

THE NINTH HOUR

THE NINTH HOUR

by

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The Cause for Composing the Ninth Hour

Recently I have meditated on the baseness of my character, the shamefulness of my desires, and my thoughtless behavior. However often others have called harsh words down upon me, I give thanks to God that they do not know the worst of it.

*Who better to judge the criminal,
Than the criminal himself?
He will be acquainted with his every crime,
No matter how carefully concealed.*

If I repent what I have done, I may find favor in His sight and be admitted to His court. But repentance is not enough for the recidivist. Though fear should compel

me, I cannot renounce what I have done. To every door He holds the key—to every treasure and to every heart. It is impiety to despair of His mercy, though the force of His wrath may be upon you. I seek shelter in God from God, in His mercy from His anger. His forgiveness surely outstrips His wrath and His mercy exceeds His justice.

In Persepolis ruled a king known for magnanimity and justice. In this king's prison lived a single prisoner, a poet of merit, but who had committed such crimes that the king considered putting him to death. In the king's presence, the poet pleaded for his life and tied his shoes around his throat and rested the neck of hope upon the king's threshold. The king acknowledged his prisoner's repentance but did not set him free,



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from God, in His
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justice.*

knowing that the poet would again take up the crimes and vices to which he was inevitably drawn.

The king said, "I will keep you near me so that you will fear me. I am but a few steps from you. I will be, as the Holy Prophet said, *nearer to you than your jugular vein*. I will not free you but will let you live that you may take pen in hand. So long as ink runs through your pen, I will not draw blood from your throat. But if you put your pen aside and busy yourself with what is shameful and forbidden in my kingdom, I will know and I may alter my sentence and put you to death."

The end of this tale is not yet written. Perhaps you will hear its end, but the author does not know.

I have planted an orchard for my mistress, but the soil is barren and only a single sickly tree has grown. My mistress asked for fruit from this orchard, but I told her there was none fit for her table. She walked with me to that tree and, when she touched a branch, a single fruit fell into her hand. She held it up to my sight and I wondered at this miracle that something so beautiful could be born from one unworthy and unclean. She took a bite from that sweet fruit and said, "This tree seems to you fit only for fire, yet I have been patient and this fruit is the reward, fit for a queen's table. The beauty of the tree is nothing to the one who tastes only sweetness."

I have been careful to conceal my past wrongdoing with a woman who was not

lawful to me. I have nursed the hope in my heart that sins committed for the sake of love may be forgiven, even if I cannot renounce what my heart desires. Is illicit love still not love? Can the heart distinguish? Does gold lose value when stolen? Even concealed, is truth not still true? Hallaj said, "Glory be to me. I am the Truth." The people rose up to punish him and he was destroyed for what he said. Yet Jonaid, who scolded Hallaj and who sanctioned the execution, did not call Hallaj a liar.

During his imprisonment, Hallaj recounted the story of Tobias and Sarah. The demon Asmodeus loved the girl Sarah, the daughter of Raguel. Though the demon did Sarah no harm, he was jealous and murdered every man given to her in marriage.



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love? Can the heart
distinguish? Does gold
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She had wed seven husbands in turn and Asmodeus killed them all. No man would now go near her for fear of his life. Yet Tobias fell so deeply in love with her that his heart was no longer his own and he feared only separation from her. He asked to marry Sarah. Raguel told him of the fate of her seven husbands, how each had married her, and how each had died the first evening after going into her room. Tobias did not relent and Raguel assented to the marriage. On the night Tobias and Sarah were married, Raguel ordered his servants to dig a grave for Tobias, expecting Asmodeus to kill him. Yet the demon did not harm Tobias. Before Tobias entered Sarah's room, the Angel of God captured Asmodeus, bound him in shackles, and strangled him. As they

embraced, Sarah asked her husband why Asmodeus spared him. Tobias said, "The lover is already dead to the world. Asmodeus had power only over the living. Love has already slain me."

Later that evening, Raguel's servants informed their master that the demon had been banished and Tobias was unharmed. At once, Raguel ordered his servants to fill up and conceal the grave they had dug. In the morning, Tobias saw the freshly turned earth, and remarked upon it. Raguel was embarrassed, but Tobias said to him, "It is fitting to dig a grave for a man in love. When he has achieved union with the beloved, that is the resurrection."

When asked the meaning of the story, aside from the obvious moral, Hallaj said,

“People remember only Tobias; they forget the demon that loved Sarah. Tobias’ love was lawful. Asmodeus died at the hands of an angel; is there a better parable for love? The demon did not love less although Sarah was not permitted to him. Thus do all lovers live or die in the shadow of the Beloved. Had their fates been reversed, they would have loved the same. As for the fault of Asmodeus, I pass no judgment in matters of love. Love makes fools and madmen of us all.”

The draught is bitter yet, when we become drunk with it, it is sweet and pleasant. I have prayed that God might protect me from love, except that love has already entered my heart and ruined me. If yesterday I kissed Najwah’s lips, today I can



*Asmodeus died at the
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love?*

hardly denounce love or the folly of those in love. While the boat takes on water, the lover sleeps soundly, dreaming of his beloved. The world and all its fury and tumult mean nothing to the one in love. The goal is not Paradise. Heaven is not a place the righteous go when they die. The righteous are in Paradise at all times, even as they crawl in the dust to find Him. Is it not the same with love and with lovers? Which is the parable of which? How is it that there are those who deny even the possibility of God, yet are slaves to love?

I have collected stories of love; anecdotes to entertain the one I love. Here are my stories of love; parables to admonish men that all proofs come to nothing. If wine is forbidden to you, you may drink from

this little cup. A sip of love makes drunkards of saints, makes fools of scholars. A droplet of love breaks the cup but quenches thirst, swallows a hundred Jonahs, drowns a thousand Pharaohs. Jesus was told, "You have raised Lazarus back to life." Jesus said, "This is nothing compared to love."

*Love has slain me.
If I had clung to life,
What would the beloved say?
"If you have not died in love,
Then you are faithless."
If I still seem alive to you,
Then you have never loved.*

Love is madness. It requires of us no reason and offers none. It is the poison; it is the antidote. It is the martyrdom; it is the full reward. It kills and, by killing, restores to life. It gives fragrance to the blossom, sweetness to sugar, flavor to wine. Without it, the sun goes dark, flesh turns to dust, Joseph has no beauty, and Solomon no wisdom.

The End of Reason

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*That You May Find, in Stories of Love,
the Face of the Beloved*

I was walking one morning with Najwah in her garden. I brought her, as a gift for her birthday, a chess set carved of black soapstone and alabaster. I wanted to see her; this gift provided me an excuse. She accepted my gift and briefly embraced me, but said, “If you are on fire for me, let no smoke appear. Conceal your love for me, as I have concealed mine for you.”

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I said, “I wish I were King David to send Uriah away.”

She said, “Don’t speak this way.”

I said to her, “I don’t mean to upset you. But now I have finished my three books. I’ve locked away pen and paper. I occupy my mind with nothing but my selfish desires and this has become an excuse for thoughtlessness and improper conduct. I have abandoned a gold mine and busied myself in the dirt.”

She said, “Is this why you’re here?”

I smiled and said, “No. You misunderstand me. I came to see you and to remind myself that loving some things in this world should not make me feel ashamed.”

She said, “You should be ashamed. But I understand you. I am a few years older than

you are and am not, like a child, dependent on your love to sustain me. But you are also no longer so young. You have spent ten years on three small books. Now you should find a wife and raise a family. This is fitting for you and will make the things you most enjoy lawful to you.”

I said, “How can I seek a wife when love has turned me to the wife of another, to a woman who is not lawful to me?”

Najwah said, “This woman would have you if she were free. You have stolen moments with her; isn’t that enough?”

I answered, “Union with the beloved is not enough if it ends. If the sun sets and she leaves my bed, I am as alone as if she never lay in my arms.”

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She said, “This is shameful and she repents what she has done.”

I said, “I recognize what I did was wrong, but I am tied to love for her. Whether she betrays her husband or remains faithful to him does not alter my love for her. I have sipped this wine once and have been drunk ever since.”

She said, “Would you renounce me if it were within your power? God would surely aid you.”

I said, “How can I renounce the very thing that has opened my eyes to His existence?”

Najwah said, “I don’t understand. How would illicit love open your eyes or give you faith in God?”

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I said, “When I wrote of Iblis, I was envious of him. Iblis had laid eyes on God and none had been nearer to His throne. And again, I was jealous when I wrote of Balaam. God’s spirit had entered him and Balaam had spoken God’s word and had manifested His power. These two, as I scribbled about them, had personal and direct knowledge of God. I had only musings and empty philosophies. Even rejected and cast out, Iblis and Balaam possessed certain faith in God and His existence. And I was jealous, even of the curses they carried.

“When I fell in love with you, I too was rejected. Yet through His rejection, I was blessed and gained that certain faith myself. Though cast down like Iblis and cursed like

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Balaam, I came to the valley of belief. When I sipped from love's cup, I drank the wine of faith, even as we transgressed His law."

Najwah was quiet at this, but her eyes dimmed and her brow furrowed. I said, "Love, whether licit or illicit, is a sign of God. It is more than analogy, though it can serve as one. Consider a man's reason and rationality. With it, he goes about his day and performs work and makes sound decisions. But when love enters his heart, his rationality escapes from him or he drives it out. Love may cause him to act without sense and he may behave contemptibly. The compass of his heart shows no direction north, the needle spins without end. He doubts all things, even his own doubt. He disowns everything,



*When I sipped from
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except love itself which has become his single master. He gives no thought to himself but thinks only of his beloved and whether he himself is loved by her. What in nature or in intellect would drive a man to act so foolishly? There is no explaining it. Further, the one he loves is not his choice; that he loves and whom he loves are not the result of sensible deliberation. Yet if you ask why he loves the one he loves, he can supply reasons without end and yet his reasons mean nothing. They are rationalizations. He is the scientist who offers theories on the formation of the cosmos but, in the end, realizes that the cosmos came first and the theories only after.”

Najwah said, “Then we have no reason to love each other.”

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I said, “We have a million reasons, but they lead us nowhere. In the end love is what it is and nothing more can be said of it. Reasonable men who have not felt love might suggest that love does not exist and that those who argue otherwise are deluded. Yet reasonable men, when love enters their hearts, speak as though love were evident in itself and that those who argue otherwise are deluded. Those who have not loved seek after the possibility of love and the truth of love. Those who love have no need of truth, for they have already found it. The same can be said of God.

“If all the evidences of our intellect and sense deny the existence of God, so too can they deny the existence of love. It cannot be revealed to you by anything less than the

experience of it. To feel love is to transcend the need to prove love. The feeling is proof enough.

“The Meccans mocked Muhammad and asked him for proof. They said, ‘You have come to us with a Quran, but nothing more. Supply us with manna! Turn our water to wine! Bring the Table down from Heaven and an Angel to vouch for you.’ But Muhammad’s wife, Khadijah, said, ‘If you have understood a word of the Quran, you would not ask for proof. The Book itself is proof enough.’”

I took Najwah’s hand and led her to a wicker table in the sun. I opened the chess set and arrayed the pieces according to the rules of the game. I said, “Each has a proper place; each moves with certainty according



*To feel love is to
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proof enough.*

to its nature. The pawn moves as a pawn, the rook as a rook, the bishop as a bishop—each without variance.” I moved a pawn forward one square. “If this one had thoughts and speech, he would say, ‘I have come here according to my manner for such-and-such a reason.’ But he has no perception of the real reason. His entire world, its rules, its customs, its morals—these are a mummery; his comrades are all equally without perception. From the lowest pawn to the kings and queens—they do not know they are actors in a pantomime.”

I lifted the pawn from the table and placed it in Najwah’s hand. “Yet if this one could love, he could move like a queen. And if the queen felt love, she might be frozen in place, a prisoner of the pawn.”



That Love Consumes the Lover

Love topples reason. Love destroys us and it will seem a curse to those who bear the obligations of love but cannot achieve the goal of love, which is union with the Beloved.

A young man said to Majnun, “I seek love as true as your love for Layli. Will you instruct me in the ways of this love?”

Majnun laughed at him and said, “Even if I could offer you such instruction, I would not. I would not inflict this punishment on any man, even those who despise me and

have mocked me and humiliated me. Love is not the beauty of the rose; it is the perfection of the thorn. It is not the scent of Paradise; it is the stench of Hell. If love is the smile of the beloved, it is also the torment of the lover. If it fills you with life, it deprives you of sense. If you grasp it, it tastes your blood and draws from you sighs of regret. It captures you and corrupts your reason. It enslaves you and deludes you so that you imagine your chains are a robe of honor and your prison is a mansion in Paradise.

“Do you wish to know the true meaning of this feeling of love? Before the ninth hour, one of those crucified with Jesus said to him, ‘I am a thief and was, until this moment, utterly lost. Now I seek forgiveness



*Love is not the beauty
of the rose; it is the
perfection of the thorn.*

from the Beloved.’ Jesus said, ‘You will be welcomed with me into Paradise.’

“Is this the love you seek? It is annihilation at the hands of the Beloved. If it comes, you are lost. If you flee from it, it will hunt you down whether at the top of the mountain or at the bottom of the sea. If you hide from it, it will find you whether in deep caverns or among the mob. Fear it more than death. Death comes once and you are at peace. Love comes once, and torments you forever after.”

The young man said, “Then you regret your love for Layli?”

Majnun said, “Not for an instant. The caterpillar does not long for its wings. The infant does not crave adulthood. Yet from the chrysalis, the caterpillar will emerge



*Death comes once
and you are at peace.
Love comes once and
torments you forever
after.*

beautiful and transformed. Adulthood will come, and whether you hide from it or not, it will claim you. If love fills your heart, you are changed. Like Paul on the road to Damascus, that terrible epiphany will blind you and you will never again be as you were. Like Balaam's path to the angel, if you come too close you will lose your head. Like fire, love will destroy and consume you. You will become kindling, and you will draw breath only to fan its flames."

The young man said, "How can you say these things and still be worthy of love?"

Majnun said, "I have said that you cannot escape it. I have said that it will find you. But, in truth, when love enters the heart, you will run to it. I lit a lantern once and saw that its fire consumed a hundred moths. I said to

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the flame, 'You should be ashamed. Do you see the destruction you bring to those living creatures?' The flame said, 'I did not call them out; when they became aware of me, they threw themselves upon me, knowing how it would end. They are the ones who should be ashamed, yet I pity them and allow them union with me.'

"If love appears before you, you will not need my instruction, for love is my master and I know nothing except what it has taught me."



*That the Lover Sees Only the Face of the
Beloved*

Love changes all perception; it opens your eyes to the beloved and blinds you to everything else.

Balamah, the queen of Sheba, left Solomon to return to her land and her kingdom. Nine months after her departure, she gave birth to Solomon's son who is remembered by the name Menyelek. As Menyelek grew older, he came more and more to resemble his father. The people remarked on the

beauty of this heir to Balamah's throne, but did not know Solomon. Neither the people nor Menyelek himself knew the identity of his father. When Menyelek was still very young, he asked his mother, "Who is my father?" Balamah told her son that his father was a foreign king, but she would not say his name. As he grew older, Menyelek asked a second time. Again, she refused to say his name. After Menyelek came of age, he asked her a third time, but Balamah refused to speak with him, or even allow him in her presence. At every approach, her guards turned the prince of Sheba away.

Menyelek spoke with his friends and said to them, "I am a prince and the only heir to the throne, but my mother will not see me or speak to me of my father. Since

she will not tell me his name, only that he is a foreign king, I am leaving to find him.”

Balamah’s attendants saw Menyelek and his friends preparing to leave the city. They informed their queen, who came down from her throne and left her palace. She found Menyelek on horseback at the gates of the city. She said, “Come down and I will tell you whatever you want to know.”

Menyelek obeyed and dismounted. She said to him, “Don’t go. Some harm might befall you. Jacob would never have allowed Joseph to leave if he knew he would lose the son of the woman he loved.”

Menyelek said, “Jacob let Joseph go, and it was all for good. And Joseph was restored to his father. Allow me to be restored to mine.”

Balamah said, “The people think you are handsome like my father was. But you do not resemble my family. Your features are exactly as I remember your father. You have grown to resemble him closely. It is difficult for me to look on you without thinking of him and those thoughts are painful. That is why I didn’t want to see you. I didn’t tell you his name, because the sound of that name is a torment to me.”

Menyelek said, “Why can’t you say his name? Did he wound you so deeply? Did he dishonor or disgrace you?”

Balamah smiled and said, “No, it is because I loved him but could not be with him. I love him today as much as I did when he first spoke to me, when I first saw him on his

throne. He was strong and handsome and very wise.” She caressed Menyelek’s face as though remembering Solomon. She said, “I will tell you his name if you will promise to stay here.”

Menyelek said, “I have set my mind on seeing him and speaking with him. If you tell me, I will visit his kingdom directly and return to Sheba. I promise it. If you refuse, I will wander in search of him and may never return.”

Balamah held out a ring, which Solomon had given her, and said, “He did not know I was pregnant when I left him to return home. If you show him this ring, he will know you are his son.” Menyelek took the ring in his hand and read the Hebrew

letters upon it. Balamah said, "Give him this message from me," and she whispered a few words into his ear.

As Menyelek remounted his horse, Balamah said to him, "Your father is Solomon, the king of Israel and a prophet of God."

After a difficult journey, Menyelek arrived in Jerusalem with his retinue. The people saw him and whispered about him. Many mistook him for Solomon and wondered at the magic that had restored the king's youth. Solomon also saw him from his palace and said to Benaiah, "That is the son of Balamah. Bring him before me." Benaiah came out to greet him and said, "The king awaits you, prince of Sheba."

Menyelek entered his father's palace, near the temple Solomon had built for God.

Solomon came down from his throne smiling and greeted him, “Welcome, son of Balamah.”

Menyelek embraced him and called him father. Solomon was surprised at this and said, “You are my son?”

Benaiah said to the king, “Do you not see his perfect resemblance to you?”

Menyelek showed him the ring Balamah had given him. Solomon said, “Does your mother have a message for me?”

Menyelek whispered in his ear. “Before I left, she asked me to tell you, ‘Those who love see in all good things the face of the beloved. In your son I see only the face of Solomon; in his words I hear only Solomon’s voice; in his smile, I see only the

*Those who love see
in all good things
the face of the beloved.*



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happiness of my beloved king. What do you see in your son?”

Solomon took Menyelek by the shoulders and said to him, “Tell her that I saw only the face of Balamah, the queen I loved.”



That Love Surrenders Pride and Station

Love consumes us and humbles us. When Jesus ascended into Heaven, he was barred from God's presence. Jesus said, "What have I done?" The Angel of God said, "You have a needle in your pocket; only once you cast that away are you worthy of His presence." Jesus tossed the needle away and said, "I had given up all things in life; I had thrown aside all the joys and pleasures of this world and yet even a needle prevented my entry

here. Imagine what happens to those who come still proud.”

Remember the story of Joseph and Zuleika, who was Potiphar’s wife. Joseph was a servant in her household and she fell in love with him. He rejected her advances. She considered this a terrible insult and punished him for it. She bore witness falsely against him and he was imprisoned. In time, Joseph was released, but she remained a prisoner of her desire. Her husband divorced her and she was penniless and lived on the streets where once she had been carried on her couch. She begged at every door and performed manual labor for her suppers. Her body was emaciated, her clothes were rags, she was unclean and her beauty was gone. At last, she lost her pride

and asked for an audience with Joseph, who now wielded Pharaoh's power.

She stood before Joseph and could barely speak with him or look upon his beautiful face. He said, "Do you remember, when I was a servant in your household, the women of Egypt gossiped about us? They said, 'Look how she has fallen, to lay with a Hebrew slave.'"

Zuleika said, "I remember. I brought those fine ladies into my house and set paring knives and sweet fruits before them. When I brought you out to show them the one I loved, they were amazed and, distracted by your beauty, they cut their hands with the knives I had provided them. They said to me, 'You are blameless. He is a beautiful angel.'"

Joseph said, "You told them that you loved me and that if I would not sleep with you, you would throw me in prison."

Zuleika said, "I wronged you and I repent that. But I do not repent loving you."

Joseph said, "I was tempted to sleep with you. But you did not love me as you say."

Zuleika protested, "How can you say this? There has never been one who has loved another as I love you. Look at what I sacrificed in the name of this love. I have lost my husband, my fortune, my friends, and my reputation! Even my pride is gone; here I am before you, without defense."

Joseph said, "You desired me, yes. But did you love me or did you love the idea that you might catch the scent of me on your bedclothes? The others forgot themselves in

my presence and cut their hands in amazement. But your hand was untouched and you thought only of wounding me.”

Zuleika said, “I was selfish in my love; but now here I am before you, loving you without expectation. I did you no harm. But I am ruined. The wounds they inflicted on themselves have healed. But the wound you inflicted on me does not heal.”

Joseph rose up before her and placed his hand upon her. He said, “What if I could heal you of love?”

She fell away from him and said, “I will not renounce my love for you, whatever the price.” When she said this, Joseph kissed her mouth and she was transformed, her beauty was restored. She said to him, “I would have loved you forever without reward.”

*I am ruined. The
wounds they inflicted on
themselves have healed.*

*But the wound you
inflicted on me does not
heal.*



Joseph said, "When you had given up all hope of Paradise, you arrived at that instant in Paradise."

When Muhammad was still a young man, before God revealed the Quran to him, he was a merchant. The wealthier households of Mecca sometimes hired Muhammad to act as their agent and to trade their goods in neighboring cities. Although Muhammad did not become wealthy himself, he was well liked for his hard work, his scrupulous honesty, and his good character. One day, the lady Khadijah asked to speak with him, to hire him to sell her merchandise in Busra. Khadijah was a wealthy and beautiful woman, widowed twice, and sought in marriage by many in Mecca. Yet she refused every proposal and prized her independence

above all things. She was shrewd and wise and guarded her wealth carefully. However, when she spoke with Muhammad, she was impressed by him and felt strangely vulnerable to this handsome youth. In his presence she was distracted and her face became flushed.

Khadijah hired him to trade her goods in Syria. Because she did not trust her heart, she sent Maysrah, a faithful servant, to accompany Muhammad on the way to Syria. Khadijah spoke to Maysrah privately and said, "Watch Muhammad closely and tell me, when you return, if he is true to his reputation."

After several months, Muhammad returned from Syria and Maysrah reported to Khadijah. He said, "Muhammad is known

as honest and trustworthy. I would add to that. He is also wise and blessed by God. In Syria, he doubled your income in a single a trip. But this is nothing.” Maysrah then hesitated.

Khadijah said, “Tell me everything.”

Maysrah whispered, “As we traveled along the most barren and dangerous roads, the djinn who harass the caravans that travel through their lands greeted Muhammad with respect. He seemed to have authority over them, as Solomon did over their ancient fathers. And when the sun beat down upon us, angels shaded him and all of us who were in his presence.”

Khadijah said, “I felt his power even when I called him to speak with me and he sat humbly and quietly before me. He is a

simple merchant and I am his employer; yet I thought to myself at that moment that I would give away all my wealth and renounce my independence, and sell myself into slavery for him.”

Maysrah said, “You loved him from the moment you saw him.”

Khadijah asked to speak with Muhammad about another trip. When he sat before her again, she could not deny the feeling in her heart. She said, “You are wise, cousin. I have other commerce than this in mind, but I am fifteen years older than you and am afraid you might reject this other proposition.”

Muhammad said, “You are kind and honorable and you have a good heart. I cannot imagine that I would refuse you any-

thing that you ask of me. You are wealthy and beautiful. It is no surprise that prominent men have pursued you. I am a poor man and can offer you nothing more than you already have.”

Khadijah said, “I do not have you.”

Muhammad said, “Love is not commerce and I am no prize to be won. Why give up your freedom to obtain another husband?”

Khadijah said, “I won’t deny that I have guarded my independence. Yet I have found something better. When Jesus turned water to wine, who rejected the wine and demanded the return of water?”

Muhammad said, “Whatever future awaits me, I know that those I love will suffer most. Today you are wealthy and re-

*When Jesus turned
water to wine, who
rejected the wine and
demanded the return of
the water?*



spected. Tomorrow they may abuse your name and shun you.”

She said, “Let them shun me.”

He said, “What will you have gained by loving me?”

She said, “I will have gained you.”

After he accepted her proposal and they were married, Khadijah said to him, “You are right. Love is not commerce. I sought no profit except that you would love me and become my husband. I have not traded my pride, my honor, or my good name to be your wife. Yet I would gladly sacrifice all these things, and a hundred others, to make you lawful to me.”



That the Lover Exceeds Propriety

Sakhr was a demon in the service of Solomon. He possessed great strength and shrewd intellect and was considered a chief among the demons and the djinn.

When Sakhr first fell under Solomon's power, Solomon told him, "After you and the demons and the djinn who obey you complete the building of the temple, I will set you free." But the completion of the temple came and went and Sakhr was not set free. During this time Sakhr fell in love

with the most beautiful of the king's wives. Her name was Aminah and she was the daughter of Pharaoh.

Sakhr, who hoped to seduce Aminah, was disappointed to find that she was much in love with Solomon and would not betray him. To be near Aminah without drawing suspicion to himself, Sakhr disguised himself as a maidservant in Solomon's household. He attended to Solomon's wives and became a confidant of many of them, including Aminah. Thus Sakhr kept his identity concealed from Aminah and conspired to break the bonds of affection between King Solomon and his beautiful wife.

Aminah, who had been born to Pharaoh and raised in Egypt, wished to worship the gods in the manner of her people. She asked

Solomon to worship with her and showed him her idols. Solomon was repulsed by this and said, "I will not worship false gods. Destroy these idols. They are not permitted in my house."

The daughter of Pharaoh was offended but said nothing more. Secretly she continued her worship and her attendants, including Sakhr, joined her in idolatry. They kept this knowledge from Solomon. Still, she wished her husband to make obeisance to the gods of her fathers.

Sakhr, appearing to Aminah as one of her servants, said, "I know a way to win Solomon's heart. Leave it to me. If you will follow my instructions, Solomon will divorce his other wives and become wholly devoted to you. To please you, he will gladly wor-

ship as you worship and will love no other woman as completely as he loves you.”

Aminah was delighted and said, “Tell me what I must do.”

So Sakhr dressed Aminah in clothing that had once belonged to Balamah, the queen of Sheba. Because the daughter of Pharaoh was more beautiful than Balamah, Sakhr draped a veil over Aminah’s face to conceal her features. He then took the perfume that Balamah had given as a gift to Solomon when she left Jerusalem. He placed a droplet of that perfume upon her breast and said, “Go into Solomon’s bedchamber and he will obey your every whim. Only, do not reveal your face and do not speak except in a whisper.”

Aminah went into Solomon's bedchamber, where he lay sleeping. The daughter of Pharaoh whispered his name and woke him. When Solomon saw her in the dim light and smelled her fragrance, he forgot where he was and the many years that had gone by and he mistook her for Balamah. She took his hand and led him to the room where she kept her idols. When she bowed to them, he bowed with her. When she offered them incense, he did likewise. Overjoyed, Pharaoh's daughter kissed Solomon and thanked him. Solomon smiled upon her and drew her toward him. But when he drew her veil aside, though her features were dark like Balamah's, he saw that she was not the queen of Sheba, but was his own

wife. He said, "You are not Balamah!" He turned again to the idols and realized what he had done. He cried out and said, "Why did you do this to me?" He took the idols in his hands and smashed them.

Pharaoh's daughter began to cry. He demanded, "Are you crying because you deceived me or because I broke your idols?"

She said, "I am crying because you loved Balamah enough to worship her idols; but when you saw that they belonged to me, your lawful wife, you broke them without hesitation. It was not the idols you loved, but Balamah. It was not the idols you destroyed, but me."

With Pharaoh's daughter, Solomon was a righteous believer; with Balamah he would have been a willing apostate.



*With Pharaoh's
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If you say Solomon was deceived and would never knowingly worship idols, remember the story of his father and mother. After King David had conspired to kill Uriah and had taken Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, as his own, the Prophet Nathan accused David of sin. Nathan said to the king, "When Bathsheba became pregnant with your child, you brought Uriah back from the field of battle. You hoped that he would lie with his wife so that when her pregnancy began to show, he would imagine that the child was his. But he refused to return to his home and to sleep with his wife while his comrades remained in the field and while Israel was still in danger. Again, you tried to persuade him to go to his wife and you made him drunk to weaken his resolve. Again, he

refused. Because of his duty to Israel, Uriah surely would discover that his wife had been faithless and had slept with the king he had served and for whom he had sacrificed. Therefore, you allowed him to die in battle and stole his wife from him.”

David said, “Who are you to speak to me of my intentions and my motives? Yes, I have sinned against God and have done what displeased Him, but you are not God and you cannot see into my heart. I brought Uriah out of danger and told him to go to his home and be with his wife. He refused and said to me, ‘How can I lie with her when my duty is to the nation, to the army, and to the king?’ It is true that I made him drunk at my table so that he would wish to see his home again and be with Bathsheba. I gave

him wine to peer into his heart that his love for Bathsheba might become apparent. But again he refused. This is faithlessness. If he loved her as I love her, he would have put aside his duties to be with the one he loves. There was no love in him and I accounted him already dead. God put love for Bathsheba in my heart; God took Uriah's life."

Nathan said, "These are the devil's excuses! You should feel shame for what you have done."

David said, "You are right, these are excuses for the wrong I have done and I am ashamed. I beg God forgiveness for this terrible sin and He would be right to strike me dead. Yet even as I acted, I knew that I was in error. God might have stopped me; I am grateful that He did not. I do not ac-



When love enters your heart, good may be your ally, but so may evil, and you shall embrace either if it brings you to the beloved's door and into her embrace.

cuse Him of my sins as Iblis does. Nathan, I acknowledge that He has power over all things and I thank Him for allowing me to take the one I love as my wife. When love enters your heart, good may be your ally, but so may evil, and you shall embrace either if it brings you to the beloved's door and into her embrace."



That Love's Loss Is Death

Shirin, the daughter of the king, possessed remarkable beauty and, unlike her father, she was virtuous and kind. Her face ravished the moon, and her eyes shone more brightly than the sun. Around that beautiful face her hair hung in golden ringlets. Her form was lissome, young and fresh as a blade of green grass, supple and lithe as a doe. No man saw her who did not desire her.

Like a hundred other men who had seen Shirin, Farhad fell in love with her, but kept

his love a secret. He was a stonecutter and had no hope of marrying the king's daughter. He did not reveal his love to the object of his love, but went into the mountains where he played his flute and composed songs in honor of his beloved. One day, Shirin heard the music in the mountains and asked Farhad for whom he played. Farhad said, "I play for the one I love." Shirin realized that he played for her and kissed him without shame.

When the king heard this stonecutter had enchanted his daughter, he was indignant. He and his ministers devised a plan to keep these lovers apart. The king told Farhad that he could marry Shirin if he would cut a mountain in two and bring a river be-

tween them. Farhad eagerly undertook this task and, within two years, had nearly accomplished what the king and his ministers assumed no one man could accomplish. The king, fearing this stonecutter would complete the passage and would claim Shirin as his wife, devised a second plan. This time he sent a messenger to Farhad to prevent him from completing the passage through the mountain. He sent an old woman who went to Farhad weeping. Farhad asked her, "Why are you crying?" She said, "I weep for the dead." Farhad said, "Then why come to me? I am still among the living." She said, "The one you love, the princess Shirin, has died."

Farhad, believing this deception, said, "I have labored all this time to build my tomb."

His grief overwhelmed him and he fell from the mountain to his death.

When Gabriel spoke to Mary, she said, “How will I have a son when no man has touched me?” Gabriel said, “That is easy for Us.” The son was God’s offering of love and his death was love’s self-sacrifice.

In love, Farhad was the greatest and mightiest of men; the task appointed by the king, however impossible to mortal men, was easy for him. Yet when love escaped his grasp, his strength deserted him and his legs could no longer carry him.

Delilah said to Samson, “How can you say that you love me when you refuse to confide in me the secret of your strength?”

Samson said, “Because you love me, I will tell you. My hair is the secret of my



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strength. If my hair were cut, then I would be as weak as any other man.”

While Samson slept, Delilah cut his hair and the Philistines seized him. He awoke, but was powerless to resist them; his strength had left him entirely.

The Philistines scourged Samson and tore out his eyes. Before the Philistines took him to Gaza, Samson asked to speak with Delilah, the woman he loved. Samson said to her, “I deserve this treatment for lying to you about the source of my strength.”

Delilah said, “When did you lie? You said that your hair was the secret of your strength. I cut your hair and your strength left you.”

Samson said, “When I awoke and the Philistines were upon me, I could have

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killed them. But I knew that you had cut my hair. When I knew your love was false, my joy became despair and my strength became weakness.”



That Love Forgives All Things

The Prophet Hosea said to God, “Israel has sinned against You. She has taken foreign gods into her bed and has violated Your trust and has transgressed Your laws. Yet You bear this patiently! You should abandon her and find a people worthy of Your love and Your blessings.”

The Angel of God said, “You should not berate God for your inability to understand, or question His choice. He is not to be asked.”

Hosea said, “Open my eyes, O Lord. Give me understanding.”

But no understanding filled Hosea’s heart until, some time later, he met the girl Gomer in the market. She was purchasing grain and fruits with silver coins taken, but recently, from the hands of other men.

When Hosea saw her, his heart became her captive. When she spoke, his heart was transported. Her voice was sweet and angelic. Her eyes were like the eyes of the houris. Her form and her movements were graceful and pleasing.

She knew that Hosea was a prophet, and was shy and ashamed in his presence. He said to her, “Lady, come with me and become my lawful wife. Abandon all this and become the mistress of my house and the

mother of my children and I will love you and bless you with every honor.”

Gomer was flattered by this talk and accepted his proposal. After they were married and she bore him several children, Hosea boasted, “I have reformed her and saved her from prostitution, shame, and disrepute.” But the Angel of God said, “She is restless and will leave you.” Hosea was horrified and said, “Do not let her leave me; I have given her my heart entirely and could not bear it.”

The Angel said, “What if I revealed to you that the children she has given you, whom you love so much, are the children of other men?”

Hosea was crushed and said nothing more. For a long while he said nothing and,

when Gomer left him, as the Angel predicted, he did nothing. At last, he heard of her fate; she had been abused and abandoned by others, had been beaten, robbed, and left destitute. For her many debts, she sold herself into slavery. Hosea went to the market and found her, filthy and rejected, and purchased her. Back in his home, he washed her and dressed her in her finest gowns and restored her as his wife, though his neighbors mocked him for it. Gomer, who was ashamed, said, “I have taken other men into my bed and have violated your trust and humiliated you. Why have you purchased my freedom and saved me from the destruction I brought on myself?”

Hosea said, “You are my wife and you are the one I love. I had no choice; yet if I

had been given a choice, still I would choose you. You possess such beauty. Be beautiful. Become what you are, not what you imagine yourself to be, not what you have done before. You are not what your base desires and your mean imaginings have made you. Throw off those chains; grasp the gift of His key to you and become as He has made you. With that key, unlock the door to the prison you have made for yourself. He awaits you beneath the canopy of grace and power, in the shade of His love.”

Surely you have heard the story of King Shahryar who discovered his wife’s infidelity. He was so enraged by her betrayal that he executed her and swore a binding oath that every day he would espouse a girl, take her virginity at night, and strike off her head

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in the morning. This, he reasoned, was his rightful revenge upon womankind and was likewise the only way he could be assured that no woman could again betray him and play him false.

After three years and more than a thousand wives, the king's vizier was no longer able to procure for his king a new wife and momentary queen. The king's subjects hid their daughters away and cursed their king with terrible curses and it was assumed that the wrath of God would be upon this king. When the king heard the curses of the people, he laughed, saying, "No curse they hurl at me is more terrible than the curse of a faithless wife or a whore for a queen."

The vizier's daughter, Shahrazad, told her father, "I will be the king's wife this

evening.” But the vizier refused. Shahrazad said, “If you bring him no wife tonight, he may take your head tomorrow in her place. Don’t worry. I will not die at his hands. Either I will ensnare him or, failing this, I will do with him as Judith with Holofernes.”

The vizier relented and offered his daughter to the king. To the vizier’s surprise, however, the king did not put Shahrazad to death the next morning, or on any morning thereafter. Three years passed and the king preserved Shahrazad while she told him wondrous stories. And during this time, Shahrazad fell in love with the king whom she hoped to ensnare and deceive. When she told him the last of her stories, the king said, “You have not tricked me. I know the purpose of your stories, to put me off and

to cause me to break my oath. But I wonder why you did not put an end to me rather than entertaining me for so long? Surely you hate me for having done what I have done. Surely you know that I am damned and that the wrath of God is upon me. Yet I have slept a thousand nights within your reach and you have spared me though you had no reason to expect that, in the morning, I would spare you.”

Shahrazad said, “It is true. Had I avenged womankind by striking your head from your body, the people would have acclaimed me queen in your place and would have torn down your monuments and rejoiced at my accession. It is true that on any night you slept in our bed, my sister Dunyazad could have held the basket as I cut the head from

your body. Yes, Pharaoh wronged Moses, but the firstborn of Egypt perished for it. So too did one woman betray you and yet you slaughtered a thousand other women. What you have done is shameful and monstrous. You became a slave to revenge against the single woman who wounded you. Yet I am in love's service. Those thousand maidens you slaughtered, those momentary queens of your kingdom, even now they are in Paradise, martyrs in His court and friends to the afflicted. But to be with you, I forgo the rewards of martyrdom and renounce the joys of Paradise, except that I am by your side. With you I am happy and my every wish fulfilled."

When Shahryar heard this, he said, "I renounce my revenge and my oath. How is



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of martyrdom and
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am by your side.*

it that I have committed such evil and yet He has allowed you to love me? How is it that I have slaughtered innocents and am forgiven and loved even before I sought redemption?”

Shahrazad said, “His mercy outstrips His anger and His love forgives all.”



*That Here You May Have Glimpsed
the Beloved; That Here You May Have
Caught His Scent*

Do you seek proof of God? Do you seek proof of love when you have fallen in love? All arguments against love, how quickly you put them aside, as a young woman puts away the dolls of her childhood, when love enters the heart. So too will you embrace God, without reference to the reasonable and rational arguments of your intellect and the legerdemain of your wit, when His gaze

falls on you. If a man, falling in love, rejects the foundations upon which love exists, he then denies the feeling that he cannot hope to deny. He is like Balaam; the prophet who rejects the God through Whom he prophesies. And those sound arguments that refute love, likewise they refute God. Still, the very reasons that you might believe, to have faith, to submit without resistance or condition to love are no less true and compelling than believing in God, having faith in God, and submitting wholly and unconditionally to His decree.

Dissect the mind and, if you can, find the seat of Love. In the residence of reason and intellect you will not discover it. If rain falls on your house, you will not find clouds in your attic. If daylight warms your bed,



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you will not find the sun beneath the covers.
Dissect creation and you will not find God.

I came upon a dervish and I asked him if he would speak to me of Love. When I said this, he spun around and around and he vanished from my sight altogether. I sifted the dust to find a trace of him, but found only dust and felt only the currents of air subsiding around me. Love had set him in motion. The rest was entropy. Is it not the same with the universe? Love has set the worlds in motion. The spark of Love has ignited the sun. The pull of love keeps us near and we spin upon our axis and we spin around the sun, like a moth preserved in ecstasy. Do you feel the worlds moving? The sun rises and sets. The stars dance circles above us; the planets wander, as though lost, among

them; the moon, her face always upon us, spins steadily to fix her eyes upon the world she loves.

Najwah placed the pawn back in my hand and closed my fingers around it.

I said, "Remember when I read to you from my second book? I told you the story of Balamah and Solomon and how they parted and the gift that she left him."

She said, "I remember. We were sitting on your bed together. And when you finished reading, I kissed you for the first time."

I said, "I wrote that story of love as an allegory of love for God. Yet I needed to love you before I could understand what I had already written. I had gone through the motions; my counterfeit was nearly perfect.

Then you kissed me and transformed lead into gold.”

She said, “What we have done is wrong. Sweet words do not make it lawful.”

I said, “No one condemns the peacock for showing his colors, or the vulture for eating carrion. If the owl lingers in desolate places, or the nightingale sings sweetly, why praise them; why fault them? It is their nature to do so and this deserves neither praise nor blame. If how we feel is beyond all power to suppress, why are we at fault?”

Najwah smiled and said, “Don’t play Iblis’ part. You know that this is not so and that you are no bird nor is free will to be compared to animal instinct. To have this feeling in our hearts is not blameworthy. But to act upon this feeling when I am an-

other man's wife is a terrible wrong and deserves censure."

I said, "We can say whatever we please; nothing in the heart changes." With these words, Najwah's expression became sad. But as I drew closer to her, her eyes grew wide and then became heavy and her mouth opened a little, as if failing to put into words the trembling of her heart. I kissed her on the mouth and she responded to my kiss. I drew back and looked upon her. O Najwah, you are to him simply a wife and a mother to his children. To me, look what you become.

You have asked me why I love you, because you are ordinary and not beautiful. But in the eyes of the lover, you are extraordinary and you are most beautiful.

*O Najwah, you are to
him simply a wife and
a mother to his children.*

*To me, look what
you become.*



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I have not given you a game of chess. I have given you this book. If it finds favor with you, remember me in your prayers. My own prayers are thoughtless and selfish. Remember me and ask from Him that favor, which is surely His to grant, that my wish be fulfilled. Though I have been warned that I should not ask from God that which God does not want for me, I am heedless and am not my own master and must seek what my heart desires most in this world. And if this is not to be, pray that He forgive the one who loves you. The lures of love have led me astray.

I acknowledge my error and pray that He grant me what is best for me. After Hallaj was put to death, Jonaid said, "I approved the execution not because Hallaj

erred in belief, but because he was not permitted to announce it.” Najwah, I erred not because I loved you, but because I became your lover.



That Love Is Hidden Though Everywhere
Potent

Do you wonder at the power of this hidden mystery? Do you marvel at the value of this buried treasure? Does your heart swell with longing for it? Do you sigh in separation from it?

What is obvious to us is hidden from others. What our eyes take in is invisible to others. If they say, "It is hidden, so it has no substance," it is no less substantial. If they

say, “It is invisible, so it has no power,” there is no diminution of power.

What we see only in our hearts has no face, nor voice, nor presence before us, yet it ties us together as surely as irons and chains. Despite our thousand denials, if we peer behind the curtain, we learn the truth of this. Here I have pulled the veil aside and opened my eyes to Him. Even the road of unlawful love may lead to the valley of belief and the city of His unity.

