



"On the Merciful God and on the Birds' Glorifications"

"در توحید خداوند غفور و تسبیح طيور فرمايد"

Text Information

Author | Sanā'ī of Ghazna

Language | Persian

Period | 12th Century

Genre | Laudatory poetry, Qaṣīdas

Source | Sanā'ī al-Ghaznavī, Abū al-Majd Majdūd ibn Ādam. *Huwa kitāb-i mustaṭāb-i kullīyāt*. Bombay: Khan Sahib M.M. Shirazi, 1328 [1910]

Collection | Prayer, Spirituality, and Life after Death: Global Medieval Perspectives

URL | sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/sanai_on_merciful_god/

Translation and introduction by Navid Saberi-Najafi.

Introduction to the Text

Sanā'ī of Ghazna (d. 1131 C.E.) was the first major poet of classical Persian Sufi literature. He was a monumental poet not just because of his versification skills, but also because of his profound influence upon Sufi poets such as 'Aṭṭār of Kadkan (d. 1225 C.E.) and Mawlavī (Rumi) (d. 1273 C.E.). "On the Merciful God and on the Birds' Glorifications," in the *Dīvān* [collection of poems], is a qaṣīda (laudatory poem) comprising three key themes: nature, the centrality of the Sufi concept of dhikr (remembrance) to man's salvation, and tawḥīd (the Oneness of God).

At the very beginning of the poem, Sanā'ī depicts one of the blessings of God, which is in the form of bountiful rain. Spring is the ideal setting for the poet to portray the avian species' glorifications, not only because the revivification of nature takes place, but more importantly, because spring's abundant rain is a sign of God's forgiveness toward mankind. Dhikr—a central practice, in Islamic esoterism, derived from the Qur'an—and tawḥīd are two themes communicated through multifarious talking birds, such as the humā—a mythical bird like an eagle, who acknowledges the Oneness of God by saying, "The Unequaled is One." Medieval Persian authors deployed the bird metaphor to concretize abstract Sufi concepts (e.g., dhikr). Further, the Qur'an—an important source of influence upon Muslim thinkers—likens birds to human communities (6/Al-An'ām: 38). Sanā'ī conceives of birds as purposeful signs for humans to make sense of the universe. The red pigeon, for instance, serves as a spiritual model for humans, saying huwa [He] "one-hundred times with each breath."

The poem contains abundant stylistic features. Sanā'ī's use of periphrasis is seen in "The Riḍwān [an angel] opens all the gates of Paradise," which is a circumlocutory way of emphasizing divine blessings in springtime. He employs olfactory ("qāliyah [a fragrant substance comprising musk, ambergris, and pussy willow]," "mounds of camphor," etc.), auditory ("wind's blowing," "cock's crow," "wailing," etc.), tactile ("silk and ermine coat," etc.), kinesthetic ("quivering trees," "lark's strut," etc.), and thermal ("autumn") imagery, all of which provide the reader with a vivid picture of nature. The poet's allusion to 55/Al-Raḥmān: 70 ("good and beautiful ones") illustrates that he was inspired by the Qur'an. Other stylistic features include alliteration ("character and customs [sīrat va sām]") and consonance ("the Omnipotent Subduer" [qādir-i qahhār]). Finally, in classical Persian literature, it was common for poets to address themselves—especially at the end of poems—by using their pen names; the final distich that includes the poet's pen name (i.e., "Majdūd") in a qaṣīda is called takhallus. Sanā'ī's use of takhallus might convince his audience to take his sermon seriously: whilst the poet pleads with his readers to shun the indulgences of the fleeting world, he acknowledges in the final distich that he needs to purify his own soul ("Majdūd! You are closer to this state, for / Old age has indeed summoned autumn").



Introduction to the Source

The Dīvān, in which the aforementioned poem appears, was published in Bombay in 1910 by Khan Sahib M.M. Shirazi. The collection contains 14,000 distichs that mainly revolve around religious themes, such as eschewing the nafs [carnal soul], performing the dhikr, and abandoning the cupidity of worldly substance and goods, among others.

Further Reading

De Bruijn, J.T.P. *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Ḥakīm Sanā'ī of Ghazna*. Brill, 1983.

- A very detailed study of Sanā'ī

De Bruijn, J.T.P. "Sanā'ī." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 17 May 2012. Accessed 4 September 2020.

- A general introduction to Sanā'ī

Johnson, Kathryn V. "A Mystic's Response to the Claims of Philosophy: Abū'l Majd Majdūd Sanā'ī's Sayr al-'Ibād ilā'l-M'ād." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1995, pp. 253-295.

- A thorough analysis of Sanā'ī's notable allegory



“On the Merciful God and on the Birds’ Glorifications” “در توحید خداوند غفور و تسبیح طیور فرماید”

Once again, God beautified the world, Turned the Earth and time into the Most Exalted Paradise.	چون خُلد برین کرد، زمین را و زمان را	آراست جهاندار دگر باره جهانرا
As soon as the firmament made one orbit, He ordered The sun to travel its circular path.	خورشید بپیمود مسیر دَوَران را	فرمود که تا چرخ یکی دور دگر کرد
5 He beautified that senile, old man in a way that His sprightliness enkindled the fair sapling's envy.	کاید حسد، از تازگیش، تازه جوان را	ایدون که بیاراست مرآن پیر خرفرا
It appeared as if the air had mixed lots of <i>qālīyih</i> Filling the <i>qālīyih</i> holder with <i>qālīyih</i>	رضوان بگشاید همه درهای جنان را	هر روز جهان خوشتر از آن است چو هر شب
Each day the world is more pleasant, for each night 10 The <i>Riḍwān</i> opens all the gates of Paradise.	پر کرد از آن غالیه‌ها، غالیه‌دانرا	گوئی که هوا غالیه آمیخت بخروار
The treasure in every corner that was hidden from <i>Qārūn</i> , [The air] brought that hidden treasure out of the earth.	از خاک برآورد، مر آن گنج نهان را	گنجی که به هر کُنْج، نهان بود ز قارون
The clouds that continuously rained snow, broke, Submerged in a sea in which no shore was visible.	شد غرقهٔ بحری که ندید ایچ کرانرا	ابری که همی برف ببارید ببری
15 That pearl-laden cloud which rises from the sea, Showers [river] mouths with pearls, coins, and raindrops.	پر کرده ز دُر و درم و دانه دهانرا	آن ابرِ دُرربار، ز دریا که بر آید
Pearl-drops rained down so hard that All the flowing water turned into fulgent pearls.	چون لؤلؤ تر کرده همه آبِ روان را	از بسکه ببارید به آب اندر، لؤلؤ
The wind's blowing, which causes ever-increasing hardship, 20 Came from a direction that comforted the soul.	بر ما بوزید از قبَلِ راحتِ جانرا	رنجی که همی باد فزاید ز بزیدن
The mountain turned mounds of camphor into fine silk, Gladdening the soul of the dear departed.	شادیِ روان داد، مر آن شادروانرا	کوه آن تلِ کافور بدل کرد بسیفور
The heavy heaps of camphor on the mountain, The sun lightened those burdensome loads.	خورشید سبک کرد، مر آن بارِ گران را	بر کوه، از آن تودهٔ کافورِ گرانبار
25 The earth that absorbs all the dew from the cloud's mouth, Uproots that dormant, supine tulip peacefully asleep.	تا بر کند آن لالهٔ خوش خفته ستانرا	خاکی که همه ژاله سَد از دهنِ ابر



From the sky, the cloud rained down heavy dew on it, Creating a vast field of supine tulips.	تا لاله‌ستان کرد، همه لاله‌ستانرا	چندین ز هوا ژاله ببارید بدو، ابر
Given the flowers' and tulips' colors, it is time for the violet to bloom.	چون نیل شود، خیره کند، گوهرِ کان را	از رنگ گل و لاله، کنون باز بنفشه
30 Upon turning cerulean, it would bedazzle a mine's gem.		
At cockcrow, the crane calls, its heart ablaze with passion, And by calling, it reproves [other] callers.	وز نعره زدن، طعنه زند نعره‌زنانرا	شبگیر، زند نعره کُنگ از دلِ مشتاق
That stork says, " <i>lak al-ḥamd-u lak al-shshukr</i> You have made that frightful snake my prey."	تو طعمه من کرده آن مار دمان را ».	آن لکلک گوید که «لَکَ الْحَمْدُ لَکَ الشُّکْرُ
35 The turtledove doffed its silk and ermine coat, Donning a vesture of linen now that it feels hot.	اکنون که بتابید و بپوشید کتان را	قُمَری نهد از پشت قبایِ خَز و قافم
The peacock performs a display when it spies afar The <i>Kīyān</i> Crown on the parting of the hoopoe's head.	بر فرقِ سرِ هدهد، آن تاجِ کیانرا	طاوس کند جلوه چو از دور ببیند
The wood pigeon is saying, "O Supplier of Sustenance! 40 You are the soul-giving sustenance-supplier of man and of the djinn."	روزی ده و جان بخش توئی، انسی و «جانرا»	موسبجه همی گوید: «یا رازقِ رَزاق
The chough closes its bill to futile, clamorous chattering. Like the collared turtledove, its tongue is open to glorification.	چون فاخته بگشاده به تسبیح، زبانرا	زاغ از شَغَبِ بیهده، بربندد، منقار
The <i>Humā</i> constantly says, "The Unequaled is One," Delighting the mountain pigeon up in the air.	تا در طرب آرد، بهوا بر، وَرشانرا	«پیوسته هما گوید: «بِکَیست یگانه
45 The spring sparrow recites the attributes of the Creator, Enlivening the Earth's quivering trees.	کز بوم برانگیزد، اشجارِ نوان را	گنجشکِ بهاری، صفتِ باری، گوید
" <i>Huwa</i> ," says the red pigeon one-hundred times with each breath, " <i>huwa</i> ." In saying " <i>huwa</i> ," its tongue is constant.	در گفتنِ «هو» دارد، پیوسته لبان را	هو» گوید «هو»، صد، بدمی، سرخِ کبوتر»
The saker falcons have clutched the pheasants in their talons; 50 That has made the birds' mouths utter glorifications.	تسبیح شده از دهن مرغِ مر آن را	چَرغان، بسرِ چنگ، در آورده تذروان
The starling, like the muezzin, throats out [its melody] at dawn. That red lark and that accentor intone the <i>adhān</i> in tune.	آن ژولک و آن صعوه از آن داده اذانرا	شارک، چو مؤذّن بسحر، حلق گشاده
Gladsome, those grouse alight upon rock after rock, In amaranthine quest of that running messenger.	پاینده و پوینده، مر آن پیکِ دوان را	آن شیشکان، شاد، از این سنگ بدان سنگ



55	That partridge, in a patched, flared skirt, Has made a necklace of perfumed, black tresses as an ornament. Behold, in the air, what the lark says, "May [He] bless the 'good and beautiful ones' for their good deeds." The lark's strut and the wagtail's warble,	از غالیه غُل ساخته از بهر نشانرا خَیر و حَسَنَت بادا، خیرات و حسان را ناطق کند آن مردۀ بی نطق و بیانرا	آن کبکِ مُرَقَّع، سَلَبِ برچَدَه دامن بنگر بهوا بر، بچکاوک که چه گوید: نازیدن نازو و نواهای سریچه
60	Turn the inarticulate, speechless dead into orators. That Crane says, "You are the Omnipotent Subduer, Perpetually subduing the death of creatures." That thirsty falcon is constantly saying, "May the King bestow patience upon the ardent."	«از مرگ همی قهر کنی مر حیوانرا «بی آب ملک صبر دهد مر عطشانرا»	آن کُرکی گوید که «توئی قادرِ قَهَّار پیوسته همی گوید آن سرشَبِ تشنه:
65	The red duck that sits on the ground, Says "You are the venerable Lord of the world." Sweating, the quail clamors, "O God! The Creator of creation over hundreds of years of conjunctions." The pheasants crow, "You are the one who knows	«گوید که «خدائی و سزائی تو جهانرا «تو خالقِ خلقانی صد قرن قران را «رازِ تنِ بیقَوّت و بیروح و روان را	مرغابی سرخاب که در خاک نشیند در خوید، چنین گوید کُرکی که «خدایا! گویند تذروان که «تو آئی که بدانی
70	The mystery of a strengthless, soulless body." That falcon says, "O Lord! Protect the faith of the Prophet's community and give them sanctuary." The mighty vulture says, "Powerfully, The Omnipotent protects the universe."	«بر اَمّتِ پیغمبر، ایمان و امان را «جَبَّارِ نگهدارد، این کون و مکانرا	آن باز چنین گوید: «یا رب! تو نگهدار آن کُرکسِ باقَوّت، گوید که «بقدرت
75	Hearken what the eagle says for its glorification: "Beautify your character and customs!" The nightingale has become a sermonizer, the turtledove a Qur'an-reciter; Both are warbling, chanting loudly, and wailing. Night and day, you hear the cock's crow:	«!آراسته دارید، مر این سیرت و سانرا» برداشته هر دو، شَغَب و بانگ و فغانرا «کی غافل! بگذار جهان گذرانرا!»	:بنگر که عقاب از پی تسبیح چه گوید بلبل چه مُذکّر شده، قمری قاری آید بتو، هر پاس، خروشی ز خروسی
80	"Eschew the passing world, O neglecter!" [The cock] has cried, "O people! Do not condemn your bodies to Hell for so-and-sos!"	«!دوزخ مَبَرید، از پی بهمان و فلانرا	آوازه برآورده که «ای قوم! تنِ خویش



View the world as a jungle [with a] lion, fierce; In that jungle, do not provoke that fierce lion.	در بیشه مشورید مر آن شیرِ ژیانرا	دنیا چو یکی بیشه شمارید، ژیان شیر
85 In seeking bread, do not destroy your dignity. Do not burn your soul for bread.	در نار مسوزید روان، از پی نان را	در جُستنِ نان، آبِ رخِ خویش مریزید
Since God has not girded you with a girdle, Do not irrationally gird your waist.	در پیشِ چو خود، خیره مبندید میانرا	ایزد چه بزَنار نبسته است میانتان
Before the Angel of Death takes your soul, 90 Remove the [soul's] bridle from Satan's grip.	«از قبضهٔ شیطان بستانید عنان را!»	زان پیش که جانتان بستاند مَلکُ الموت
<i>Majdūd!</i> You are closer to this state, for Old age has indeed summoned autumn.	پیریت به نهمار فرستاده خزان را	مجدود، بدین حال، تو نزدیک‌تری، زانک

Critical Notes

Line 33 "Praise be to You and thanks be to You."