

Islam

The Qur'an and The Secret Rose Garden (excerpts)

Islam originated with the teachings of Muhammad. The Qur'an is believed to be the word of God revealed to Muhammad through the chief of angels, Gabriel, from 610 AD to 632 AD. Muslims believe in one God, the god of Abraham; they believe that the Qur'an is the uncorrupted, true word of God. Sufism is a mystic form of Islam that is thought by some to have originated in the seventh century in a region of modern day Iraq. Sufism is deeply spiritual, with a focus on the adherent personally experiencing God within the heart. Sufism is known for its poetry. The Secret Rose Garden is a beautiful example of a Sufi poetic work, written circa 1275 AD.



The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Israel

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The Qur'an Chapter II: The Chapter of the Heifer Translated by E.H. Palmer (1880) (excerpt)

IN the name of the merciful and compassionate God.

A. L. M. That is the book! there is no doubt therein; a guide to the pious, who believe in the unseen, and are steadfast in prayer, and of what we have given them expend in alms; who believe in what is revealed to thee, and what was revealed before thee, and of the hereafter they are sure. These are in guidance from their Lord, and these are the prosperous. [5] Verily, those who misbelieve, it is the same to them if ye warn them or if ye warn them not, they will not believe. God has set a seal upon their hearts and on their hearing; and on their eyes is dimness, and for them is grievous woe. And there are those among men who say, 'We believe in God and in the last day;' but they do not believe. They would deceive God and those who do believe; but they deceive only themselves and they do not perceive. In their hearts is a sickness, and God has made them still more sick, and for them is grievous woe because they lied. [10] And when it is said to them, 'Do not evil in the earth,' they say, 'We do but what is right.' Are not they the evildoers? and yet they do not perceive. And when it is said to them, 'Believe as other men believe,' they say, 'Shall we believe as fools believe?' 'Are not they themselves the fools? and yet they do not know. And when they meet those who believe, they say, 'We do believe;' but when they go aside with their devils, they say, 'We are with you; we were but mocking!' God shall mock at them and let them go on in their rebellion, blindly wandering on.

[15] Those who buy error for guidance, their traffic profits not, and they are not guided. Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindles a fire; and when it lights up all around, God goes off with their light, and leaves them in darkness that they cannot see. Deafness, dumbness, blindness, and they shall not return! Or like a storm-cloud from the sky, wherein is darkness and thunder and lightning; they put their fingers in their ears at the thunder-clap, for fear of death, for God encompasses the misbelievers. The lightning well-nigh snatches off their sight, whenever it shines for them they walk therein; but when it is dark for them they halt; and if God willed He would go off with their hearing and their sight; verily, God is mighty over all.

O ye folk! serve your Lord who created you and those before you; haply ye may fear! [20] who made the earth for you a bed and the heaven a dome; and sent down from heaven water, and brought forth therewith fruits as a sustenance for you; so make no peers for God, the while ye know!

And if ye are in doubt of what we have revealed unto our servant, then bring a chapter like it, and call your witnesses other than God if ye tell truth. But if ye do it not, and ye shall surely do it not, then fear the fire whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for misbelievers. But bear the glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that for them are gardens beneath which rivers flow; whenever they are provided with fruit therefrom they say, 'This is what we were provided with before,' and they shall be provided with the like; and there are pure wives for them therein, and they shall dwell therein for aye.

Why, God is not ashamed to set forth a parable of a gnat, or anything beyond; and as for those who believe, they know that it is truth from the Lord; but as for those who disbelieve, they say, 'What is it that God means by this as a parable? He leads astray many and He guides many;'--but He leads astray only the evildoers; [25] who break God's covenant after the fixing thereof, and cut asunder what God has ordered to be joined, and do evil in the earth;--these it is who lose.

How can ye disbelieve in God, when ye were dead and He made you alive, and then He will kill you and then make you alive again, and then to Him will ye return? It is He who created for you all that is in the earth, then he made for the heavens and fashioned them seven heavens; and He knows all things.

The Secret Rose Garden
Sa'd Ud Din Mahmud Shabistari
Translated by Florence Lederer (1920)
(excerpt)

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

PART I
THE PERFECT FACE OF THE BELOVED

THE EYE AND THE LIP

WHAT is the nature of the eye and the lip?
Let us consider.

Coquettish and intoxicating glances shine from His eye.
The essence of existence issues from His ruby lip.
Hearts burn with desire because of His eye,
And are healed again by the smile of His lip.

Because of His eye hearts are aching and drunken.
His ruby lip gives soul-garments to men.
His eye does not perceive this visible world,
Yet often His lip quivers with compassion.

Sometimes He charms us with a touch of humanity,
And gives help to the despairing.
It is His smile that gives life to man's water and clay;
It is His breath that opens heaven's gate for us.
A corn-baited snare is each glance of that eye,
And a wine-shop lurks in each corner.

When He frowns the wide world is laid waste,
But is restored every moment by His kiss.
Our blood is at fever point because of His eye,
Our souls demented because of His lip.

How He has despoiled our hearts by a frown!
How He has uplifted our souls by a smile!
If you ask of Him an embrace,
His eye will say "Yea," His lip "Nay."
He finished the creation of the world by a frown,
Now and then the soul is revived by a kiss.
We would give up our lives with despair at His frown,
But would rise from the dead at his kiss.

. . . When the world meditates on His eye and His lip,
It yields itself to the intoxication of wine.

THE MOLE

THE single point of the mole in His cheek
Is a centre from which circles
A circumference.
The two worlds circle round that centre.
The heart and soul of Adam evolved from there.

. . . Hearts bleed because they are a reflection
Of the point of that black mole,
And both are stagnant; for there is no escape
Of the reflection from the reflect.

Unity will not embrace Plurality,
For the point of Unity has one root only.

. . . I wonder if His mole is the reflection of my heart,
Or my heart the reflection of His mole.
Was my heart created from His mole's reflection?
Or may it be seen shining in His mole?
I wonder if my heart is in His face,
Or if His mole abides in my heart.
But this is a deep secret hidden, alas! from me.

. . . If my heart is a reflection,
Why is it ever so changing?

Sometimes tired like His brilliant eye,
Sometimes waving to and fro as His curl waves,
Sometimes a shining moonbeam like His face,
Sometimes a dark shadow like His mole,
Sometimes it is a mosque, sometimes a synagogue,
Sometimes a hell, sometimes a heaven,
Sometimes soaring above the seventh heaven,
Sometimes buried far below this earth.

. . . After a spell the devotee and ascetic
Turns again to wine, lamp, and beauty.

THE CURL

IF you ask of me the long story
Of the Beloved's curl,
I cannot answer, for it contains a mystery
Which only true lovers understand,
And they, maddened by its beauty,

Are held captive as by a golden chain.
I spoke too openly of that graceful form,
But the end of the curl told me to hide its glory,
So that the path to it should be twisted
And crooked and difficult.

That curl enchains lovers' hearts,
And bears their souls to and fro
In the sea of desire. A hundred thousand hearts
Are tightly bound, not one escapes, alas!

No single infidel would remain in the world
If he could see the shaking aside
Of those black curls,
And on the earth there would not remain a faithful soul
If they were always in their place.
Suppose they were shorn. . . . No matter,
Day would increase and the night disappear.

As a spider spreads its nets to ensnare,
So does the Beloved in wantonness
Shake His locks from off His face.

Behold His hands plundering Reason's caravan
And with knots binding it tight.

Never at rest is that curl,
Ever moving to and fro
Making now night, making now morning,
Playing with the seasons in wonder.

Adam was created when the perfume of that
amber-scented curl
Was blown by the wind on his clay.

And I too possess an ensample;
I cannot wait for a moment,
But breathlessly start working anew
To tear my heart out of my breast.
. . . Sore troubled am I by that curl
Which veils my longing soul from His face.

THE CHEEK AND THE DOWN

THE theatre of Divine beauty is the cheek,
And the down is the entrance to His holy presence.
Beauty is erased by His cheek, who says,
"Without my presence you are non-existent."
In the unseen world the down is as green meadows
Leading to the mansion of Eternal Life.
The blackness of His curl turns day into night,
The down of His cheek holds the secret of life.
If only you can glimpse His face and its down,
You will understand the meaning of plurality and unity.
His curl will teach you the knowledge of this world,
His down will reveal hidden paths.

Imagine seven verses in which each letter
Contains oceans of mysteries;
Such is His cheek.
And imagine, hidden beneath each hair of His cheek,
Thousands of oceans of mysteries;
Such is His down.
As the heart is God's throne in the water,
So is the down the ornament of the soul.

PART II BEAUTY

THE MARRIAGE OF THE SOUL

DESCENDING to the earth,
That strange intoxicating beauty of the unseen world
Lurks in the elements of Nature.

And the soul of man,
Who has attained the rightful balance,
Becoming aware of this hidden joy,
Straightway is enamoured and bewitched.

And from this mystic marriage are born
The poets' songs, inner knowledge,
The language of the heart, virtuous living,
And the fair child Beauty.

And the Great Soul gives to man as dowry
The hidden glory of the world.

THE CHARM OF BEAUTY

FROM the unseen world descends
Heavenly beauty,
And plants its flag in the city
Of earthly fairness,
Throwing the world's array into confusion;
Now riding the steed of comeliness,
Now flourishing the sword of eloquence,
And all alike bow down,
Saints and kings, dervishes and prophets,
Swayed by the charm of Beauty's fascination.

EARTHLY BEAUTY

WHENCE the charm of a fair face?
Not earthly beauty only
Can so allure us with its loveliness.
Perchance we see in this, as in a cloudy mirror,
The far faint reflect of the Perfect Face.
And these deep feelings of delight and wonder
Can only issue from the One True Beauty,
For in Divine Perfection there is no other partner.
Nor is it all desire and lust that tempts men's hearts with longing.
. . . Evil appears but as the other side of Truth.

PART XIV THE LIGHT MANIFEST

THE LIGHT

THE Light which is manifest
Leads all hearts captive,
Now as the minstrel, now as the cupbearer.

What a singer is He who, by one strain of sweet melody,
Burns the harvests of a hundred devotees!
What a cupbearer is He who, by a single goblet,
Inebriates two hundred threescore and ten!

Entering the Mosque at dawn,
He leaves there no wakeful man;
Entering the cloister at night,
He makes a fable of Sūfis' tales;

Entering the college veiled as a drunkard,
The professor becomes hopelessly drunken.

Devotees go mad for love of Him
And become outcasts from house and home,
He makes one faithful, another an infidel,
Disturbing the world.
Taverns have been glorified by His lips,
Mosques have become shining by His cheek.

All I desire I have found in Him,
Gaining deliverance from self,
My heart was ignorant of itself,
Veiled from Him by a hundred veils
Of vanity, conceit, and illusion.

THE VISIT

ONE day at the dawn
The fair idol entered my door
And woke me from my sleep
Of slothful ignorance.
The secret chamber of my soul
Was illumined by His face,
And my being was revealed to me
In its true light.
I heaved a sigh of wonder
When I saw that fair face.
He spoke to me, saying,
"All thy life thou has sought
Name and fame;
This self-seeking of thine
Is an illusion, keeping thee back from Me.
To glance at My face for an instant
Is worth a thousand years of devotion."

Yes, the face of that world-adorned
Was shown unveiled before mine eyes;
My soul was darkened with shame
To remember my lost life,
My wasted days.

THE GIFT

THEN that moon
Whose face shone like the sun,
Seeing I had cast hope away,
Filled a goblet of Divine Knowledge
And, passing to me, bade me drink,
Saying, "With this wine,
Tasteless and odourless,
Wash away the writing
On thy being's tablet."

THE EFFECT OF THE DRAUGHT

INTOXICATED from the pure draught
Which I had drained to the dregs,
In the bare dust I fell.
Since then I know not if I exist or not,
But I am not sober, neither am I ill or drunken.
Sometimes, like His eye, I am full of joy,
Or, like His curl, I am waving;
Sometimes, alas! from habit or nature,
I am lying on a dust heap.
Sometimes, at a glance from Him,
I am back in the Rose Garden.

EPILOGUE

THIS bouquet of scented blossoms
I have plucked from that garden,
And have called it "The Secret Rose Garden."
In it are blooming
Roses of the mysteries of the heart
Untold before;
In it the tongues of the lilies are all singing,
And the eyes of the narcissus behold all, far and near.
Gaze on each one of these with your heart's eyes
Till your doubts melt away.
You will see tradition, earthly and mystical truths,
All arranged clearly in knowledge of detail.
Do not seek with cold eyes to find blemishes,
Or the roses will turn to thorns as you gaze.
Ingratitude is a sign of ignorance,
For those who know the truth are thankful.
When you remember me, breathe "Mercy be upon him."
I am ending with my own name,
"O Allah, grant me a 'Lauded' end."