

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Beyond

by Jamiluddin Morris Zahuri

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Edited by Kara Fouladi

Illustrations by Jamiluddin Morris

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Beyond

This is the Third of what it is hoped will be a series of short booklets on the Sufi path. Effectively they will try, with Allah's help to form comments on the writings of the great mystics like Mevlana Rumi, Khawaja Muinuddin Hasan Chishti, Shah Wali Ullah, Attar, Abu Said, Bayazid Bistami, Hazrat Kharaqani and of course by my spiritual guide Hazrat Zahurul Hasan Sharib and many others.

In all cases the comments on the Masnevi are based on the well known English translation made over 80 years ago by R. A. Nicholson.

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Salam

Salam is an Arabic word often translated into English as 'peace'. The peace referred to, however, is very different from the simple stopping of war or hostilities. It is of course, the root of the word Islam. It is used by Muslims greeting one another. The holy Prophet Muhammed said, before talk this greeting should be given - Salam aleikum - 'peace be upon you'. The reply is Aleikum Asalam - meaning 'and upon you be peace'.

The holy Bible refers to 'the peace that passes beyond understanding'. This is also the implication of Salam. It refers to tranquility of mind and heart that exceeds, and is not reliant on, any kind of logical reasoning. It is a peace that descends from a higher source on an individual whatever the external causes or pressures they may be subject to at the time. The mind of the individual may be full of doubts and worries but they are all suspended temporarily and the person is flooded with a calmness that distances the consciousness from the effect such thoughts would normally have. It is as if one were watching events unfold without really being personally involved in the same way that one might read in a book or see in a film some terrible event without being personally affected by it.

There is an account in the Qur'an about the holy prophet who had undertaken a military campaign to invade Mecca. Before his army reached their goal, however, Allah informed the holy Prophet that he was not to proceed because of harm he might accidentally bring to those who practised Islam secretly in the city. The followers of the invading force were told the venture was off. This would have caused them much distress as they were

all geared up to fight, but in fact Allah sent down to them inner peace. This is the state of mind and heart which I refer to. The individual is aware of some external cause for distress but feels no actual disturbance in themselves. They witness the cause for distress but feel nothing except peace in their own heart. That peace involves the cessation of thought and removes the individual from the complex web of thought and feeling that is associated with 'normal' consciousness. In a sense it is a little like the Hal or temporary state of Ishq except that Ishq replaces normal thought and feeling with an ecstasy that is almost unbearable whereas inward peace has a tranquility that one would wish to continue. Bayazid Bistami it was, I believe, who said once that he went into the state of Ishq and could not come out. In the same way the state of inward peace takes over the individual's consciousness. Thought disappears and inner calmness prevails. That state may last for some time.

What is common to both Ishq and inward peace is that the states are of divine origin and cannot be accessed by effort or asceticism. It is a blessing of Allah and the only possible response is gratitude.

There is, however, a verse in the holy Qur'an that says 'after hardship comes ease' and if this ease is inner peace then it may be that the trigger for Allah to dispense inward peace is previous hardship. Sometimes one may be surrounded by negativity and difficulty and then somehow suddenly it doesn't matter. Circumstances that created that negativity may also change positively.

There is a story in the Masnevi about a young boy who sells halwa, (sweets). He is asked by a dying Sheykh to give sweets to his creditors who are sitting around waiting for payment of money owed to them by the Sheykh. He does so but when the boy turns to the Sheykh to collect payment, the Sheykh says he has no money and is dying. The boy lets out a howl and abuses the Sheykh saying that the sweet maker, his master, will surely beat him or kill him for getting no money from the sweets. Shortly thereafter a man appears at the door with a tray. A rich man has sent money for the sheykh's creditors each in a package. In addition there is a small package with money for the sweets. The creditors, astonished by this, beg the sheykh's forgiveness but they ask why he put the boy through such distress. He tells them that it was the distress of the boy that invoked Allah's mercy.

From this we may understand that hardship or difficulty may be on some occasions be the trigger for invoking the 'peace that passes understanding' from Allah. The various qualities of Allah can be invoked in this way, unintentionally, just as they can be invoked as well as by recitation of a divine name or quality of Allah in Zikr. The halwa selling boy did not deliberately invoke Allah's mercy verbally, in fact he was abusive to the shaykh, but his distress was evidently from the heart. In this case the Mercy showed itself in an actual event ie the arrival of money. In just the same way on occasions the arrival of a state of peace may at times be accompanied by an outward event linked to it.

Perhaps there is a parallel to this in the recitation of the name of Allah, which can arise from the heart spontaneously and silently until it reaches the lips where it becomes the divine Name spoken aloud.

Zikr

Having seen that the qualities of Allah can be invoked by events or strong emotions it remains true that the intentional verbal evoking of qualities of Allah is also possible. This is one of the means of reaching to the state of Sema (Sama). This state can also be accessed by certain kinds of music under particular conditions or indeed street sounds or even, as in the case of Mevlana Rumi, the sound of the goldsmith's hammer. The truth of the matter, however, is that the state of Sema is entirely dependent on the will of Allah and all these means of reaching Sama are only notional.

I have seen it written that the name of Allah is between the lover of Allah and his or her own heart. On reaching the goal of reciting the holy name outwardly and /or inwardly the door to your own heart opens and you find you re-experience some part of your own life history which exists in the memory of Allah. The difference between the recollection and the original event is that the original event was clouded by various thoughts but the recollection in the heart is clear of such distractions.

The verbal recitation of Zikr is like polishing the (metal) mirror of the heart.

*How can you find the heart? Follow the way to Allah,
Then keep right on going, from there it's not very far*

Zahuri

If life has been full of bad experiences then this might take a negative turn as in the Masnevi where Pharaoh sees himself in very bad images (book 4 line 2487-2502) It is important therefore that one has purified oneself by sincere repentance so that negative images do not interfere with the remembered images of one's own life. In the sincere repentance there is not only the forgiveness by Allah but the revelation that the bad experiences were not devoid of the presence of Allah. As He says to prophet Moses 'It was not you that threw but I'. The passage quoted above from the Masnevi is preceded by discussion of repentance.

Cleaning the Heart

Let us consider some of the methods that will help an individual in their efforts to cleanse the mirror of heart.

1. Sincerity

Sincerity implies real soul searching and a refusal to allow yourself any excuses. In a sense it is like enacting the day of Judgement before you die. It is acting upon the advice of the holy Prophet to 'die before you die'. It can lead to self disgust but also requires the courage to ask what one can do to change. It implies that one must stop criticism of others in favour of criticism of one's self.

Mevlana writes;

Oh many an iniquity you see in others is your own a nature reflected in them, Oh reader.

In them shone forth all that you are in your hypocrisy, iniquity and insolence.

You are that evil doer and you are striking those blows at yourself, 'tis yourself you are cursing at that moment.

You do not see clearly the evil in yourself, else you would hate yourself with all your soul.

Masnevi book one, lines 1319-1323

Sincerity implies that the cleaning of the heart is not done for any ulterior motive, such as acquiring spiritual power or for prestige or to impress others nor even for visions. The lower nature of a person will do everything it can to avoid sincerity. It will throw up all sorts of desirable reasons to do this or that but the only valid reason should be the pleasure of Allah.

The self will ask 'how' and 'why'. That is the same 'how and why' which is the pit into which the lion in the story in the Masnevi jumped

O thou lion that lies at the bottom of this lonely well, your hare like soul (Nafs) has shed and drunk your blood.

Your hare soul is feeding in the desert while you are lying at the bottom of this well of how and why.

Masnevi book one, line 1351.

Thus sincerity implies going to the very bottom of your own nature, repudiating any excuses the self will undoubtedly try to make. The day of Judgement implies you are on a flat plain with no hills to hide behind or valleys to hide in. Every lie you told yourself is exposed. Only your Creator before you. No place to hide. This is where sincerity is found.

2. Gratitude and generosity

Gratitude when it is sincere is said to be pleasing to Allah. It means understanding that whatever we think we own is really just on loan to us. We offer sincere thanks to Allah for everything we have use of but we do not really own any of it. The Sufis regard poverty as a great thing so they regard whatever they have as not really their own, but for the things they appear to own they offer thanks to Allah. They regard the proper use of things to be in service of Allah. One Sufi from Shiraz said that he had never been a guest for a meal with anyone in which Allah was not the host.

Generosity is a quality of Allah. It includes but is certainly not limited to financial generosity. To think the best of others is to be generous. To give time and effort to helping others is a good form of generosity. Actions rooted in the desire to be generous all help in the process of self purification. Actions rooted in desire to please the self are far from generosity. To be truly generous one must make one's actions pleasing to Allah.

3. Patience

The Qur'an says that 'Man is born hasty'. Mevlana Rumi repeatedly says patience is the key to joy, or to success. Patience implies a detached attitude it does not merely mean waiting in queues

it means an awareness that Allah will bring about things at the right time and in the right way and that whilst effort is required the outcome of the effort is not in our hands. It is to understand we are part of a deep plan and to consciously accept being part of a design that transcends our personal objectives whilst we continue to work towards them. It isn't an excuse for laziness but implies not getting upset or becoming angry or frustrated when things are not in accord with our desires. Another way to put it is that in any dilemma we turn to God for the help we need and do not rely ourselves or the help of other persons. The the holy prophet Ayub (Job) is the exemplar Patience because he did not complain of his difficulties. Prophet Yaqub (Jacob) likewise did not complain to anyone but God about his separation from his beloved son Yusuf (Joseph).

4. Trust in God

We are caught between two basic motivations. One is divine inspiration reaching us from angels, saints, Prophets or indeed from the Divinity. The other is the whispering of our lower nature, our Nafs, demonic suggestion, Jinns, and the impulses from the unworthy thoughts of others. One way of distinguishing the higher from the lower thoughts is 'delay'. If you receive an idea to do something but are unsure if it is from your higher or lower nature then delay doing that thing. Impulses from the lower nature will remain for a while but will lose energy and fade. Inspiration from the higher nature will remain. However beware your Nafs is not easily outsmarted.

There is a tendency to confuse trust in God with 'determinism' which implies simply mentally shrugging your shoulders

and saying 'It's all in the will of Allah'. This reminds me of Sir Toby Belch in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Sir Toby is a dissolute drunkard who excuse himself by saying 'It's all one'. No doubt it is, but that truth is being used to cover his dissoluteness. Mevlana Rumi writes a long dialogue in book one of the *Masnevi* between the lion and the animals he hunts. In this the virtue of trust in God is expounded by the animals whilst the contrary view is expressed by the lion who extols free will. The reason for expression of both points of view is that the truth lies between the two. Mevlana juxtaposes the two but they represent duality whereas Allah is one and transcends every kind of duality.

The struggle to be sure that one is not responding to the lower impulses but to the higher inspiration is an inwardly active one. Khwaja Muinuddin Hasan Chishti dreamed that the holy Prophet told him to make a 17 year old youth his successor. He did nothing and for the next thirty nights he had the same dream. Eventually Allah Himself came in his dream and said that He wished it and Khawaja Saheb did what he was asked to do.

5. Submission

Submission may be taken to be the acceptance that whatever comes your way is best but in truth it is even more than this. It is an act of the heart that prostrates itself willingly to the Divinity. It is easy enough to make the body prostrate as in ritual prayer by putting the forehead on the ground but to make the heart participate in this is something else. The heart tends to try to remain independent.

We have discussed briefly a few of the ways of self purification. At least it should be clear that self purification is not limited to particular religious observances or to Zikr or music or to prayer and fasting, or remaining awake and so on. Those things have their place of course.

Important as the remembrance of your own life is - 'to know God know yourself', there are higher places to reach in Sama. For example, the spiritual politics of the unseen, discussions between the various saints or even prophets, an awareness of how these interact with the material world, and many, many revelations such as divine Knowledge, Certainty and so on. Nawob Gudri Shahi Baba, the guide of Zahurmian, was once challenged by someone because he allowed his children to visit the cinema which that man regarded as un-Islamic. Nawob Saheb took the man to the cinema to see an ordinary Hindi film. On emerging from the cinema that man was asked how it was. He said that he was confused because although it was an ordinary movie all he saw was saints having discussion.

Guide and disciple.

Hazrat Abdul Qadir al Jillani says:

There are two kinds of cleanliness....one is carried out by washing one's body with pure water.inner purification is obtained by realisation of the dirt in one's being. Being aware of one's sins and sincerely repenting for them. Inner purification necessitates taking a spiritual path and is taught by a spiritual teacher.

As indicated above all these states of heart and mind require that the one wanting higher things has purified themselves of their lower nature. In order to do this in most cases, guidance by an experienced and divinely appointed guide is required. Guidance of course originates from Allah, but one of the means He uses is that of particular persons, who have themselves been purified to Allah's satisfaction. These Shah Wali Ullah calls divinely appointed guides. Having themselves passed through the processes of purification they are aware of the human dimension of those undergoing such purification.

We are not here concerned with fakes, the self deluded, charlatans and so on.

The commitment of the guide to the murid is to spare no effort in perfecting the murid. The commitment of the murid is to follow the guide irrespective of his or her previously formed personal views or beliefs. It's not a case of merely finding a shaykh whose ideas seem sympathetic to ones own or of following someone who knows particular techniques even if they are capable of teaching these effectively to followers. A real guide has to have the capacity to purify the disciple comprehensively from within. Sometimes neither the guide nor the guided are consciously aware of the relationship. It is, however, preferable if the relationship is both inward and outward.

There are some interesting examples in the series of films about Hazrat Yunus Emre which was made in Turkey. For example Yunus Emre, who was later to become one of the most famous mystic poets of Turkey, offered to help the Sheykh with his knowledge of the law that he acquired as a trainee cleric. The

Sheykh said nothing about this but instead gave hazrat Yunus a wazifa (verbal formula) to reply to anyone who asks him for anything, that he just ‘doesn’t know’. Thus the pride he unintentionally demonstrated by offering to use his own knowledge in the service of the Sheykh is negated and he learns a great lesson in humility and about the Sheykh’s complete dependence on Allah alone.

It should not however be imagined that the disciple is taught only by such methods. The fact is that these are only externals. The soul of the Sheykh and the soul of the murid interact in the unseen world and it is likely that between them they decide the best course of actions to take.

In many respects the Sheykh is like a messenger from the unseen conveying to the murid what the murids own soul cannot yet convey to the murid himself because he or she is not yet able to receive communication direct from their own soul. In taking instruction from the Sheykh that person is really responding to their own souls instruction.

To traverse the Way of spiritual development is not easy since the real enemy one must defeat and therefore purify, is in fact yourself. One should not imagine one has defeated one’s own Nafs or a particular part of one’s lower nature. That is just a trick of the self which is a subtle clever opponent. The battle with it is ongoing with apparently endless twists and turns.

The relationship between guide and disciple is not easily formed but it is one that must be answered for. It cannot be discarded on either side albeit the guide may send the murid away if it helps

him or her. It is a solemn mutual commitment. If the murid tries to leave the Sheykh of his or her own accord without consent they may have betrayed a commitment made to Allah.

Contrary to a common perception the guide takes the murid inwardly only to the foot of the stairs that lead to the divinity but it is the murid who must climb those stairs, alone.

Visions

Before talking about this topic a warning is necessary. One may inadvertently find oneself in confusion and misinterpretation if one gets caught up in trying to understand dreams or visions. To give one example a childless woman may have dreams or even waking dreams of having a child. The interpretation of this may be the expectation of having a physical baby. The real meaning may be this but it may also be what Hazrat Abdul Qadir Al Jillani says:

The holy Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said "I have seen my Lord in the shape of a most beautiful youth." As Allah is beyond all shape and form this statement is interpreted as the manifestation of the Lord's beautiful attributes reflected upon the mirror of the pure soul. This reflection is called the child of the heart, the material appearance, the body, is the mirror of the divine intelligence which educates and forms us.

The Secret of Secrets by Hazrat Abdul Qadir Al-Jillani. Translated by Tosun Beyrak Al Jerrahi published by the IslamicText Society. Pp111.

The process of self purification may lead the murid to experience visions. Visions are a kind of waking dream. There are a number of types of vision which one may experience and just as in dreams some are beautiful but others are frightening. Contrary to common belief visions are not the purpose of self purification or of mysticism.

Some visions are in black and white and are associated with the pineal gland physically and also the intellect. The pineal gland is a physical phenomenon situated about a millimetre behind the centre of the forehead between the eyes. It is what Hindus call the third eye and it known to modern science though scientists cannot discover its function. The gland itself becomes bigger with frequent use. Zahurmian was of the opinion that Tolstoy, the great Russian writer, had overdeveloped his pineal gland at the end of his life.

Other visions are in colour and are associated with the heart. The heart referred to has its root in the physical heart but transcends it completely just as Mind is rooted in the brain but transcends it.

Most visions are just momentary glimpses but less often they may last over a period of time sometimes over quite a long period of time, More rarely they may be completely encompassing and last over long periods of time and have multiple dimensions. The problem that many people have with visions is not in the vision itself but in the interpretation of it. This of course is also true of sleeping dreams. As a general rule one might say it is better merely to note the vision and then move on. Sometimes the meaning of the vision is quite clear however.

Perhaps one the best account of visionary experience can be found in the Masnevi of Mevlana Rumi Volume 3 commencing line 1924. It concerns a visionary called Daquqi. It would be too long a passage to quote the whole of it verbatim but I will reproduce parts of it, in Nicholson's translation into English, interspersed with my own comments.

Daquqi said.....of a sudden I beheld from afar seven candles and hastened along the shore towards them.

The light of the flame of each candle thereof ascended beautifully to the loft of the sky.

I became amazed so that even amazement itself became amazed; the waves of bewilderment passed over the head of my understanding.

(I thought) 'What kind of candles are these that He has lighted, so that the eyes of His creatures are screened from them'.

The people had gone to seek a lamp in the presence of that (sevenfold) candle which was surpassing the moon (in splendour).

Wonderful! There was a bandage over their eyes: they were bound by (the Divine destiny implied in the text) He guides aright those whom He will.

.....Then I saw the seven became one, its light cleaving the bosom of the sky,

Then again that one became seven once more; my intoxication and bewilderment waxed mighty.

There were such connections between the candles that may not come on my tongue and in my speech.

.....The seven candles appeared to the eye as seven men; their light was mounting to the azure vault.

Besides those lights the daylight was as dregs; by their intensity they were obliterating all other lights.

Then each man assumed the shape of a tree; my eye was happy in their greenery.

On account of the denseness of the leaves no boughs were visible; the leaves too had become scant on account of the plenteous fruit.

.....from the fruit that was bursting forcibly, flashes of light would spurt forth, like juice.

Mevlana then writes about the non mystical people who do not see all the wealth of goodness within their grasp. He says;

.....At every moment I rub my eyes considering whether I am dreaming and beholding a phantom in the world of time.

How can it be a dream ? I go up to the tree. I eat their fruit; how should I not believe?

Daquqi said, “I the fortunate one, pushed forward; again all the seven trees became one tree.

At every moment they were becoming seven and a single one; you may imagine what I was becoming like, through bewilderment.

After that I beheld the trees in the ritual prayer, drawn up in a line arranged like the congregation (of Muslims in formal prayer).

After a while they became seven men and Daquqi approached them. They were communicating with him without speech and they knew his name.

He led these mystic figures, at their insistence, in the ritual Muslim prayer. During the prayer he became inwardly aware of a ship that was in trouble on the sea. He heard the cries of the people about to be drowned. Moved by this he prayed for them and they found safety. Afterwards the mystic figures, who had prayed behind him, asked each other as to who had intervened with prayer, in fact who had intervened in what Allah had done. Finally they realised it was Daquqi. They disappeared and Daquqi was unable to find them again.

Such experiences attract the seekers of religious truth. The story has a very great point inasmuch as it highlights the difference between the moral need to intervene for the benefit of mankind (Tariqat) and the acceptance of the Will of Allah in all circumstances (Haqiqat).

Non believers dismiss experiences like this as the result of chemical processes in the brain and point to the effects of certain kinds drugs as having very apparently similar outcomes. It is not our intention to argue the point except to say that 'recreational' drug induced states are sensory in effect rather than spiritual and their cumulative effect on an individual may be negative and destructive. There is however a very real difference between drug induced states and genuine religious experiences and that is evident to the mystic without argument being required.

Daquqi expressed his wonder at the blindness of people who sought out a living in the earth whilst they were underneath a mystic tree of so much bounty. No doubt it is in the Will and plan of Allah that people should not have belief or that they busy themselves with finding some rational explanation. Many Sufis and indeed mystics of every religion and none have written about their visionary experiences and of course there are also non drug-induced states which appear to be like visions too but which lack the substance of genuine visions. They can be induced by various forms of asceticism or even enforced asceticism. When one considers that even the holy Prophet Muhammed is imagined by critics ancient and modern, to suffer from some kind of supposed epileptic effect one understands that no verbal arguments can remove such blindness.

Here is a mystical visionary experience whose authenticity I can attest to and which did not involve the use of any drugs or asceticism or indeed particular religious belief though there

was a small degree of conscious repetition of the word ‘Come’ which, although it was not known at the time, is recommended by Mevlana Rumi.

The visionary experience was however preceded by various other illuminated moments which it not intended to discuss here.

The vision took all night and is too long to tell completely but here is part of it. The visionary was sitting on some bedding on the floor of a small room whose walls were covered with silver paper. At first the wrinkles in the silver paper presented to the visionary as imaginary landscapes and people and so on. As the visionary looked at these, however, they began to assume a life of their own free of the imagination. The visionary was no longer able to control the images. They moved independent of the imagination. As he looked round the room at the walls the images or scenes were everywhere and all moving independently. It felt as if he could see the entire world from there. There was even a rocket being launched somewhere. During the whole process there was an underlying expectation of the arrival of someone hence the repetition of the word ‘come’.

Something of even greater intensity arrived in the form of an image of a man in grey coat who was wandering the world. He arrived at the foot of some stairs. Very palatial and grand stairs. He took off the grey coat and appeared in a shining white military style uniform. It appeared to the visionary that this was an image of himself. He began to ascend the stairs which led up to a great throne on which sat an elderly bearded man looking like a great king. As the shining white image ascended the stairs

step by step his chest began to expand and expand eventually at about the half way stage a great voice was heard from the area of the throne. It said 'Too proud'. At this point the white uniformed man turned and descended and resumed wearing the grey coat. There was no sadness about this, in fact the whole experience was amazing and full of wonder, but there remained only the determination to seek out the necessary humility in order to mount the stairs fully. A gift appeared as a separate image, it was a great sword. Many colours surrounded it. There were numerous other brightly coloured images.

One may ask if this was a vision of ascending to Allah on His throne and the answer would have to be 'yes' and 'no'. The ascension to Allah is rather well described by Hazrat Fariduddin Attar in his book *The Conference of the Birds*. What the mystic sees is a mirror, but a mirror that has the substance of light in it, not like an ordinary mirror. What the mystic sees in this mirror is essentially what his or her image of Allah has been since infancy albeit concealed from the adult. The mirror has the particular ability to form itself into an image of what is expected of it. So inasmuch that the mirror is made of the substance of light and 'Allah is the light' it is Allah but the specific form that is seen in it, in this case an old man with a long white beard, is a reflection of the form expected by the visionary's unconscious mind and thus is not Allah.

Hazrat Attar writes;

There in the Simorghs radiant face they saw,
Themselves, the Simorgh of the world - with awe,*

*They gazed and dared at last to comprehend
They were the Simorgh and the journeys end
They see the Simorgh - at themselves they stare,
And see a second Simorgh standing there,
They look at both and see the two are one,
That this is that, that thus the goal is won.
They ask (but inwardly, they make no sound)*

.....

*And silently their shining Lord replies;
I am a mirror set before your eyes,
And all who come before my splendour see
Themselves, their own unique reality;
You came as thirty birds, not less not more
If you had come as forty, fifty - here
An answering forty, fifty would appear*

* the word Simorgh literally translates as 30 birds, in the poem it stands in a sense for God.

Fariduddin Attar - The Conference of the Birds. Pp239. Translation by Arkham Darbandi and Dick Davies Published by Penguin Books 1c984.

Much more can be said about ‘the before” and “the after” of the mystical experience described above and also about the nature of the vision but for our present purposes this is enough. The interpretation of this vision is that the ascending soul had to pass through the unseen ranks of angels who were engaged endlessly in the praise of God. The soul concerned mistook these praises

as directed towards himself and thus later when reviewing this he understood the importance of the well known phrase “All praise belongs to Allah”.

The purpose of mysticism, however, is not by any means reached or understood by merely concerning oneself with visionary experiences.

Beyond Visions

Mevlana Says about spiritual experience that one should always ask if there is more. In the case of visionary moments like those described the answer is a resounding YES.

In the case of Daquqi the mysterious figures disappeared and he wandered the world in search of them. In the case of the second vision described it was the beginning of finding guidance into the mysticism of Islam; into belief and faith.

So what then lies beyond this kind of visionary experience.

Firstly the nature of the unseen itself is vast beyond human comprehension and it contains multiple dimensions. These different dimensions can be seen and heard usually at different times. Sometimes in black and white, sometimes in colour. It seems that there is nothing in this world that does not have a pure origin in the unseen. In this world things may be deemed bad or negative but their origin is in fact pure. In that sense nothing is absolutely bad or evil albeit in this world it appears so, and from the perspective of morality certain things are bad and necessarily thought of as such. About murder for example

according to Mevlana Rumi, Allah says to the Prophet Moses (Musa) 'It was not you that threw but Me'.

Nevertheless there is a judgement for all actions and the purification for bad actions may be hell. The reward for good actions being of course paradise. Thus, even though both paths end only in Allah (as everything returns to Him) the route is quite distinct. The holy Qur'an says 'Can there be any reward for good other than good'. (Sura Rehman v 63)

There is one dimension in which one sees the physical shape of oneself as pure light and spots of darkness appear on that image when one entertains negative thoughts or performs negative actions. Similarly when the thoughts or actions are good a light spot appears. There is a constant process of change with the image being light or dark. Shah Wali Ullah says somewhere that it is upon this image and its final condition that one is eventually judged.

Another dimension is called Certainty and that in itself has many aspects.

The types of vision we have mentioned previously tend to belong to the dimension of 'spirituality'. By this I mean that the person will see in the heart wonderful sights - 'palaces of pearls' as it is sometimes spoken of. This may be seen outwardly or inwardly. It may be seen in meditation or in sleeping dream but it is certainly not the full thing because there is a root to each of these. Maybe here we can use the image that is often used by Sufi mystics. They refer to what is called 'dreg drinkers'.

In a glass of wine there is the wine itself filling most of the glass. This is what makes the drinker drunk. There is something else however found at the bottom of the glass. These are called dregs or lees. They are in fact sediment at the bottom of the glass that accumulate from the wine making process. The real drunkard drinks these as well as the wine. Draining the glass completely.

The spiritual drunkards of course will not be literally drinking alcohol but this is an important metaphor. The wine of course makes the seeker spiritually drunk, regardless of whether that spiritual drunkenness is associated with meditation, Qur'an or religious reading, prayer, poetry, music, Zikr or something else. It takes one so far but the real spiritual drinker passes beyond that to the symbolic dregs. They are the root reality.

Let us give a notable example of this in the story about Khawaja Gharib Nawaz, also known as Khawaja Muinuddin Hasan Chishti. He was taken to heaven and there received the divine mandate to go to Ajmer. He saw a vision of Ajmer. Before departing from heaven he was given a gift. A pomegranate.

The pomegranate was a real physical fruit. It was the actual physical proof of his entire spiritual experience. The mystics ask the one who has received instruction from heaven - "Where is your evidence". The evidence is necessarily physical, material. Of course when one says a saint went heaven it does not mean he was physically carried up to the sky. Heaven is all around us. Going to heaven implies the alteration of perception so that whatever is around us is imbued with heavenly qualities.

The seeing of a place or a person is yet another aspect of vision.
These visions are quite specific and verifiable externally.

In the dimension of Certainty one finds the root of the 'palaces of pearls' in the same way one finds the dregs at the bottom of the wine or in the same way that at the heart of a genius with a tremendous mind there is a human being. In the same way the Kaaba is the spiritual heart of Islam but it is also a brick building and for the Saint, though his influence is largely spiritual, nearness to his physical grave has its own particular power. The Saint can produce also material effects such as giving birth by one who was without child or even giving financial help.

The Beloved's Reply

The beginning of loving is becoming 'Me' in 'You'
To bring love into existence I became 'Me' and 'You'
Love separates and unites both 'You' and 'Me'
And between brings into being what needs be.

The Lover's Reply

You have broken my heart
And it really, really did hurt

Beloved

What an excellent start!
Remember Jacob and Joseph's Shirt!
Mevlana and Shems (I can't tell apart)?
Nizamuddin and Amir Khusro too?
And Majnun and Laila - Oh so true!

Lover

*And what purpose can there be
In this game of You and me?*

Beloved

*The purpose is to bring into being
The actual fact, yes the material thing.
That is the evidence of the true love
In man and woman and heaven above.*

Lover

And this talk now of you and me?

Beloved

Print out the poem - you will see.

Zahuri

So the division of love into lover and beloved is so that some particular effect can be produced during the process of the lover and beloved uniting. In human terms this can be the production of a child but love and beloved is not limited to the human situation. Thus the heat of the sun may unite with the wetness of soil to produce a vegetable or a flower. Food unites with the body to produce health and so on. Thus lover and beloved are everywhere present, they are a relationship. The model for this universal relationship being the relationship between the soul and God.

So it seems that it is love that is the height of spiritual attainment and yet Mevlana Rumi describes love as the Astrolabe of the

mysteries of God. An astrolabe was an old instrument by which the activity of the movement of stars and so on was measured. In a sense the forbear of the galaxy spanning telescopes of today.

Beyond Love

So even love itself is not the final goal. It is the super fine mechanism to reach that goal which is in Mevlana Rumi's words the 'Mysteries of Allah'. Just as prayer, fasting, asceticism, patience, Knowledge, Zikr and Sema, are means to reach self purification, and self purification is the means to reach love, so love is the means to reach the mysteries of Allah. One enters those mysteries by a single door - the door of unity, 'There is no God but God'. Within the mansion that one enters by that single door there is however spiritual multiplicity.

It is rather like the case of the embryo of an infant. The male and the female unite into a single unity but within that embryo before it begins to divide there are many potentials which have been given various names by science but such as lysosomes, mitochondria and many others. With cellular division that takes place as the embryo develops these potentialities are multiplied numerous times.

The mystics speak of non existence in which there are many potentialities. Mevlana Rumi describes it as the workshop of the divine. All that is required is for the Divinity to say to it 'Be' for it to become existent.

How does one enter that door? Mevlana gives us the clue when he says ‘ I was knocking on the door when I realised I was knocking from the inside’.

The unseen is full of so many dimensions and so many different functions by which the Divinity makes Himself known. We have already mentioned the divinely appointed guides. These should be differentiated from the self appointed guides who have certain capacities and can achieve certain limited effects.

Then there are the divine assemblies where various spiritual forces meet to discuss actions that are needed. There are two levels of these, an upper and a lower house. The souls involved are from various backgrounds. Amongst them we must mention great Souls like Khawaja Saheb and Mevlana Rumi and Hz Abdul Qadir Al Jillani.

Then there are the Abdal which consists of souls from particular parts of the globe. Mostly they are physically asleep but they are representative of their particular place and culture. Of course they are not by any means exclusively Muslim. I suspect the idea that they originate from the fact that those who are aware of them are mostly Muslim mystics.

Then there are the divinely influenced actual worldly political powers. It may be imagined that political things like elections are devoid of anything spiritual but in reality various governments are the result of the influence of spiritual powers. They are created in the unseen and become what they are by divine Will.

Then there are the palatial buildings of the various saints.

There is also the Qutub, which is often assumed to be a particular saint or spiritual personality but in my view this refers to a permanent role which is occupied by various souls for differing lengths of time. The resident soul has the capacity to ‘move around the furniture’ so to speak and thus alter the spiritual structure of the universe. The meaning of Qutub being the axis or pole of the Universe. The principle is rather like centre of a circle, any change near the centre affects large areas near the circumference.

Then there is Alast which is said to exist outside of time and space. In this place the perfect souls live outside of time, and they manifest themselves in various persons within time, though themselves they are timeless. The light from which they are created is known as the Nur -i-Muhammed or in western thought as the Logos.

(The “day of Alast” (“Am I not your Lord?” (a-lastu bi-rabbikum)), verse 172 of Sura 7 of the Qur’an.)

The following poem attempts to give an imaginary flavour of Alast.

Have you Forgotten

*Have you forgotten when in gardens of glory we stayed,
Have you forgotten, Have you forgotten?*

*Have you forgotten when as innocent children we played
Have you forgotten, Have you forgotten?*

*Have you forgotten when our language was loves speech
Have you forgotten Have you forgotten?*

*Have you forgotten when up to white clouds we could reach,
Have you forgotten Have you forgotten?
Have you forgotten when the scented blossoms we caught
Have you forgotten Have you forgotten?*

*Have you forgotten when you were the seeker and I was sought,
Have you forgotten Have you forgotten?*

*Have you forgotten when all kinds of gifts we were given,
Have you forgotten Have you forgotten*

*Have you forgotten when we drank the nectar of heaven,
Have you forgotten Have you forgotten*

*Have you forgotten when a voice said 'Am I not your Lord'
We all said 'Yes' and with that voice were all in accord,*

*Have you forgotten Have you forgotten
Have you forgotten Have you forgotten*

We can refer to Khawaja Saheb for an explanation of the creative process. He says quoting the holy Prophet :

His (God's) Light is unlimited and without bounds. It has no beginning and no end. Like the light of the sun it envelops everything.

Afterwards this unfathomed and unlimited light created the light of the holy Prophet Muhammed by its own powers. The two light like the sun and the moon are shining in the sky. At first there was one light and then two, but the reality of both lights is one in fact.

Subsequently He created the souls of all living beings from the light of the holy Prophet Muhammed, but He created at first the souls of the perfect men. Allah says thus: "Man is my mystery and the perfect men acquire my gnosis and recognise Me in their hearts. They reach up to Me. Had the perfect men not existed then none in the 18000 worlds would have received My gnosis."

Quoted from The Meditations of Khawaja Muinuddin Hasan Chishti by Zahurul Hasan Sharib. Published by Sharib Press. 1994.

All of this gives an indication of very few of the many many mysteries of God, but of course there is so much more. We have not mentioned Paradise or Hell. We have not touched upon the nine levels of heaven, nor upon the Jinns and shaitans, nor upon the wonders of birth, or the houris, nor upon the male female balance Allah has created, nor upon so many other splendours created by Allah. These may be seen as visions but also experienced as something more than just vision since the experience is also auditory, olefactory, and tactile.

But again this is not the purpose of true mysticism. They are merely experiences on the way to that purpose.

That purpose has been described by Zahurmian as the Reconstruction of humanity. That sounds grandiose at first but for the

true mystic it nothing less than a simple description of the true purpose of mysticism.

So many persons live in a spiritually abject way. They make money, they marry or have sexual relations and raise children, they fight, they suffer many hardships for the sake of wealth and material possessions. But though the tree Daquqi talks about, with all its fruits of human spiritual happiness, is within their reach they are blind to it.

The mystics become aware of those blessings and seek to help mankind to find them and benefit from them. This for them is the proper service of Allah.

In the Service of Allah

*All praise, service, and adoration to Allah alone are due,
Evidenced, when love of His holy Prophet appears in you:*

*Loving obedience to His Messenger is surely realised,
When reverence for His Friends becomes actualised;*

*Respect for His Saints becomes more real to you,
When they lead you to a guide who's wise and true;*

*Service of the guide becomes most sincerely applied,
When it becomes evident to you from deep inside,*

*(And you know it to be a certainty in your own mind)
That the best service of Allah is the service of mankind.*

Zahuri

Some additional poems by Zahuri

My Heart You Broke

*My heart you broke and then thousands of delights gave me,
My heart you broke and then to love you chose to wed me.*

*My life you asked for and then life in you, you gave me,
I never expected so much love to feel, or such beauty to see.*

*I used to walk into lampposts; now they light the way for me,
I went through red lights, now the end of the tunnel I see.*

*I fled from fame: now fame is hunting everywhere for me,
From intelligence and skill I departed, now they haunt me.*

*What did I ever lose that a better was not returned to me,
You locked me away but only to show the way to liberty.*

*I thought I had choices, I have now, you I choose willingly,
I heard voices but now it is you and you talk so lovingly.*

*I thought that to trust meant following someone blindly,
Now I know its sensing you, and doing what you tell me.*

*That the sum of this life Jamil adds up to nothing, is likely,
Know now, that, this 'nothing' amounts to a life in eternity.*

Spirit

*When words start slipping and sliding like this,
The spirit is rising higher, in the way of Hafiz.
Dipping and diving and from sobriety skiving,
On a pure white moonshine mountain skiing.
The spirit doesn't ask why; it just soars higher,
On the wings of prayer, it becomes a high flier.
On the sighs of longing lovers it is mounting up,
Drinking deeply from Hafiz's brimful dawn cup.
It takes us nowhere, because we're already there,
Riding the waves of the beloved's shining hair.*

What a Great Place!

*I must drain this cup of wine to the last dreg,
The master of love gave it straight from the keg,
Its not the first tavern I have been in,
Though to praise its virtues, how to begin?*

*O sing out my heart in appreciation of the wine,
And of the taverns, all so excellent and fine;
Don't ask me to play favourites though, I pray,
Each reaches to perfection in its own way.*

*But this I can say, praise God for the street,
Full of taverns, and the dust of the Beloved's feet.
O tavern keepers all! Pray accept our salaam,
And forgive if in your cups we did any harm.*