

histories and their letters, begging him to submit them to the king. He would place the documents in his wallet. On coming into the king's presence he could not endure the splendour of his beauty, and would fall down dumbfounded. The king would then in a loving manner put his hand into his purse and pocket and wallet, saying, 'What has this dumbfounded servant of mine, who is utterly absorbed by my beauty?' In this way he found the letters and would endorse the petitions of every man and then return the documents into the wallet. So he would attend to the needs of every one of them, without that servant ever submitting them, in such manner that not a single one was rejected; on the contrary their demands were granted many times over, so that they attained far more than they had asked for. But in the case of other servants who retained consciousness, and were able to present and indicate to the king the histories of people in need, out of a hundred affairs and a hundred needs only one perchance would be fulfilled.

4

Some one said: Here is something I have forgotten.

The Master said: There is one thing in this world which must never be forgotten. If you were to forget everything else, but did not forget that, then there would be no cause to worry; whereas if you performed and remembered and did not forget every single thing, but forgot that one thing, then you would have done nothing whatsoever. It is just as if a king had sent you to the country to carry out a specified task. You go and perform a hundred other tasks; but if you have not performed that particular task on account of which you had gone to the country, it is as though you have performed nothing at all. So man has come into this world for a particular task, and that is his purpose; if he does not perform it, then he will have done nothing.

*We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth
and the mountains, but they refused to carry it
and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely
he is sinful, very foolish.*

26

'We offered that trust to the heavens, but they were unable to accept it.' Consider how many tasks are performed by the heavens, whereat the human reason is bewildered. The heavens convert common stones into rubies and cornelians; they make mountains into mines of gold and silver; they cause the herbs of the earth to germinate and spring into life, making a veritable Garden of Eden. The earth too receives the seeds and bears fruit; it covers up blemishes; it accepts and reveals a hundred thousand marvels such as can never be told in full. The mountains too give forth all those multifarious mines. All these things they do, yet that one thing is not performed by them; that task is performed by man.

And We honoured the Children of Adam.

God did not say, 'And We honoured heaven and earth.' So that task which is not performed by the heavens and the earth and the mountains is performed by man. When he performs that task, 'sinfulness' and 'folly' are banished from him.

If you say, 'Even if I do not perform that task, yet so many tasks are performed by me,' you were not created for those other tasks. It is as though you were to procure a sword of priceless Indian steel such as is to be found only in the treasuries of kings and were to convert it into a butcher's knife for cutting up putrid meat, saying, 'I am not letting this sword stand idle, I am putting it to so many useful purposes.' Or it is as though you were to take a golden bowl and cook turnips in it, whereas for a single grain of that gold you could procure a hundred pots. Or it is as though you were to take a dagger of the finest temper and make of it a nail for a broken gourd, saying, 'I am making good use of it. I am hanging the gourd on it. I am not letting this dagger stand idle.' How lamentable and ridiculous that would be! When the gourd can be perfectly well served by means of a wooden or an iron nail whose value is a mere farthing, how does it make sense to employ for the task a dagger valued at a hundred pounds?

God most High has set a great price on you, for He says:

*God has bought from the believers their selves
and their possessions against the gift of Paradise.*

27

The poet says:

You are more precious than both heaven and earth:
What can I more? You know not your own worth.

Sell not yourself at little price,
Being so precious in God's eyes.

God says, 'I have bought you, your moments, your breaths, your possessions, your lives. If they are expended on Me, if you give them to Me, the price of them is everlasting Paradise. This is your worth in My sight.' If you sell yourself to Hell, it is yourself you will have wronged, just like the man who hammered the dagger worth a hundred pounds into the wall and hung a jug or a gourd upon it.

To return: you put forward your excuse, saying, 'I expend myself upon lofty tasks. I am studying jurisprudence, philosophy, logic, astronomy, medicine and the rest.' Well, for whose sake but your own are you doing all these things? If it is jurisprudence, it is so that nobody shall steal a loaf out of your hands or strip you of your clothes or kill you, in short it is for your own security. If it is astronomy, the phases of the sphere and its influence upon the earth, whether it is light or heavy, portending tranquillity or danger, all these things are connected with your own situation and serve your ends; if the star is lucky or unlucky, it is connected with your own ascendant and likewise serves your own ends. When you consider the matter well, the root of the whole business is yourself; all these other things are but branches of yourself.

If these things, which are a branch of yourself, are so multifarious and comprise so many marvels, phases and worlds both wonderful and without end, consider what phases you may pass through, who are the root! If your branches have their ascensions and descensions, their lucky and unlucky aspects, consider what may transpire to you who are the root, what ascension and descension in the world of spirits, what luck and un luck, what profit and loss! Such a spirit possesses this property and produces that; such a one is suitable for such a task.

For you there is other food, besides this food of sleep and eating. The Prophet said, 'I pass the night in the presence of my Lord, He giving me to eat and drink.' In this lower world you have forgotten

that heavenly food, being occupied with this material sustenance. Night and day you are nourishing your body. Now this body is your horse, and this lower world is its stable. The food of the horse is not the food of the rider; the rider has his own kind of sleeping and eating and taking enjoyment. But because the animal and the bestial have the upper hand over you, you have lagged behind with your horse in the stable for horses and do not dwell in the ranks of kings and princes of the world eternal. Your heart is there, but inasmuch as the body has the upper hand you are subject to the body's rule and have remained its prisoner.

Even so when Majnūn was making for Lailā's dwelling-place, so long as he was fully conscious he drove his camel in that direction. But when for a moment he became absorbed in the thought of Lailā and forgot his camel, the camel which had a foal in a certain village profited of the opportunity to return in its tracks and came to that village. On coming to his senses Majnūn found that he had gone back a distance of two days' journeying. For three months he continued on his way thus. Finally he exclaimed, 'This camel is the ruin of me!' So saying, he jumped off the camel and continued on foot, singing:

My camel's desire is behind me, and my desire is before:
She and I are at cross purposes, and agree no more.

The Master said: Saiyid Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq, God sanctify his lofty spirit, declared: Someone came and said, 'I heard your praises sung by So-and-so.' Burhān al-Dīn replied: 'Wait until I see what sort of a man he is, whether he is of sufficient rank to know me and to praise me. If he knows me only by word of mouth, then he does not truly know me. For these words do not endure; these syllables and sounds do not endure; these lips and this mouth do not endure. All these things are mere accidents. But if he likewise knows me by my works and if he knows my essential self, then I know that he is able to praise me and that that praise belongs to me.'

This is like the story they tell of a certain king. This king entrusted his son to a team of learned men. In due course they had taught him the sciences of astrology, geomancy and so forth so that he became a complete master, despite his utter dullness of wit and stupidity.

One day the king took a ring in his fist and put his son to the test. 'Come, tell me what I am holding in my fist.'