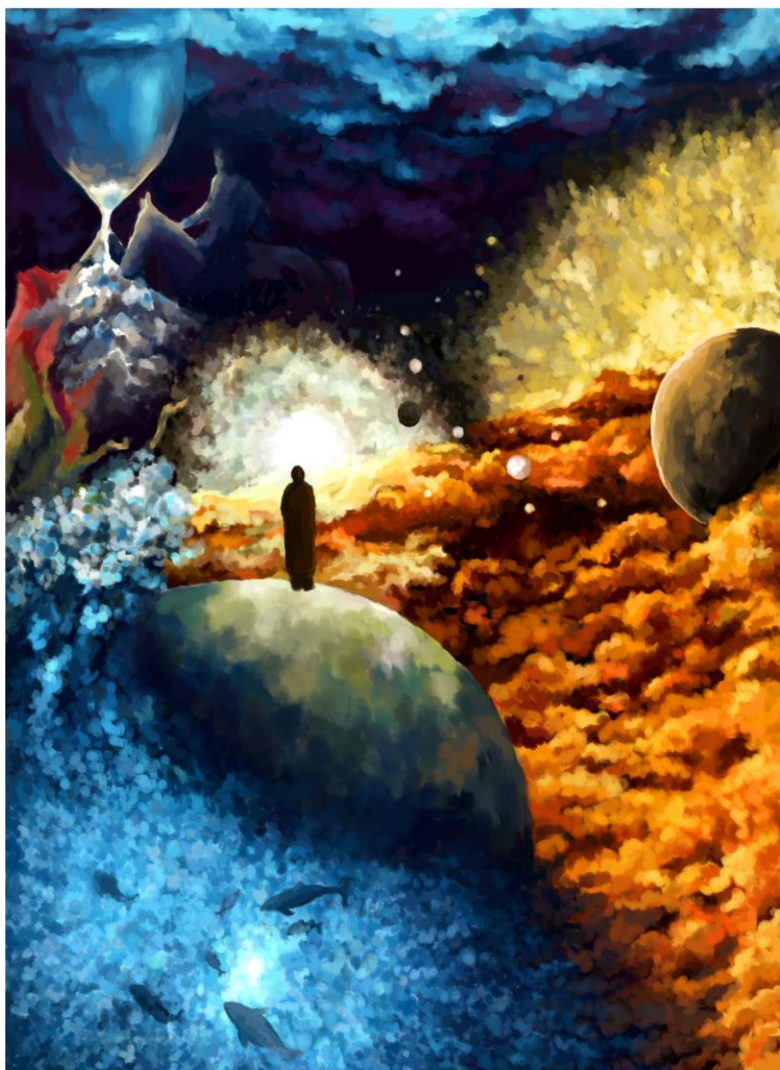
What search for God will profit thee
When thou failed reaching man?

What is friend's union for the one
From self away who ran?

Demand no flaming song from me
With which thy heart to burn;
For men to find its bleeding track
To tulip-garden turn.

A dervish I am who upon
The world doth shed new light;
Thou needst no other alchemy
Pray gain from me my sight.





God

Paradise too is a manifestation of God, however the soul of a lover cannot be satiated with anything but the sight of the beloved and hence I moved beyond those palaces and the *bouris*. Knowledge impure in nature becomes an impediment to vision but knowledge aimed at the vision of beauty is the path as well as the guide. It nourishes your heart and your sight through interpretation of the universe and leads you to the doorstep of God. There, however, you stand alone – without your knowledge or any other attachments, because a lover's jealousy would not suffer the company of a third entity in the presence of the beloved.

I allowed my soul to drift in the ocean of light and was engrossed in looking at God in His Infinite Beauty present in ever changing glories. I became lost in the secrets of creation and life appeared to me like a harp, each string an instrument in itself and each note more piercing than the other. All creations belonged to the same family of light and fire. A mirror was placed in front of my soul and my sense of wonder was mingled with my faith.

There I saw the past and the future standing together before a present morning. God was before me with all His mysteries and looking at Himself through my eyes!

“O Creator!” Love made me bold and I ventured to address the Almighty. “Does this world suite you where humans are preyed upon by the profiteers, tyrants, *maulhis* and false saints? Indeed, a world of miseries doesn't suite a creator like you, O Lord! It is a stain upon your name!”

“The pen of destiny wrote whatever We chose from the good and the bad,” God answered me. “Do you know the meaning of life? To live means to create through Our power. Make your own world if you are alive, for whoever lacks the power to create is indeed an infidel in Our eyes.”

“Nations don't resurrect once they die,” I said, “Just as the water doesn't turn back in a running stream.”

“Life doesn't depend on the physical reality alone,” God answered me again. “Since I have said that I am closer to you than your jugular vein, you too can become immortal by the virtue of this closeness. A nation can also become immortal through Unity, just like an individual. O you who say ‘There is no god except Allah,’ do you understand the meaning of a nation? A nation is like thousands of eyes seeing together. Attain this unity of vision, so that you may possess authority in the world.”

“O Lord! Pray tell me who am I, and what is your reality?” I asked. “Why am I far away from you? Why am I subordinate to destiny? Why do I die and how are you immortal?”

God answered all these questions in one statement. “Whoever lives in the world, dies in it,” He said. “Live within yourself and absorb the world too if you want to become immortal. Then you will know who are you, and who am I, and how do you live and die!”

“Forgive me my Lord,” I ventured a little more. “But I pray you to reveal the fate of the world upon me! I have seen the revolutions of Germany and Russia, and I have seen the anxiety in the hearts of the Muslims. I know the schemes of

the East and the West, let me see their destinies too!"

Suddenly I saw my planet and its sky bathed in a scarlet light. The vision revealed all realities on my soul and I could not hold my power of speech anymore. Like Moses I fell unconscious. A deep, passionate voice arose from the inner reaches of that dimensionless world. It was singing this song:

Be not enchanted by the West
Nor on the East thou needest dote,
For both this ancient and this new
Together are not worth an oat.

So carelessly to Ahriman
The precious jewel thou didst sell,
Was such that cannot well be pledged
With even trusty Gabriel.

Than radiant sun that illuminates
The ancient sky thou art more bright,
So live that every grain of sand
May borrow brilliance from thy light.

To Javid and posterity

The book has come to an end but I still have something to say that cannot be said. The effort of saying it makes it more complicated as the words and sounds blur it. Grasp it from my eyes and from my passion.

To say 'There is no god except Allah' means that you should never lower yourself before anyone or anything in this world. One who doesn't believe in oneself is an infidel, worse than one who doesn't believe in God. Look at the evils of the world around you and protect yourself from them. Our teachers give all the wrong messages to our youth, since they take away the natural flare from the soul. Take it from me that all knowledge is useless until it is connected with *your* life, because the purpose of knowledge is nothing but to show you the splendors of yourself!

Religion starts with courtesy and attains its perfection through love. Do not slander anyone, for the Muslims and non-Muslims all belong to the same God. Beware of the dignity of the human being and remember that your humanity lies in showing respect to other humans. One who loves God should be kind to everyone, just as God Himself is merciful to people of all religions.

Do not serve your body at the cost of your soul, and learn to take pride in poverty even if you become a wealthy noble. Try to find a true guide and if you fail to do so, follow Rumi just as I took him for my guide. People have learnt to dance like dervishes but they haven't learnt the dance of the soul, which moves the order of the universe; but the soul cannot dance until you shake off fear and expectation from everyone except God. Stay away from grief because grief indicates a weakness of faith and turns youth into old age.

O my child! If only your soul could learn to dance, then that is the secret of the religion of Muhammad that I am disclosing to you, as I lie praying for you in my grave.

عوضتاً که کرده اند و هر یک - یک یک است - جان پاک

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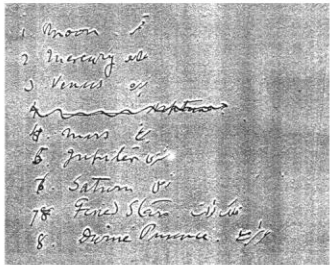
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The Making of *Javidnama*

In the summer of 1927, Iqbal opened his notebook and recited some verses to Syed Nazeer Niazi, the nephew of his Sialkot teacher Mir Hasan and a frequent visitor. The verses, as Iqbal himself would later describe them, "came from another world" and the book in which they were meant to go would be proclaimed as "descended from another heaven." It was going to be *Javidnama*, apparently named after his favorite son but also meaning, with a pun on the name, "The Book of Immortality."

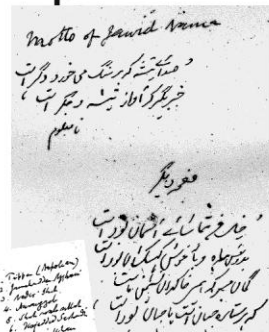
The major inspiration was *m'iraj*, or the ascension of the Holy Prophet to the heavens. "Professor Bevan has given us valuable historical discussion of the story of the m'iraj," he mentioned in his Presidential Address to the Indian Oriental Conference in 1928, a year after he started *Javidnama*. What was more important to him than the historical discussion was the intense appeal of the story to the average Muslim mind, "and the manner in which the Muslim thought and imagination have worked on it." He mentioned the impact it had on Ibn 'Arabi, and through him on the mind of Dante.

In that speech he did not mention the book *Divine Comedy and Islam*, published in Spanish in 1919 and by now available in English translation. However, its author Miguel Asin was mentioned as the pioneer of this discussion in an essay appearing soon after the publication of *Javidnama* in 1932. The essay was by Iqbal's devoted friend Chaudhry Muhammad Husain,



The draft notebook (now preserved in the Iqbal Museum) helps us trace the making of the epic. The first page lists the celestial itinerary: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Fixed Stars, Divine Presence. The Fixed Stars were later dropped, bringing the total number of chapters to a lucky seven.

The next page of the notebook contains a list – mostly historical personalities whose souls would



feature in the book. Some, like the Turkish dictator Mustafa Kemal and the Persian monarch Reza Shah,

1. *Book of the Hereafter*
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26. *Book of the Hereafter*

still alive and in good health so they could only be mentioned in conversations by others in heaven if the book were to be written soon. Other omissions included, quite regrettably, the Queen Noor Jehan.

in all probability supervised by Iqbal himself.

In that same essay we we also find that he was planning to write a thesis on *m'iraj* but when he discovered that Dante's *Divine Comedy* was also inspired by the same incident, he decided to turn his thesis into narration, an *Eastern Divine Comedy* of sorts. We cannot be sure which author first caught his attention on this subject, but in any case he benefited from Asin's book either before or while writing *Javidnama* and it seems a happy coincidence that a year after publishing it he also met the professor in Spain.

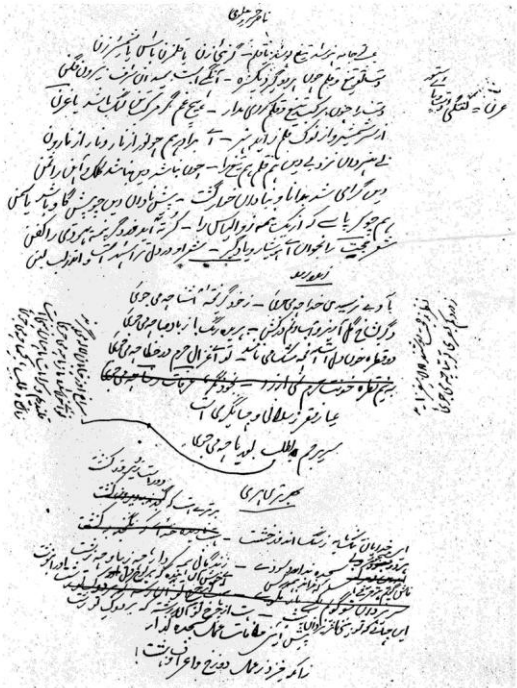
If Dante actually took his inspiration from the *m'iraj* – and he almost certainly did, despite his hostility towards the Prophet – then he was neither the first nor the last of such writers. *M'irajnama* was an established genre of Muslim literature and was not restricted to the retelling of the Prophet's Ascension only. Sufis had written about their own mini-ascensions too.

Iqbal's homework included extensive research. The characters should speak what he wanted to say through them but they must also sound like themselves. Hallaj, for instance, was given one of Iqbal's own *ghazals* from *Payam-i-Mashriq* (1923) to sing, but the dialogue between him and Zindah Rud (Iqbal's nickname in the epic) closely followed Hallaj's own mindset as depicted in his writings (edited and published from Paris some time ago).

The rules of science could not be followed throughout a spiritual fantasy but Iqbal managed to display his familiarity with the expanding boundaries of astronomy. Jupiter, it had then become known, moved in a fast and interesting manner and hence Iqbal chose it to be the haunt of those souls that did not wish to stop at anything.

And yet, *Javidnama* was not the only thing he was doing those days. He was also reconstructing the religious thought in Islam through a series of lectures, preparing the case for a Muslim homeland in India through a presidential address, and last but not least, making his livelihood through legal practice and checking examination papers for universities.

"I have drained myself," is what he said at the end of four years during which he completed his 'life's work.'



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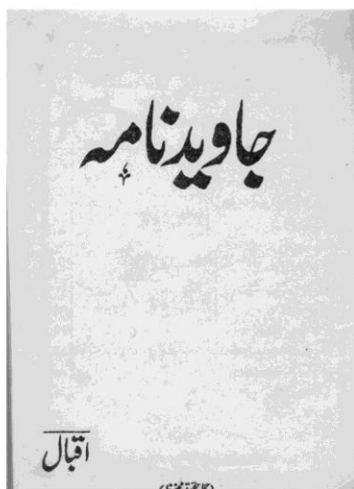
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Prologue

Prayer

The human being is ever craving for company in this seven-colored world, O Lord! Where is a companion for the soul? Let this world descend from my sight, the way sun and moon descend beneath the horizon; let a day appear before me that does not belong to the passing time.

O Lord! You are my beloved. Your face is my faith and my Quran. Let me see it, for the sun doesn't lose anything by giving out its rays. A passionate soul like mine is not to be found in this age when people are held back by reason. So light up the darkness of my heart with your light like a moon.

O Lord! We yearn to see you but cannot see. Take away our blindness, speak to us and take us beyond the world of today and tomorrow! Take us beyond the world of the moon and the stars!

O Lord! I am a mortal and my light is like a short-lived spark before your everlasting illumination. Make me immortal and grant me the strength to tread upon the path that you have laid open before me. Make my book easy for the youth to read, for I am going to tell of another world.

Long, long ago...

You feel happy when you are alone. You feel a burning desire to meet a companion. If it had been possible if there were a companion sprung from the Divine Life, everyone is longing for it. Carefully, everyone is longing for yourself, you will see that you are not alone.

And hence it was that the world was so happy everything was up in the air. The stars were trained for morning. The sun positioned itself on the horizon. The whole world, no matter how late, was waiting for the daybreak.

The earth, however, was blank. Not a single lake gushed from the sky. The wilderness. No bird was heard. No deer leaping around in the forest. No splendor and no clouds.



will be made from your dust. Its soul will be lighted from the Divine spark, and not from the light that comes from the sun, the moon or the stars. It will have power over the entire universe through its understanding and ability. Its love will reign over time and space while its knowledge and judgment will choose the path that's right. Its wisdom will surpass Gabriel. Undoubtedly it'll be a product of dust but its flight no less than an angel's – flying to the higher realms even beyond the sky. True, it will also be impious to quite an extent and will shed pointless blood of the innocent yet even its weaknesses will result into progress and prosperity. The universe will further enlighten its wisdom so that it beholds the Divine Essence through the traces of

His attributes. Anyone who immerses in the appreciation and love of the Lord's magnificence is in fact the commander of all the existence.”

The angels then began singing a song:

Such glory shall the man of clay¹
Own far above the angels' light
That with his star of destiny
He'll make the earth like heaven bright.

Possessed of such a mind that feeds
On every storm that time may bring,
He'll fly and clear across one day
The whirlpool of this azure ring.

Consider what man signifies
Evolving to what's yet to be,
A subject heaving into form.
Of him why should you ask of me?

Soon fashioned forth in rhythmic poise,
This subject old, this common man,
Will with his rapturous impact
The heart of even God attain.

A lonely evening

Love often seeks wilderness because the noises in the city kill its flame. I, too, didn't find anyone with whom I could share my secrets, and therefore went to the riverbank outside the city. The sun was setting, and the blue water was turning red with its reflection.

Sunsets fascinate me. They are a strange phenomenon of nature, bringing the colors of daybreak to the evening – and the colors are so beautiful that I won't be surprised if I were told that a blind man developed a sense of sight through the magic of sunset. On that particular evening that same magic made me speak to my own heart. I talked, I longed, I searched. “To live a life that is going to end in death is such a burden,” I thought. “It is like being alive and yet not having a life!” My heart grieved over the fact that I am mortal although I was created by an Immortal God – how close to immortality am I, and yet how far away! I longed for my true beloved, my Creator. In my agony I began singing this song from the poems of Rumi:

I long for honey lips of thine
And love the garden of thy face;

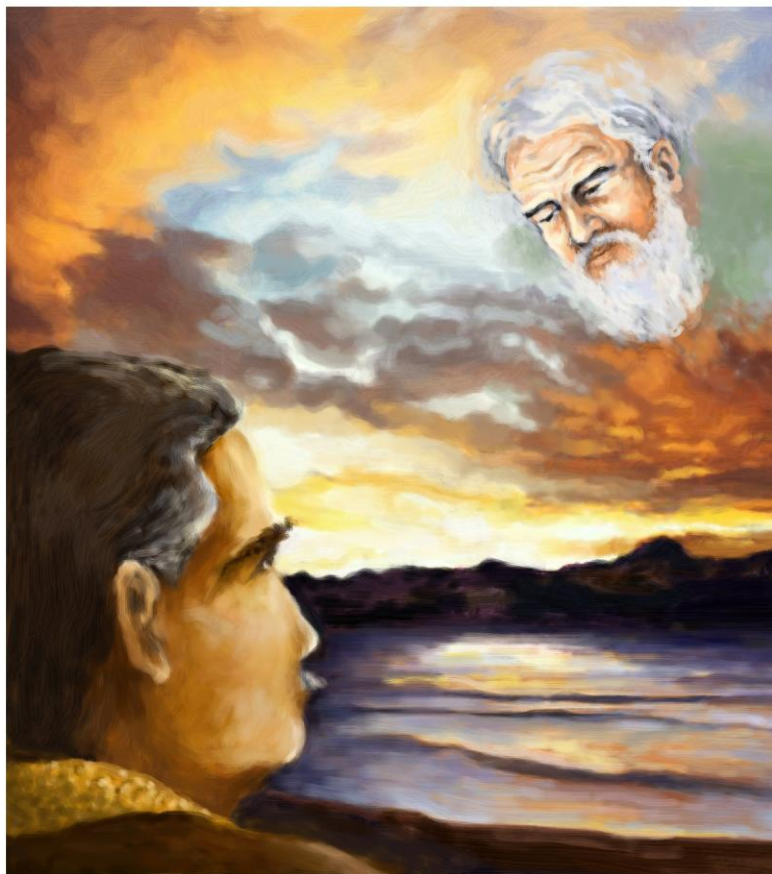
1. The songs in this book are taken from *The Pilgrimage of Eternity*, a versified translation of *Javidnama* by Shaikh Mahmud Ahmad.

O dance with me a measured pace,
I'll hold thy locks and quaff the wine.

But yester-eve a lamp in hand
The Shaykh did all the city span,
Sick of mere ghosts he sought a man,
But could find none in all the land.

"I Rustum or a Haydar seek
I'm sick of snails, am sick," he said,
"There's none," said I. He shook his head,
"There's none like them, but still I seek."

The waves slept in their watery bed, and the horizon went dark after the sunset. A lonely star appeared on the sky, and I saw the spirit of Rumi emerging from behind the mountains. His face



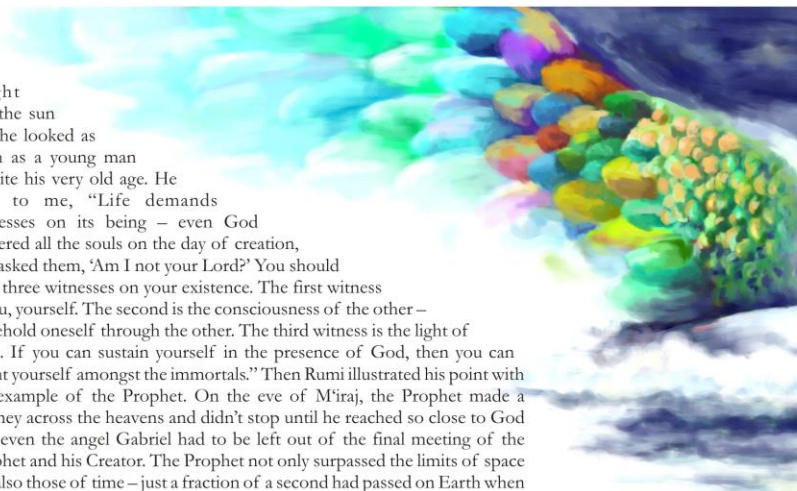
was
bright
like the sun
and he looked as
fresh as a young man
despite his very old age. He
said to me, "Life demands
witnesses on its being – even God
gathered all the souls on the day of creation,
and asked them, 'Am I not your Lord?' You should
seek three witnesses on your existence. The first witness
is you, yourself. The second is the consciousness of the other –
to behold oneself through the other. The third witness is the light of
God. If you can sustain yourself in the presence of God, then you can
count yourself amongst the immortals." Then Rumi illustrated his point with
the example of the Prophet. On the eve of M'iraj, the Prophet made a
journey across the heavens and didn't stop until he reached so close to God
that even the angel Gabriel had to be left out of the final meeting of the
Prophet and his Creator. The Prophet not only surpassed the limits of space
but also those of time – just a fraction of a second had passed on Earth when
the Prophet returned from his long trip.

I asked Rumi about how one could make this journey towards
immortality. He said, "It is like a rebirth. Just as you arrive in this world
through a birth, another birth takes you out of this world. However, this
rebirth comes through the inner strength of Love. Remember, the essence of
humanity is the power to see God. The body cannot hinder your flight once
the power of true Love takes over the soul."

The Spirit of Time

Rumi's speech left me restless and every part of my body trembled like
quicksilver. Between the east and the west a cloud of light in the sky caught
my eyes. Out came an angel from the cloud. It had two faces, one like fire and
the other resembling smoke. One illuminated like a star and the other dark as
a night. One of his eyes was wakeful and the other asleep. The wings were
very colorful, made lively with red, yellow, green, silver, blue and azure. His
temperament was like a flight of imagination. In one breath he traveled
between the heavens and the earth. Every moment he experienced a new
desire and soared in a new atmosphere.

He said, "I'm Zurvan and I command this world. I can be seen but I'm
also out of sight. Every strategy of mine is linked to destiny. I target the living
and the non-living. It's only because of me that a bud blooms on a branch and
a bird chirps in its nest. My flight causes the seed to grow into a tree and my



effects change every farw
thirst so that I may be a
resurrection. I'm the sense
and angels are in my grasp
am every flower that you pl
your sight has been given b
and I age it with every bre
spell; he was someone who
no angel or messenger can
the Prophet, who ascend
continued, "Whoever sets
enchantment. If you wish t

There was something
sight. Either my eyes wer
changed itself. Whatever th
world and reincarnated in a
surroundings and I found
that took place and thus a n

My body became weigh
the heart opened. The hid
tune of the stars:

Life's kernel is
World's secret

O earthly mould, we joy
That thou hast come above.

Moon, Venus, Jupiter
Are rivals for thy sight
The hope of thy one glance
Doth keep them gay and bright.

Life dwells in truth, it doth
With urge for growth extend,
The country of the Lord
It is from end to end.

1. Stopping by the moon

A friend of everyone

Life means moving on, and therefore I moved on. As I rose above the earth, everything that I had always seen above me was now below. This universe belongs to God, and therefore we should look at it with love and affection. Nothing is alien to the human soul, since the human soul has a divine spark in it.

The silent moon was the first stop on our way, as Rumi informed me. Its surface was adorned with many volcanoes but there was neither air nor any sound to be heard. Its clouds never rained and there was no life on the planet. Rumi understood my amazement, and asked me to follow him into a dark cave.

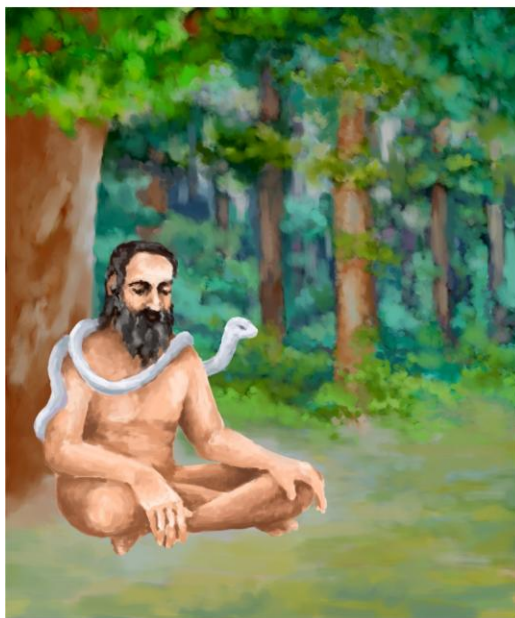
Fear struck me dumb as I entered the cave. "Even the sun would need a lamp here!" I thought in my mind, but nevertheless, I followed my guide into this dark alley. As I moved on, I found myself beginning to doubt everything – maybe that was some strange effect of that mysterious environment. Finally, when I felt that I would perhaps begin to doubt the doubt itself, a new world dawned upon my mind.

It came like a surprise. Right there before me, deep inside that dark cave, there was a valley of eternal light. On our earth, the light is always surrounded by darkness. For instance, the light of the sky fills up the sky but its boundaries are drawn by the dusk that comes out at the end of the day. A candle spreads its light only up to a distance, but darkness survives beyond the candle's range. This was

not the case here. This valley was filled with a light that was absolutely, completely, utterly boundless. Even a shadow would illuminate upon falling on the land!

I began to survey the valley. The trees were huge, and spread out everywhere as if they were sacred cords worn by each stone, the way Hindus wear beads around their necks. Indeed, there was a Hindu sage sitting under one of the trees.

Rumi told me that his name was Vishvamitra, which in Sanskrit meant 'the friend of everyone.'



I looked at Vishvamitra. He wasn't wearing much, and a white snake girdled his body. Just as I was looking at him in wonder, he opened his eyes and looked at both of us. Perhaps he knew Rumi, who now introduced me as a passionate wanderer, a philosopher and a poet.

"How do you prove the existence of God?" He asked me.

"I don't need to prove it," I replied. "He can be seen everywhere!"

Vishvamitra got extremely pleased upon hearing this, and shared his own words of wisdom with me. "It is always a fault of your own vision when you see evil in something," he said to me. "The sun never sees darkness anywhere!"

Then he went on, "Those who don't believe in God are as good as dead, then why fight the dead? A true believer fights instead with the demons within his own soul, and preys upon them the way the cheetah falls upon a hapless deer..."

I was listening to his wise sayings. "I once asked the flower, 'How do you extract perfume out of dark soil?'" Vishvamitra was telling me, "And the flower asked me, 'How do you extract thunder out of the silent lightening? We never hear any voices and we are amazed that you humans hear such loud voices from things that appear voiceless to us. Maybe its just the difference in our modes of life: you grasp what is obvious and we grasp what is not so obvious.'"

The Indian philosopher paused, and I waited for him to say more, but then I realized that he had gone into meditation again. The light that had filled the valley a while ago now suddenly faded away, and that is when I realized its secret. The light was coming from Vishvamitra. Now it must be glowing inside him, and not outside, since his attention was now diverted within.

Sarosh

In the magical charm of the night appeared a woman so delicate, as if she was the star of that dark night. Her tresses reached her waist on either shoulder and light radiated from her face, lending luminosity to the surrounding mountains and fields. Drowned in her own intoxicating beauty she was humming to herself. The light of imagination and vision revolved around her, bringing forth new ideas of artistic imagination.

I said to Rumi, "O gifted one! Enlighten me with this secret as well."

"This silver portrait was created in God's mind," said Rumi. "But in order to gratify her need for expression she came into this world. Like us, she's a lonely wanderer, a stranger like you and me. She restores senses by taking them away! Our buds bloom from her dewdrop and the flame kindles from the heat of her breath. Because of her, a poet strikes the chords of his heart and rips the drape of his support. I saw my world in her song. Come and experience the passion of her voice within you."

As I paid attention, I could hear within me the song she was singing:

Upon a mirage, I
 Fear, thou dost row thy ark;
 So sailed thou veiled in life,
 And veiled thou'lt death embark.



If thou fulfillment seek'st,
Extend thy deep desire;
Rose! As thou perfume claimed,
Now garden win entire.

This lovely melody
Is not from nature's lute;
A bouri far away
From heaven blows her
flute.

Rumi, the master of passion and love whose word is like a heavenly spring to the thirsty, said to me, "Poetry that has a flame veiled within it has foundations in the warmth of God's praise. It turns weeds into a beautiful garden and rises to rearrange the skies. It bears testimony to the Divine Truth, and endows sovereignty to the destitute. Because of it, the blood gushes swiftly through the body and the heart becomes more alert and learned than Gabriel. Yet there are plenty of poets who are highwaymen of the hearts and devils of the sight. May God have mercy on the poets of your sub-continent! Their soul is devoid of a yearning for true expression. They relegate the supremacy of love and are ever willing to teach an Abraham the art of making idols! Their poetry is charged with rhythm and verse but devoid of pain and passion. To those who contain compassion, your poets are numb and dead. The humming of someone in deep sleep is way better than a melodious voice that has no understanding of the depth of music.

"A poet's nature is a quest from the beginning to the end. He shapes and nurtures love and desires. A poet is like a heart; without him, the body of a nation is but a mass of dust. The world is made up of pain and desire and therefore without them the poetry is merely mourning. But poetry aimed at civilizing a people is in fact heir to the mission of the prophets."

The Valley of Prophets

Yearning can always find its way without a map, and hence I headed to the Valley of Yarghamid. The angels call it the Valley of Tawaseen because in this valley are inscribed the “Taseens,” or secret codes, of four prophets of God.

The beauty of the valley is hard to describe. No less than seven stars circle it at all times, and the light of the valley gives vision to humans as well as angels.

The first Taseen carried the teachings of Budha and a sinful woman’s response to them. There, one could see the Budhha holding out the gist of his teachings, “Nothing is permanent, and therefore you should let it pass. Do not give yourself to the dreams of the unseen; the right thing to do is to live in this world and yet remain free of it. The beauties of the world are not worth your attention; the beauty of character and right thoughts are what you should aim for.”

The response of the sinful woman was, “Do not let me wander away once again. Hold me faster with the magnificence of your spirit. You are the light of my heart, and this light makes me indifferent to all the stars, the moon and the sun.”

The second Taseen belonged to Zarathustra. Ahriman, or the spirit of evil, was trying to dissuade him from going out to preach. “It is true that you have found the Truth,” Ahriman was telling him, “But do not go out to teach the world. Remember the sad plight of the prophets that have passed before you. Noah couldn’t convert his people and had to pray for a flood in the end. Others were tortured and killed by their people. One who has found God should give up the world and sit in a corner with his wisdom, his eyes closed in perpetual meditation. That is far better than prophet-hood.”

And thus spoke Zarathustra to Ahriman, “The light of God is like a sea, and I am the greatest storm born in its bosom so far. It is my calling to destroy the shores of darkness, and spread the light far and wide. This I must do. You cannot



stop me by recounting the difficulties that may come with the task I have chosen. Love, in its perfection, cannot help reaching out to improve others.”

The third Taseen belonged to Jesus Christ, and it contained the dream of Leo Tolstoy, the Nineteenth Century reformer from Russia, who was immensely troubled with some of the things that went in the name of Christianity. His dream was about a valley in the Mount of Seven Deaths, where no life existed. The dust was so dark and dense that even moonlight was turned into charcoal in this valley, and the sun died out of thirst for light. A stream of mercury ran gushing across the middle, frightful in its speed and force. Tolstoy saw a hapless man caught up to his waist in this stream, and desperately shouting for help. On the bank was a beautified woman, slim like a doll and crafty in her manners. Her name was Afrangine, and she had taught idolatry to bishops. Now Tolstoy discovered that the man who was struggling with the dreadful current of the mercurial stream was a companion of the Christ who betrayed him to the Romans. Just then, a powerful wave struck the miserable fellow and he gave out a horrible scream. The blow had broken his spinal cord. “Now, do you regret what you did to our Lord?” Afrangine asked the traitor, whose anguish increased many times at hearing this taunt.

“O Deceitful Enchantress!” He cried in pain, “Look at your crime, which is worse than mine. You tempt the people to forget God and give themselves to the worldly life. It is due to you that the followers of the Christ have done to his soul what I did only to his body!”

The fourth Taseen belonged to Muhammad, the last prophet. It contained the laments of Abu Jahl. Despaired at the Prophet’s success, this archenemy was wailing before the ancient gods in the premises of the Holy Ka’aba, invoking them to rise up in his aid. “O, Lat, O Manat!” He was crying, “Muhammad has cleft my heart into pieces. He teaches equality, and he has corrupted out youth. The young no more listen to their elders, they are turning away from the old traditions. Muhammad has taught them to pray before an Unseen god, and deny the gods of our forefathers. He says that all humans are equal, and there should be no distinction of race, class or status. O gods of my forefathers, break the spell of Gabriel! Do not leave Ka’aba, but if leave you must then at least stay in my heart.”

2. The living spirits of Mercury

The reformers

It was hard to believe that it was happening in real. We were traversing the space and were now closing upon Mercury. It turned out to be a little planet born out of a cloud. It also had deserts, mountains and forests but they were untouched by the human being, and hence, there was no one here to improve upon the nature.

"I don't see any sign of human life," I said to Rumi. "How come we hear the sound of a call for the prayer here?"

Rumi informed me that this was the habitat of the blessed souls. The saints of the past were mostly to be found here, such as Fuzail, Abu Said, Junaid and Bayazid. Then he asked me to hurry, so that we may get an opportunity to pray with the present congregation. We both moved fast, and the congregation turned out to be a little company of only two men – a Turk, offering his prayer behind an Afghan leader. Rumi's face glowed with excitement as he saw them.

"Two better people weren't born in the recent times," he said to me. "Jamaluddin Afghani, the great preacher, and Saeed Haleem Pasha, the Turk soldier and reformer. A prayer offered in the company of such people is a real prayer, otherwise it's just hire and salary."

Afghani recited Surah Najm, which sounded so appropriate for those surroundings. I felt a deep understanding of the Holy Book awakening in my heart, and as soon as we had finished the prayer, I moved forward to kiss his hands. Rumi then introduced me to both of them as "Zindah Rud," a nickname he had given me in jest. In Persian it meant The Living Stream, and Rumi called me by this name because he thought that I was always searching, bent upon moving ahead with the mysteries of life the way a living stream flows past all barriers in its way.

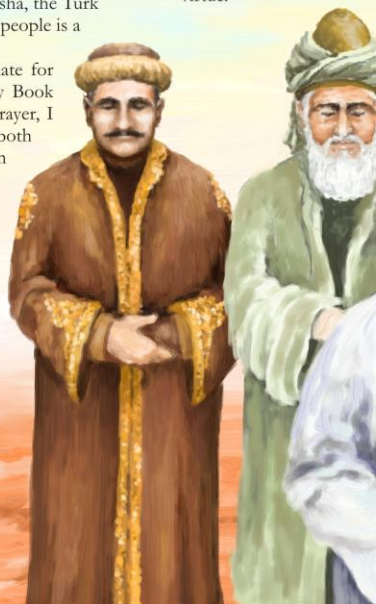
Afghani asked me to relate the present situation of the world I had come from, and I had to tell with much regret that the Muslims were generally oblivious of their own rich heritage and running after foreign ideas. They were developing loyalties to regional identities at the cost of the greater unity of the global Muslim community and now Communism was taking away the remaining of their strength. It was an ideology adopted by Russia since its Revolution in 1917 and although it aimed at uprooting exploitation, it also taught atheism.

"How clever of the West," Afghani remarked. "They

have tasted the sour fruit contemplating on a greater loyal to the land instead Communism was no doubt unfortunately he had an eye on the equality of the becomes the human dignity focused entirely on the material

"Look at Mustafa Kemal also making the same mistake with everything old, which water. You must know, my yet uncreated. If you are forced don't have to look very far create it!"

"The secrets of the Quran must be remembered in the God's vicegerent on the obeying is the government land belongs to God, and is obliged to use it for the world virtue."



Afghani went on to explain each of his four points in lucid detail, and I felt increasingly more enlightened as he proceeded. “Truly, I now understand a lot more about the book of God,” I said in the end. “I wonder why our *maulvis* don’t preach this!”

“Phew!” Pasha said with disgust, “They don’t know anything about the Quran, and the only religion they follow is to create mischief in the name of God. Indeed that is all they are capable of!”

Rumi was equally moved by the discourses of Afghani. I saw tears in his eyes. He now looked at me and said, “Recite one of your songs to us. Make us more eager, yearning for more.”

I felt highly honored, and this is a portion of the song I recited:

This rose and tulip bright,
Which seem to stay and glow,
E’ver restlessly speed on,
Much as the breeze doth blow.

The meanings new I seek
Where shall I find and sing?
The pub, the mosque, the school,
Bare, barren is their spring.

Learn from thyself, and let
That word thy being claim,
For in this monastery
Like Moses none’s aflame.



3. The perils of Venus

The gods of the ancient peoples

Layers of atmosphere between the light of the moon and the sun have erected displays of fire before us so that the hearts of men may flourish. The heat from the blaze made my blood quiver like quicksilver in my veins. This was the awakening of the soul in the body, for when the soul heads towards a world to which there are no limits and boundaries it becomes carefree. Death and resurrection then become merely excuses to add to its splendor.

Standing at the edge of a rock I marveled at the beautiful landscape. It was a valley, leveled and smooth, and its soil was so fluid that it would put water to shame. The place was packed with many ancient gods from diverse lands such as Egypt, Yemen, Arab and Iraq. There were gods of separation, union, and those related to one another through race and others eager to form a relation with others. Some held a double-edged sword in their hands, yet others had snakes coiled around their necks. All of them had suffered the blow of Abraham and feared the name of God.

In the meanwhile, Mardukh began addressing his companions. "The humans have turned their face on God," he said. "They have fled from the religion. They are looking at the ancient relics and giving us new birth in the name of expanding their horizons. A new legend is in the making and the air is just right for our desires."

Baal became rapturous. He sang before the gods a song expressing our present state. The gist of the song is as follows:

"The humans looked beyond the heavens but did not see God, and turned to the material world to seek respite for their souls. Long live the Orientalists who have uncovered us from our graves. O ancient Gods! This is our time now.

"Take a look at the mob in discord, the brood of Abraham robbed of the pleasures of faith in God. They are finding regional identities and thus religion has met defeat at the hands of country and race. The day has turned pale from the fear of the night. O ancient gods! This is our time now.

"The humans should be liberated from the chains of religion and turn to us, since devotion to us is full of entertainment. A visible demon is better than an absent God. O ancient gods! This is our time now."

Rumi, who praises God through every action, now sang a song with such determination that the ancient gods fell prostrate as if the blow of Abraham has struck them again. This was Rumi's song:

Recall the days that thou hast spent,
And measure what is yet to be,
Shake off thy ancient slumber now
And let thy mind new vistas see.

My teacher said to me, "Dost thou
Behold how frail the world is set?
Its prizes all, and all its pains,
Deserve thy absolute neglect."
I said, "The idols in my heart
Are many and for them I fear."
He said, "This idol-house entire
Thou'lt have to break and shatter clear."



The tyrants and the Mahdi

In front of me was an ice-clad mountain. Rumi guided me to a deep emerald ocean on the other side of it. The ocean was motionless and there was neither wave nor ripple in its heart. Rumi described it as eternally calm. Indeed, the lack of movement in water had made it transparent so that everything was visible right up to the bottom. "This is the place of such rebellious souls who lived by the rule of their power and denied the existence of the unseen," Rumi told me. "Two of them are here, one from the East and the other from the West. Moses struck one while the other fell victim to the vengeance of a *derwish*. They both died by drowning thirsty in the sea, for indeed the death of a tyrant is one of the signs of God. Hold my hand and follow me."

Like Moses, Rumi opened the heart of the ocean and the water parted like wind. At the very bottom was a valley that had neither color nor any other physical feature. It was merely darkness layered upon darkness. Rumi began reciting Surah Taha, the powerful chapter of the Qur'an that calls upon the listeners to remember the exploits of Moses. The darkness was lit up as if by a full moon and now I saw mountains standing at the bottom of the ocean – barren, lifeless and utterly cold. Two men were running around worried and dejected. They looked at Rumi and then one of them addressed the other, "I wonder where did this light come from, at last?" This was Pharaoh, the proud tyrant of ancient Egypt who denied freedom to the people of Moses and refused to believe in the Truth.

To him, Rumi replied, "Indeed, this light is from the same source as that which shined from the right hand of Moses; the light he offered to you as a sign of God."

"Alas!" Pharaoh could not contain his grief. "I could not recognize the Truth at



that time. Now the thieves of Europe are digging our graves and our mummies are put on display in the museums of the world. Look at them with your inward eyes and learn the reality of tyranny. The kings rule by creating dissensions among their subjects and countries cannot prosper under them. If only I could find Moses again and borrow a heart that could recognize the Truth!”

Rumi commented that all government is tyranny unless it receives illumination from the light of the soul. Armies, prisons and chains are props of the robbers and a true ruler governs without such things.

Pharaoh's companion was Lord Kitchener, at one time the commander-in-chief of the British armies. I knew that when he conquered Sudan he opened up the grave of Mahdi Sudanese, a freedom fighter who had defied the power of the Western imperialists. Kitchener avenged the death of British soldiers killed by Mahdi in war by taking out his bones from the grave and casting them into the river. Many years later, some enemy torpedoed Kitchener's ship and he died in the ocean. Now he said to the Pharaoh, “No. The explorers of the pyramids are no thieves. They are archaeologists and they are opening your graves in order to learn about the past.”

“You opened our graves in search of wisdom but what did you expect to find in the grave of Mahdi?” Pharaoh retorted, and I noticed that the very mention of the dervish's name electrified the water. Waves rose and leapt across its width. The dervish himself arrived there with a breeze of fragrant air from the heavens. “O Kitchener!” He said, “Look at my vengeance if you can see! You were refused a grave except in the bottom of brackish waters.”

Mahdi's soul was perturbed and he called upon the rulers of the Arab world and the Africans to unite for liberation. “O camel driver! Our friends have already arrived at the city of the Prophet, and we are still on the way. Is there not a song that could urge our camel to run faster?”

4. The Martians

The wonderful world of Mars

I closed my eyes under those waters and in a blink I found myself taken to yet another world. This was Mars. It was positioned in a different dimension of time and space, but the sun that provides light and warmth to the earth had created a series of day and night here as well.

Our life adjusts itself to the conduct of time, and hence I began to understand the world of Mars. There, every day dawns with a reason to be happy. People don't grow old with the progression of time but rather continue to radiate a glow – which is used by the day to light up the atmosphere. Life on that planet provides energy to the night and day, and therefore I was tempted to discover the essence of life and get acquainted with its style because the world is there as long as the life is.

I saw a meadow. In that meadow there was a tall observatory. Its telescope had the highest start in its grip. Watching the immense dissimilarity between the two worlds I searched for the edge of this vast world and then my attention was diverted towards the sky.

Rumi, with his sharp insight, asked me to tour the land, see its splendor and gain knowledge about it. "This world is like our world in many ways," said he. "It is decorated with a large selection of colors and smells; it has cities, population and dwellings. The inhabitants of Mars are skilled like the Europeans, but have a greater knowledge of body and soul. Their understanding of time and space far surpasses ours. While our hearts are captivated and controlled by our bodies, the bodies of the Martians are contained in their hearts. Now, you must know that all happiness depends on life and not on body. The concept of existence on earth has two constituents: the body, which can be seen; and the soul, which cannot be seen. This division doesn't exist in the Martian world and they enjoy a unity of thought. When someone is about to die here the passion of departure gives him or her vigor to announce the death two days ahead and the death occurs merely by the absorption of the body into the soul. But this concept is above the reach of our grasp because unlike the Martians, our bodies rule our souls. We must avail the rare opportunity of making a brief stopover in this world."

The astronomer

An old man who had a white beard and a lifetime spent in search of wisdom and knowledge, came out of the observatory I have already described. He was quick witted and wore a dress similar to that of a high priest. He was aged and tall, and his face glowed like that of the Turks. He was familiar to all disciplines of



knowledge and his eyes reflected profound judgment. He looked at us, and his face lit up as he spoke to us in Persian and told us the story of their amazing progress. He told me that there was a pious Martian in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and he decided to travel to the Earth. He glided across the atmosphere of all existence and landed in the deserts of Hijaz. There, he wrote down all he saw in the East and the West and came back. "I have also gone as far as Iran and the lands of the Englishmen," the Martian astronomer told us. "I have scaled the lands of the Nile and the Ganges. I have gone to America, Japan and China to explore metals and minerals. The deeds of the humans are not unknown to me though they are unaware of our existence."

"I'm from the heavens and my companion, from the Earth," said Rumi. "He's a free man and I have nicknamed him the Living Stream. We have come to your world in search for new expressions of life, and fresh challenges. Would you kindly show us around?"

"This is the surrounding area of Barkhiya, our first predecessor," said the astronomer. "He was the father of all the people on Mars, just as Adam was on Earth. Framurz, the Spirit of Evil, also tried to tempt Barkhiya by promising him a world that was more majestic than the heavens where God had kept him. 'That world is better than all other worlds,' said Framurz. 'It is a world free of restrictions, a world without God, holy book, prophets or Gabriel.' Barkhia wasn't tempted, and asked Framurz to go alone to the world he had just described. Hence the Spirit of Evil couldn't trick our predecessor, whom God rewarded by creating this other world for him. It is called Marghdeen. Let's take a look at its splendor."

The city of Marghdeen is a magnificent place with tall buildings. Its people are beautiful, gentle and simple; they speak a language that sounds melodious to the ears. They are not after material goods; rather they are the guardians of knowledge and derive wealth from their sound judgment. The sole purpose of

knowledge and skill in that world is to help improve the life. Currency is unknown, and temperaments are not to be governed by machines that blacken the sky with their smoke. The farmers are hardworking and contented – there are no landlords to plunder their harvest, and the tillers of the land enjoy the entire fruit of their labor. Learning and wisdom don't flourish on deceit and hence there is neither army, nor law keepers are needed, because there is no crime in Marghdeen. The marketplace is free from the noisy shouts and heartrending cries of the beggars.

“In this world there is no beggar,” said the Martian Astronomer. “Nor anyone is poor; no slave, no master – no ruler and thus none dominated.”

I said, “Being born a beggar or a destitute, to be ruled or suppressed, is all by the decree of God. He alone is the architect of destiny. Destiny cannot be improved by reasoning.”

“If you are suffering at the hands of destiny,” replied the Martian astronomer with a visible anger, “It is not unfair to ask God for a new one. He has no shortage of destinies for you. Failure to understand the mystical significance of destiny has led the inhabitants of the Earth to lose their identities. Here is a hint to the secret of destiny: change yourself and your destiny will change with you. If you are dust, you shall be scattered by the wind. But if you become solid as a rock, you can break the glass. If you are dewdrop, then you are destined to fall but if you are an ocean, then you will remain. To you, faith means conformity to others while your imagination remains confined because you do not conform to yourself. Shame on the faith that serves like an addiction to opium!”

Then he paused, and added, “A gem is a gem as long as you think it is valuable, otherwise it is just a stone. The world will shape itself according to your perception of it. The heavens and the earth too will adjust.”

An enchantress

I scaled myriad battlements and cultures to reach a vast piece of land situated at the edge of the city. The ground was packed with men and women and in the middle stood a tall woman. Despite her radiant face, she lacked the spiritual glow, her speech was meaningless and her eyes dry. She was unaware of the joys of love and desire. She was bereft of youthful zeal and hence she was like a wagtail discarded by the guardians of love. A wise Martian astrologer told us that she's not from amongst the Martians. She was simple and lacked slyness but Framurz, the Spirit of Evil, abducted her from Europe and after perfecting her in the office of a prophetess, he put her amongst the Martians. She then said that she had descended from the heavens and her call is the last word of all. She talks about the status of men and women and talks openly about the secrets of the body.

As I listened to her, I heard her saying, “Lo Women! Lo mothers and sisters! How long will you keep living your life like a beloved? Friendship with a man rears misery for life, the union is fatal and distancing yourself from him is gratifying. He is a trickster; avoid this trouble and do not let his venom infect your blood. A mother's face turns pale at the time she gives birth, how wonderful life would be if

you were free from the interaction of the bodies!”

Rumi said to me, “See the outcome of a profane civilization. Love is the only divine code of life. Religion is the basis of civilization, and love, the foundation of religion. Love, apparently is heart burning and resembles fire but essentially it contains the light of God. The inherent energy of love and its zeal helps prosper art and literature. Religion is incomplete without the etiquettes of love. So discover religion in the company of the masters of love.”



5. Around Jupiter

The Wayfairers

Next we met such spirits who had chosen eternal voyage over taking residence in the heavens!

I love my inspired heart that shows me a new solitude always. Each time I think of stopping, it says to me, "Rise! The oceans are of no merit for one who reaches unto oneself. O traveler! The signs of God have no limit, then why do you think the path will come to an end?" Hence I was now scaling the skies in search of new spectacles after the blessed Rumi who had put in me the passion of his spirit. We arrived at the outskirts of Jupiter.

Jupiter was an incomplete planet orbited by several fast paced moons. Its grapes hadn't yielded wine yet, nor had its soil given rise to love and yearning. The moons lit up the skies at midnight and imparted light as if it were daytime. The breeze there was neither warm nor cold. I looked up and the stars in the sky appeared so close that I nearly lost my senses out of fear — near, far, late and early all got muddled up.

Presently I saw three holy spirits draped in red shawls. Their faces were radiating with the fire in their hearts that could melt stones. They were basking in the pleasure of that first day of Creation when God had asked all souls, "Am I not



your Lord?" And they had replied, "Indeed, you are!" All three were singing songs, and seemed to be intoxicated by their own music.

Rumi said to me, "Don't be lost like this. Derive life from the passion of their voices. The voices of Ghalib, Hallaj and this Iranian lady have brought about an uproar; they provide permanence to the soul because they have derived passion from the heart of this universe."

The song of Hallaj went on like this:
 Mix with the ones who throb
 And heave with surging life,
 But e'er escape the one
 Who keeps away from strife.

I now listened to Ghalib. He was singing:
 Law shall not cow us down
 With gallows or with jail,
 To buy off our path
 King's glittering gold shall fail.

The 'Iranian Lady,' mentioned by Rumi was none other than Qurat-ul-Ain Tahira, the martyr. She was singing:

To sight thy loveliness
 I wander like the breeze,
 On every path and street,
 From every castle and door
 I go forth, I ne'er cease.

The excitement of these compassionate travelers stirred a new fervor in my soul. Old confusions came back to my mind, rising up like a violent storm that crushed the sea of my thought. "Don't waste time," said Rumi. "How long are you going to remain a prisoner of your thoughts?"

An Interview

I now asked Hallaj why he and the other two spirits declined paradise, and he replied that eternal voyage itself was the best paradise for such free spirits. I then asked him some more questions, including one that had always intrigued me. As you know, Hallaj was crucified for saying, "*Ana al-Haq*," which had the double meaning of, "I am the Truth," and "I am God." I always wanted to find out what was actually meant by this statement, and now I got the opportunity to ask the mystic himself.

"I saw a people who were turning away from life, so I decided to wake them up," said Hallaj. "They said they believed in God and yet they didn't believe in themselves. How can you have faith in the Almighty without having faith in yourself?"

Tahira interrupted us at this point. "New worlds are born from those whose love surpasses reason," she said to me. "The martyr hides himself in the conscience of the age."



I had a burning question for Ghalib as well. In the world below, people were debating over one of his couplets. It mentioned that the bulbul, which loves flowers, is colorful like the flowers themselves whereas the nightingale, which also loves flowers, looks like a handful of ashes. Now I requested Ghalib for explanation, and he answered, "Love has a different impact on each soul. It may add colors to you or it may burn you to death. It depends on how you take it."

I then asked him if there were prophets for every world, and he replied that the Mercy of the Worlds existed wherever there was life in the universe. Since the Mercy of the Worlds (or *Rahmatu lil Alimeen*) was the title of our Holy Prophet, I asked Ghalib to explain it further but he hesitated. Seeing the reluctance of this gentleman, Hallaj spoke up boldly, "The Prophet was the king of all the worlds and yet he called himself the slave of God, or *Abdubu*. Understand very well that the slave of God is not separate from God Himself."

"Tell me," I asked Hallaj, "How can one see God in the world." "Carve His image on your soul first," Hallaj answered. "Then carve it on the world. Then you will see Him wherever you look. You can carve his image on the world through love as well as by force, but love is far better, because God is more visible in love than in force."

I then asked the whereabouts of Satan, and made the mistake of calling him a loser. Hallaj immediately asked me to watch my words. "He is the Lord of Separation," said the mystic. "It was only through him that we the humans were able to see that the rewards are pleasurable when they are earned through

suffering. We don't know his secrets because he is much senior to us in love and service of God."

I was finding such delight in the company of these impassioned souls that I requested them to stay with me a little longer but they didn't agree – they must move on, they said. As they left, I closed my eyes so I may transfer them from my eyes to the heart.

Satan

Suddenly, the world appeared dark. The darkness spread far and wide. A blaze then appeared in the night and out of it came an aged man. He was dressed in deep black attire and was surrounded by convoluted smoke. Rumi told me that he was Satan, or Iblees, the master of those who were familiar with the pain of parting. He was passion from head to toe and his cup was filled not with wine but with his own blood.

I figured that Satan was old, of grave temperament, and spoke very little. When he looked, he could see the soul right there in the body. He was intoxicated, but he was also a



scholar, a philosopher, a mystic and an ascetic. His nature was unfettered by the taste of union. To him, worship meant distancing himself from God and he accomplished this by refusing to stoop before Adam. See his hardships and his perseverance: he is steadfast in the war of good and evil even now.

My soul trembled inside my body and I let out a deep sigh. He looked at me with half-opened eyes and said, "Who else is complete in his deeds but me? I do not even take a break on Fridays. I don't have angels or servants nor do I require prophets to carry my revelation, and yet I have won the souls. O ignorant one! I set forth the mechanism of good and evil by refusing to bow. I felt the pain of Adam and endured God's displeasure for his sake. I uncovered my vices so that you may experience the joy of making your own decisions. Why don't you pull me out of my misfortune? Be indifferent to my sweetness and bitterness so that my conduct is bad no more. A hunter thrives only because of his prey; there can't be any hunters if the target is too smart."

I said to him, "Why are you treading on the path of separation? Indeed, God doesn't like separations."

"The rage of dissociation grants order to life," he said. "Alas! Separation is so intoxicating. I cannot talk of unity because if I unite, neither of us would be the same!"

I noticed that his heart experienced acute pain when he talked about union with God. He rolled and tossed in his own smoke for sometime and eventually was lost in it. Then I heard a voice crying out from the smoke, "O Lord of the good and evil!" Called out the voice from the smoke. "I have been spoiled by the humans. They never disobey me. They have closed their eyes on themselves and have failed to discover what is within them. O Lord! I seek shelter from obedient humans. Remember my past worshipping and give me a strong enemy, one who has a vision. Take away from me these dolls of clay for I don't look good playing with them at my age. O God! Give me someone who can refuse me and dominate me and whose mere sight could make me tremble. O God! I yearn for a taste of defeat."