

The Stages of the Soul Through the Path of Perfection: The *Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return* (Seyr al-‘Ibād ilā al-Ma‘ād)

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The Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return (Seyr al-‘Ibād ilā al-Ma‘ād) is an allegory *mathnavi* that suggests a man’s spiritual purification through a deeper understanding of creation, the influence of the planets, and the four elements on his thoughts and behaviors. Their effect will change a man’s life after his death if he does not control them. By taming the negative traits, he may enjoy the bliss of paradise if he does not control them, and may enter into the fire of hell. This mystical/literary work offers practical methods that may eliminate negative traits in an individual’s soul if he practices them. The poet emphasizes the necessity of following a master who guides the pupil through a spiritual journey to achieve perfection and become one with the Creator.

Keywords: mystical, cosmology, single elements, compound elements, universal reason, rational soul, microcosm, macrocosm, master, spiritual perfection, planets

Introduction

The Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return (Seyr al-‘Ibād ilā al-Ma‘ād) is a Gnostic *mathnavi* composed by the prominent Persian poet, Sanā’ī of Ġazna. His name is recorded Mjdūd ibn Adam al-Ġaznavi (480/1084-525/1131). By 494/1101, he started his career as a young professional poet. Sanā’ī composed both religious and mystic poems and dedicated them to the people belonging to the religious class. For instance, he dedicated his allegorical *mathnavi* of *Seyr al-‘Ibād ilā al-Ma‘ād* to Sayf al-Din Abu al-Mafāker Muhammad ibn Mansūr who was his patron as well as his spiritual guide. An influential work of Sanā’ī is the mystical *mathnavi* of *Hadiqat al-Haqiqa va Tariqat al Šari‘ah* (The Garden of Truth and the Path of Religion). Besides *Hadiqat al-Haqiqa*, Sanā’ī wrote *Fakri Nāma*, *Kārnāma-ye balk*, *‘Aql Nāma* and *Tahrimat al-Qalam*, and *Tariq al-Tahqiq* (Lewis, 1995).

Sanā’ī in his *Seyr al-‘Ibād ilā al-Ma‘ād* portrayed man’s worldly life as a journey that starts from the time of conception and ends in his death. Therefore, each person in a certain period of his life has to purify his soul to come in union with God. The poet uses figurative language to attract the reader’s attention to the importance of developing man’s mind through understanding the symbols. There is an analogy between the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels of the world. If a man understands the natural symbols of the world, he will know himself and the world, and as a result, he will know God. The poet portrays the structure of the world based on

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the medieval view of the structure of the world. For instance, he depicts the hierarchy of being that starts from God and continues with his creations. Firstly, the universal reason ('*aql-e kull*). Secondly, the universal soul (*nafs-e kull*) the chain of creation, ends in the creation of man. The whole universe returns to God in a way or another.

In this article, I will focus on depicting the concept of journey in the Gnostic *mathnavi* of *Seyr al-'Ibād ilā al-ma'ād* corrected by Muhammad Taqi-ye Mudares-e Razavi. In the first part, I will examine the medieval cosmology that represents the generation of the world from four single elements (*mufradāt*), cold, hot, moist, and dry. Their mixture generates four compound elements (*murakabāt*): fire, air, water, and earth. The chain of creation continues by the creation of man as the last creature. What follows this part immediately is the explanation of the structure of the world based on medieval cosmology. The first entity is Creator, who created the universal intellect ('*aql-e kull*). The next creature is the universal soul (*nafs-e kull*) that it generates from '*aql-e kull*. The continuation of the chain of creation ends in the creation of the animal world. In the next part of the essay, I will study the concept of journey. In this part, I will observe both the worldly journey (*safar*) and the mystic journey (*seyr*). The purpose of both journeys is to understand the world's natural symbols, which lead man to know God. In the next part that is the central part of the essay, I will examine the stages that the soul of man passes through the path of purification. Here, a devotee (who might be the poet himself) starts his spiritual journey with the guidance of the rational soul (*nafs-e gūyā/nafs-e nāteqe*) who is presented as an old man (*pirmardy latif-o nūrāni*). He teaches his pupils to keep control over the negative characteristics imposed on his soul through the period of conception.

Based on the specific period of his life (*ma'ās*), each person is responsible for purifying his soul from the negative characteristics. The idea of the perfect man (*insān-e kāmel*), is the core subject of *Seyr al-'Ibād*, man can occupy (*taskir*) the heavens and earth. He is the vicar of God on earth. Therefore, a man at the microcosmic level has to acquire a world vision at the macrocosmic level. Then, he would occupy the world (Arnaldez, 2012).

The poet depicts understanding and controlling each negative trait as a stage of the spiritual journey. According to Sanā'ī, as soon as man releases from the effect of his character traits and understands the natural symbols, he is purified, and in addition to self-awareness, he will understand the reason and motivation behind people's behavior. *Seyr al-'Ibād*, the journey ends when the devotee enters the spheres and heavens where he realizes that he has to follow the orders of his patron and guide. This article aims to discuss how Sanā'ī in his *mathnavi* of *Seyr al-'Ibād* used allegories to draw a comparison between the natural symbols and man's negative character traits and to illustrate the necessity of understanding the natural symbols for self-purification toward the eternal destination.

Medieval Cosmology

Sanā'ī's view in *Seyr al-'Ibād* is based on the medieval philosophy of the structure of the world. According to the medieval philosophy, the whole universe is generated from four simple elements (*al-mufradāt*) characterized as hot (*al-harāra*), cold (*al-burūdat*), moist (*al-rutūbat*), and dry (*al-yubūsat*). The mixture of simple elements (*mufradāt*) formed four compound elements (*murakabāt*): fire (*ātaš*), air (*havā*), water (*āb*), and earth (*kāk*). The compound elements generate to the complex materials (Vančik, 2021, pp. 22-23). It is

worth noting that, according to the medieval philosophy, the moving stars (*sayārāt*)¹ give the impression to the creatures while the fixed stars (*thavābit*) do not have any role in the structure of the world. The planets generate minerals (*jamād*), vegetable (*giyāh*), animal (*heyvān*), and man (*insān*). For instance, the planet Saturn (*zuhal*) in its nature is extremely cold and dry; from the effect of this planet, the coldest and driest climates and mountains are shaped. Saturn forms the underground waters as well as channels and several stones and vegetables. An instance for the vegetables is pepper and olive. The black animals and those living in the holes underground are under the influence of the planet Saturn. Human's external figure and characteristics form under the influence of the same planet. For instance, the tall stature, small eyes, and short necks have signs from this planet. Saturn makes people timid, anxious, misery, and plotter (Birūni, 1318/1939).²

The effect of the planets is not limited to the forming of the world. They strongly influence the characteristic of man. In other words, they form man's nature (*tabi'at*) that is the source of "motion and rest" of man's body,³ and that of the vegetal world. Planets profoundly influence existence. Their influence goes beyond the corporeal world. Their effect is seen as a factor of man's fortune and misfortune. When they fix in specific positions, they might cause fortune or misfortune. Furthermore, the planets themselves are categorized under favorable (*sa'd*) and unfavorable (*nahs*) ones; an example for the former is the planet Jupiter (*muštari*), and a model for the latter is the planet Saturn (*zuhal*) (Birūni, 1934).

The Structure of the World

The medieval cosmology represents a hierarchy in the creation of the world that begins from the Creator. He is one, single and independent. He created the universal Intellect (*'aql-e kull*). It is a single entity, in which it, on the one hand, serves as a veil that hides God, and on the other hand, it is a gate for the unification of the creature with God (Nasr, 1964). Davidson (1992) explained Aristotle's words on the active intellect as an example of cause or agent through which everything would emerge to the mundane world. In this regard, potentially, in each domain, material factors exist. The agent enforces the material elements arising from the state of potentiality to the state of actuality (Davidson, 1992). Thus, the agent intellect acts as a mediator between the concrete material faculty and the abstract concepts. "What immediately engendered matter is Soul" (Davidson, 1992, p. 32).⁴ The universal soul is the next creation after the intellect. It receives the effusion (*fayz*) from God through the medium of the universal intellect. Universal soul is the causation of nature and its motions and activities. In other words, nature is one of the faculties of the universal soul. From universal soul, the prime matter came to exist, which receives its motions from the universal soul (Nasr, 1964). The prime matter is a noble (*sharif*) spiritual entity that emanates to the secondary matter, which is the origin of the universal nature. A subtle (*latif*) entity, which is omnipresent in everything, universal nature "preserves each and every one of the various natures in its form so that none of them falls asunder, expires or decays" (Andani, 2017, p. 180).⁵ The creation chain continues to four levels of existence, the world of mineral, vegetal, animal, and man.

¹ The moving stars are called, Saturn (*zuhal*), Jupiter (*muštari*), Mars (*merik*), Sun (*šams*), Venus (*zuhre*), Mercury (*'utārud*), and Moon (*qamar*).

² For further information on imagery of Saturn and Jupiter in Medieval, see Savage (2020).

³ For insightful information on various views on man's nature see, Hakima Muness. (2011). Pp. 468- 476.

⁴ Davidson, H. A. (1992). Alfarabi, avicenna and averroes on intellect, their cosmologies, theories of the active intellect & theories of human intellect. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵ See Andani (2017), especially pp. 452-456, for further analysis on relationship between creation and time.

The corporal world is ruled by the universal intellect (*'aql-e kull*) that receives the commands from the world of Divine Command (Nasr, 1964).⁶ In other words, universal intellect is passive compared to the Creator and is active in comparison to other creatures. Union with him is a man's desire. Man is the last creature, and God does not create any being after him. Thus, on the one hand, he can purify his soul (*nafs*) from negative traits and ascendant toward the angelic aspect of his soul, and on the other hand, he can live like an animal without any effort to understand the reason for his creation and the place of return. Man will start his spiritual journey when he reaches the level of self-awareness.

The Travel From Self and in the Self

The term journey is equivalent to two Arabic terms, "*safar*" and "*seyr*". "*Safar*" means to travel in the world. There are clear indications in the Qur'ān that recommends man to travel around the world and to see the signs of God and the fate of other nations (6:11) (Arberry, 1995). The term "*seyr*" refers to the mystical journey, meaning looking upon self. Devotee, who begins the journey through the path of God, restricts himself to mortifying his body in order to release his soul from the mundane needs and desires. As soon as he keeps control over his mundane desires, his soul is purified. The life of man is a journey that starts from eternity and ends in the eternal.

In Islamic theology, three terms distinguish man's place in the world. The origin (*mabda'*), the place of provision (*ma'āsh*) and the place of return (*ma'ād*). Man, based on a certain period of his life, has the opportunity to cleanse his soul from its the negative traits imposed upon him. He has to strive to release his soul from evil thoughts and behaviors, such as greed, anger, and lust, to achieve unification with God. Man will start the journey when he reaches a higher level of understanding of his destination. Then, he endeavors to understand the natural symbols presented to him for a better understanding of himself.

Sanā'ī in his work uses symbolic language in order to depict the various stages that man passes through the path of perfection. According to medieval cosmology, the journey starts from conception and the descent of man to the corporal world. During this period (conception), the fetus is presented to different planets. For instance, in the first month, he is presented to the planet Saturn. The nature of this planet is cold and dry, and it affects the nature of the fetus. Secondly, the journey reaches a new level when man awakens from his higher destination and starts the mystical journey. He knows his negative characteristics thus; he endeavors to keep control over them. Thirdly, he observes different groups of people in society; in other words, he familiarizes himself with different attitudes toward life. Fourthly, after passing from the three above levels, he reaches the supreme light where he joins his patron and guide.⁷

The Stages of the Soul in *Seyr al-'Ibād ilā al-Ma'ād*

Sanā'ī in his work portrays a journey that is the result of awareness of man from his original place. According to de Bruijn (1983), the poem is "the description of the development of the human mind towards the understanding of the symbols presented to him by the natural world" (p. 201). The first reference to the concept of journey is in the introduction of *Seyr al-'Ibād* where the poet addresses the wind because one of the

⁶ According to the Qur'ān, "the universal Spirit (*al-ruh al-kullī*) was created or existentiated by the Divine Command (*al-'amr*): They (men) will question you (Prophet Muhammad) about the spirit; say to them: the Spirit is from the Command of my Lord (Q. 17:84)". For further information, see Moris (2003, p. 34).

⁷ See Nasr (1964, p. 98) for an insightful analysis on Ikhwān's idea about fetus influenced by the vegetation soul and the animal soul and the role of the universal soul.

characteristics of the wind is constant movement. It moves around the world and goes as high as ether (*athir*); the wind affects the water and flowers. The poet refers to the movement of the wind as useless behavior. He asks the wind,

*yek zamān az zafān-e bineš-e man
gūš kun ramz-e āfarineš-e man. (182/28)*

For a moment from the tongue of my Gnostic
Listen to the mystery of my creation. (182/28)

The couplet might be interpreted with regards to two aspects. Firstly, the element wind is a metaphor for the people who travel but their journey does not give them the insight needed for their spiritual progress. Secondly, the man's presence in this world is the same as a journey, and he has a certain period to achieve the highest level of his perfection. The poet states that man will develop his mind if he acquires the vision of the secret of the natural symbols that have surrounded him.

The journey begins from the time of conception when the couple is uniting. At this time, man is unaware of his origin (*mabda'*) where he is coming from, and the place of return (*ma'ād*) where he will return after departure from this world. In this period, he starts his vegetal life because he tries to survive, and his attempt is limited to eating food. Sanā'ī states,

*dān ke dar sāhat-e sarāy-e kuhan
čun tuhi šud ze man mašime-ye kun
sūy-e pasti residam az bālā
halqe dar gūš ze "uhbetū menhā". (182/30-31)*

Know that when the area of the ancient world
When the membrane of the command emptied from me
I cam down from the high place
I obeyed the command "get you down out of it all together". (Arberry, 1995, 2/35)

The above couplets refer to the time of creation when Adam descended from heaven to the corporal world because of his sin. The poet refers to the Eternal as an ancient mansion where God ordered Adam to "get out of it" (*uhbetu min-ha*, 2/35). According to the Qur'ān, God forbade Adam to touch the "forbidden tree", but he disobeyed Him. Therefore, he was descended to the earth (2/34). Although man touched the "forbidden tree", God commanded it, and it was not based on his free will. At this moment, man's journey from the heavens to the earth starts; however, he is in a nostalgic sense of separation from his origin. He strives to purify his soul and prepare for his eternal destination (*ma'ād*).

*čun giyā bi kabār hami kurdam
bā giyā hamrahi hami kardam. (183/44)*

I ate like a vegetable while I was not aware
My companion was vegetable. (183/44)⁸

⁸ Mawlānā Jalāl al-Din Muhammad Rumi the 13th century Persian mystic poet (d. 1273) in his *mathnavi-ye ma'navi* mentions the process of development from vegetation soul, to animal soul and afterwards to the human soul until an infant born. He discusses when men are born they forget about their past lives and how they developed. One's life would not be ended with his death. Death is another stage for man's spiritual progress. See, section 135, *atwar va manazel-e khelqat-e adami az ebtada* (the stages of human's creation from beginning) adapted from <http://www.gnajoor.net>.

From this time onwards, man did not perceive what his origin (*mabda'*) is. The fetal period has resembled a vegetable that its survival is dependent on another creature. Ibn 'Arabi states that man consists of spirit, soul, and body. The soul has three aspects, which are rational, vegetative, and animal. The vegetative soul seeks food and assimilates to it (Landau, 2008). In this period, according to medieval philosophy, man presents to the heavenly bodies (seven planets) where his characteristics form. The poet states,

*pas ma rā az barāy-e hargūn bark
kard nuh māh jelve bar nuh čark* (184/52)

Then she presented me to nine spheres during nine months
In order to receive my portion from them. (184/52)

The couplet refers to the medieval philosophy indicating the effect of the planets on man's nature. In the foetal period, in each month, one planet observes man and affects him. Thus his characteristics and behaviors form under the effect of the planets. For instance, in the first month, the foetal is presented to the planet Saturn (*zuhal*), and in the second month to the planet Jupiter (*muštari*), the process ends in the planet Jupiter in the ninth month. The foetal receives his different characteristics from seven planets. For instance, in the seventh month, the infant will be presented to the planet Moon (*qamar*). The nature of the Moon is cold and moist, and it moves more quickly than other planets. Therefore, in the seventh month, the foetal moves quicker than previous months in the womb of his mother. The Moon might cause the infant to be born sooner than the natural time (Mudarris Razavi, 1348). Haste is one of the characteristics of the majority of the people born under the influence of the planet Moon.

*yāftam bar karān-e rūm-u habaš
šahri andar miyān ču ātaš kuš
andarūnaš nu vu burūnš musen
turbataš jāzeb-u havāš 'afan.* (184/56-57)

I found in the side of Rome and Ethiopia
A city that was surrounded by splendid fire
It was new from outside while it was ancient from inside
Its earth was attractive while its air was unpleasant. (184/56-57)

The poet witnesses a city that is situated between Rome and Ethiopia. The city is an allusion to both the physical world and the body of man. Both perceptions appear new while ancient because they are made from four compound elements, fire, wind, water, and earth, that have existed from ancient times. The elements need to work together to produce the world (Said, 2002). Both world and body are attractive for man because of the negative traits that are hidden in them. They resemble in the case of negative traits (Mudarris Razavi, 1348). For instance, greed (*hers*) is a personal characteristic that origins in the element earth.

After explaining several traits of the body (*rūh-e heyvāni/nafs*), the poet introduces the animal soul.

*Maleki bā du rūy-u bā dah sar
Asl-e ū az du mādar-u du pedar
Panj sar mušrefān-e hāmūnī
Panj sar munhiyān-e gardūni.* (185/62-63)

An angel with two faces and ten heads
It was born from two mothers and two fathers

Five heads observe the plain
Five heads report the spheres. (185/62-63)

The animal soul is the source of information gathering. It is correspondence to the universal nature (*tabi'a*) ('Ali, 2020).⁹ Sanā'ī portrays the animal soul as an angel with two faces that, by each of them, man knows the world, one of them is internal, and the other is external. The animal soul is connected to the world through 10 senses (10 heads). Five of them are the external senses that connect man to the physical world. They are sight (*bināī*), hearing (*šenavāī*), smell (*būyāī*), taste (*češāī*), and touch (*lāmesē*). Five others are the internal sense that they figure the man's knowledge from the world they are, "communes (*al-hiss al-muštarak*), retentive imagination (*kiyāl*), compositive, imagination (*mukayyale*), estimative (*wāhime*) and memory (*hāfīze*)" (Dihlavī, 1980, p. xxxix).

The poet resembles the aimless people to the "ass-mill cow" (*gāv-e karās*) because the ass-mill cow turns around a millstone. He does not go further from the first place where he started his journey and he is not aware of his un-purposeful act. To live purposefully, according to Sanā'ī, an individual needs a spiritual guide and the best guide and companion through the spiritual journey is the Rational Soul (*nafs-e gūyā*). It is one of the faculties that work along with vegetation soul and animal soul. When each soul joins the lower one, refine it. Thus, the rational soul refines the animal soul (Abrahamov, 2003). The poet portrays the rational soul as a fair and shining old man (*pirmardy latif-u nūrānī*) who introduces himself as the son of universal intellect (*pedaram hast kārdār-e kudāy*) (188/118).

The rational soul appears as a messenger that guides man and teaches him how to control his negative characteristics. To control the negative traits, an individual should constantly be aware of when he returns to the final destination and prepares for it. On this account, Sanā'ī advises:

rūy sūy-e ma'ād bāyad tāft
kin ma'ās az ma'ād bāyad yāft. (198/139)

Turn your face to the place of return
Because you can gain the place of return from the worldly life. (189/139)

The old man refers to the worldly life (*ma'ās*), the time allocated to each individual by God to purify his soul. Lifetime is limited and short; one must not get busy with worldly amusements; instead, he must stop his animal life concerning eating, sleeping, and sexual desires and start the spiritual journey (*pāy dar neh hadith dar rah kun*) (190/147). No doubt that the devotee starts his journey with the guidance of the spiritual leader.

The journey of the devotee and the old man "rational soul" starts from a dustbin (*kākdān*) that is cold and has an unpleasant air. The body of man has resembled a dustbin with a cold and dry nature, which is the worst weather (Mudarris Razavi, 1348).¹⁰ In this journey, greed (*hers*) is the first personal trait the pupil learns about. It generates from the element earth. The poet resembles greed to mouse, cat, and pig. The pig is the head of the group because it eats a lot and moves very little (190/165).

⁹ Legenhausen (2010, p. 138) asserted that after the creation of the vegetation soul, the animal soul was created and then the human soul. There is a hierarchy that each lower soul is part of the higher one. Thus, the human soul contains the animal soul.

¹⁰ According to ancient Persian medicine, there are four humors in human's body called black bile (*soda*) with cold and dry temperature; blood (*dam/kun*), phlegm (*balgām*), and yellow bile. They influence man's temper and if any one of them overcomes others will cause diseases. For further information, see Yousefi and Shafaghi (2020, p. 395).

az pey-e 'išq sūrat-e lā rā
qible-ey sāktā čalipā rā. (191/169)

Because of the love [of the mundane properties] they made from no (*lā*)
 One cross and they worshipped it as their direction (*qibla*). (191/169)

The poet refers to the people whose attempt is limited to the obligatory religious duties known as “five pillars of Islam”, including prayer (*salāt* or *namāz*), fasting (*rūzeh*), pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), and almsgiving (*kums* and *zakāt*). The pious Orthodox people believe that religious practices connect them with God without any intermediary. This evokes the image of Moses talking to God (Yelle, 2006). They do not go further than the appearance of religion. The poet compares them with those Christians whose spiritual progress is limited to paying contribute to the cross. They are so attached to the cross that they do not realize Jesus’ spiritual message. The master and devotee continue their journey to the next abode, where they see a viper (*'af 'ī*).

The poet describes how the viper would misguide the devotee and destroy anyone beginning the path of perfection with no guide.

'af'ī-ī didam andar ān maskan
yek sar-u haft rūy-u čehār dahan
har dami kaz dahan bar āvardi
har ke rā yāfti furū kurdī. (192/175-176)

I saw in that abode
 A viper with one head, seven faces and four mouth
 In every moment that it breathed out
 It swallowed up each person that he saw. (192/175-176)

The function of the trait of jealousy (*hesādat*), which is one of the compartments of the animal soul, can be recognizable from the poem. Jealousy is likened to a viper with one head that is greed, seven faces that are seven planets, and four mouths that refer to the four compound elements. Jealousy harms the envied with his inner sense. His malicious ambition influences the planets and conquers them. He, like a viper, might cause a sudden death for the envied. There is an utterance from the prophet of Islam (PBUH) about the profound effect of jealousy on one’s life. He states, “It is near that the jealous dominates the fate” (*kāda an al-hasdan yağleb al-qadar*) (Mudarris Razavi, 1348, p. 265). The poet employs the term swallow (*furū kurdan*), showing the inevitable death of the envied. In this regard, an individual should cleanse his soul from the negative trait of jealousy so as not to fall into the viper’s mouth and not harm others’ lives. The old man suggests that the devotee will be safe as long as he is next to him and follows him. This is an allusion to the critical role of a master in saving the devotee from negative traits. The old man says,

ke yeki nūr-e man bar ū sadd-e ūst
nazar-e man bedū zomurod-e ūst. (192/183)

One ray of my light is a barrier for it
 My look on it acts like an emerald for the viper. (192/183)

According to medieval belief, a green emerald (*zomurod*) blinds the viper. For this reason, for protecting the treasury, a green emerald will be placed on it. The poet resembles the rational soul to an emerald that light blinds the viper of jealousy and protects the man. On this account, the Persian mystic poet Mowlana Jalāl al-Din Rumi, in his *mathnavi* writes, “we are the mine of emerald stricken for the viper’s eye/ one who is bitten

by sorrow his share is being remorseful (*kān-e zumurudim ma āfate-e češm-e azhdehā/ ānke ladiġ-e ġam buvad hessa-ye ust vā asaf*)” (Abbasi, 1973, p. 488). The travelers, through their journey, saw several frightening demons, their eyes were placed on their neck and their tongue was hidden in their heart (193/187). The demon is an allusion to the personal characteristic of rancor (*kina*). The eyes of the demons were placed on their neck because a rancorous pretends to the friendship, but he is an enemy who seeks a fortune to harm other people.

Covetousness (*tama* ‘) is the last trait that forms in the soul of man under the influence of the element earth. The following couplets are the portrayal of covetous people.

hame sāken ču hess-e bi kabārān
hame heyrān be yekdegar negarān. (193/195)

They all were motionless like the sense of the ignorant people
They all looked at each other while they were bewildered. (193/195)

hame pur bād hamču nāy anbān
hamčun ū bā se garrdan-o du dahān. (149/196)

They all were filled with the wind of covetousness like the leather bag of a reed flout
Like it, they had three necks and two mouths. (194/196)

The covetous people are likened to a motionless ignorant demon that looks upon the properties of other people. They are likened to the leather bag of a reed flout because it is full of wind, and man is filled with the wind of covetousness. The poet states that he emaciated his body until he mounted such a huge mountain. Thus, an individual who wants to thin jealousy in his soul should not respond to the worldly needs of his body.

Through the way of the journey, the travelers arrived near a sea where the old man states that moist (*burūdat*) is the nature of water that causes laziness and carelessness in the animal soul. The poet resembles the lazy people to a branch of a tree that is drunken from the wind (*hame sarmast hamču šāḡ az bād*) (196/226), because they both move while they are not aware of the origin of their movement. Another characteristic of these people is that they are bewildered (*heyrān*) but it is not because of their knowledge. They are motionless (*sāken*), but it is not the result of their forbearance (*helm*). The poet likens the lazy people to the rabbit (*kargūš*) because they both look as if they are wakeful while they are not. The old man teaches his pupil that he will release from these traits if he dominates the moisture in his nature. De Bruijn mentions that in Persian, “being ‘wet’ is figuratively ‘being polluted’” (de Bruijn, 1983, p. 206). Thus, the devotee has to purify his soul from negative traits to continue his spiritual travel.

The next abode is the planet Moon; its nature is cold and wet like water, moving faster than fire. Here, the devotee learns about the effect of the Moon on the cosmos. For instance, he learns that when the Moon increases, the water increases, and the same happen to the water when it decreases (198/254). The travelers enter to the domination of the element air. The poet employs several beautiful imageries to portray the formation of the animal soul (*nafs*) under the influence of the element air. He states,

kuhan az sehr naw hami kardand
zeštā rā nekū hami kardand
in nemūdy ze gulḡani bāġī
vān nemūdy tazarvī az zāġī
yek jahān dā‘iye mani didam
qiblešān aw‘iye mani didam. (199/262-264)

They made a magic, show the ancient new, and vice versa
 They show an ugly one as beautiful
 This one caused the stove of the bath appears like a garden
 Another one showed a raven like a jungle cock
 I saw a world the claim of egotism
 Their direction was their lust. (199/262-264)

According to the above couplets, the element air generates false images in the animal soul. The air acts like a witch that shows facts differently; thus, man would not recognize facts from falsehood. He sees the ugly entities as beautiful. For instance, a man sees the stove of a bath where is a very unpleasant dirty place and it has a warm and bad smelling air, like a beautiful garden. Other times, the man does not recognize the beautiful jungle cock from an ugly raven. In Persian literature, the bath stove is an allusion to hell, and the garden is an allusion to paradise. According to the poet, man under the influence of the element air cannot distinguish between hell and heaven. Sanā'ī takes the historical story of the Jewish as an example of false imaginations. He states that he saw a huge number of people who lost the truth (*biš didam ze qatre-ye zhāle/ andar ū sāmetry-u gūsāle*) (199/267). They worshipped silver and gold instead of God. Here, there is an allusion to the followers of Moses. When Moses went to the Sinai Mountain they worshipped a golden calf by the leadership of a man called Sāmetry (199/267-270).

In their journey, the travelers entered a castle where a monster was living. The poet describes the monster like,

*ham dar ān qal'e howz-e sangi būd
 vandar ān howzešān nahangi būd
 halq-e ū haft būd-u dandān šeš
 sar sūy-e āb-u dum sūy-e ātaš.* (199/269-270)

In that castle, there was a stony pool
 A monster lived in that pool
 He had seven throats and six teethes
 His head was in the water and his tail in the fire. (199/269-270)

The poet resembles the body to a stony pool where a monster lives. Monster is an allusion to the power of lust (*šahvat*). It has seven throats that are seven negative traits: greed, jealousy, anger, lust, pride, stinginess, and hypocrisy (Mudarris Razavi, 1348). They function as doors, and each of them might imprison a man. Whenever a man behaves under the influence of each of the traits, he is like a prisoner who cannot decide for himself. The old man states to his pupil that if he wants to be released from them, he must "put his foot on their head" (200/280). It means that he has to control them because when an individual puts his foot on a creature's head, it will not move. When you put your foot on the head of a negative trait, you have control over it.

The travelers entered the next abode to the domain of the planet Jupiter. The old man advises his pupil that he should take refugees on Jupiter because it trains all ascetics. There is a belief that those born under the influence of Jupiter are ready to follow the path of asceticism and become pious. Then, they arrived at a narrow valley where the old man explained fire's element and its effect on the animal soul. The poet states,

*ham dar ū jāduwān-e div negār
 ham dar ū kūh kūh kazhdum-u mār
 dareh-i bas mahib-u nākuš būd
 kazhdum-u mār-u kūh az ātaš būd.* (201/294-295)

In the valley lived both the witches that they draw demons
 And the numerous scorpions and snakes
 It was a frightening and unpleasant valley
 There was a mountain of fire where scorpions and snakes lived. (201/294-295)

Sanā'ī portrays a vivid imagery from the influence of the element fire. It is likened to a witch who pictures the images of demons in the animal soul. Here, the characteristics of anger and rage resemble a mountain of scorpions and snakes. The old man advises his pupils, be not afraid of them, and eat them; otherwise, he will not be released from that place. Here, there is a reference to the Qur'ānic verse referring to the people who "restrain their rage" (Arberry, 1995, 3/128) they will receive God's reward. The poet states that he ate them as if they were medication to cure the illness of anger. Eating anger means not acting under the influence of this negative trait, being patient, and coming down so that you can think rationally and act accordingly.

Under the mountain (of anger), there were "several wells filled with wild animals, demons, and beasts whose face were like a man" (202/312). The endeavor of these human-faced animals was limited to attracting other people. Here, the animals symbolize insolent (*mutekaberān*) that constantly boast about themselves and their properties. When the devotee saw the natural character of an insolent with the eyes of his rational soul (the old man) he fled from them (*šeklešān čun be češm-e ū didam, lā jeram, zān kasān beburidam*) (202/313-320). The old man states to his pupil that insolence (*kebr*) forms under the influence of two planets, the Sun (*šams/kurshid*) and Mars (*merik*). The former generates pride in man's nature, and the latter forms the trait of anger.

As soon as the devotee successfully passes from the previous abodes, the old man tells him that he dominates his nature and negative traits. Thus, he is allowed to enter paradise and be released from hell and the fire of hell (203/326-327). In the stage where the pupil keeps control over himself, the old man tells him to enter paradise. In other words, the rational soul controlled the animal soul. From this stage onwards, two travelers enter another level of their journey. They traveled from one planet to another. This part of their journey is based on visiting various groups of people whose behavior is under the influence of seven planets.

Sanā'ī states that the first abode was the planet Moon (*qamar*), which is under the influence of the element water. Infidels (*zenādeqa*) who are the dwellers of the planet Moon are depicted with a beautiful and cheerful (*taze rūy*) appearance while they are blind, and their direction (*qibla*) is the physical world (204/246-352). The second abode was the planet Mercury (*utārud*), where the poet sees people who imitate (*taqlid*) each other and are happy with their behavior. They worshiped eight directions (*hašt qible*) instead of God. Eight directions is an allusion to eight paradises (205/352-358). The planet Venus (*zuhre*) was the next abode where Sanā'ī sees people whose nature (*'ādat-e tab'ešān*) is the same as animals (*sebā'*). Their direction (*qeblehāšān*) is four elements. For them, these elements appear in different colors (*rang āmiz*). The term '*rang āmiz*' refers to the nature of the four elements. Yellow bile (*safrā*) forms out of hot (*al-harāra*) and dry (*al-yubūsat*). Black bile (*sudā*) generates from the mixture of cold and dry. Phlegm (*balgam*) forms out of the cold (*al-burūdat*) and moist (*al-rutūbat*). Blood (*kūn*) generates from hot (*al-harāra*) and moisture (*tar*) (205-506/359-363) (Mudarris Razavi, 1348). In other words, their direction was their nature.

The travelers passed from the abode Venus to the planet Sun (*šams*) where people with low ambition (*mardum-e dūn*) inhabited. They considered themselves as a wise man and worshiped seven planets (*qeblešān haft naqšband šude*) because they believed that the planets were the creator of the world (206/364-370). The next destination of the devotee and his guide was the planet Mars (*merik*), where another group of ignorant

people (*gamāniyān*) dwelled. They have resembled pharaoh (*fre'awn*), who claimed, "He is the Lord" (Arberry, 1995, 26/25-26) of people. *Gamāniyān* know the universal intellect ('*aql-e kull*) as the creator of the world, they did not examine further (Mudarris Razavi, 1348). The planet Jupiter (*muštari*) is the next abode where pretenders inhabited. Sanā'ī states that they traded the precious pearl of their soul for the false jewelry. They had two directions (*du qible*): One was God, and the other was people (207/385-387). The old man and his pupil passed from this abode to Saturn (*zuhal*) where self-worshippers (*kudparastān*) settled. They only saw themselves as if there was a mirror in front of them. Each of them was both the lover and beloved (*hame ma'āšūq-e kiš-u 'āseq-e kiš*). They separated from other people because they were in love with themselves (308/397-399).

In this stage, the old man and his pupil entered another level of their journey. They traveled upward to (*falak al-burūj*), where they saw a group of imitators who did not have insight. Sometimes they learned Gnosis and separated themselves from the world of nature ('*ālam-e tabāye*'). Sometimes, they were excused and did not perform the religious orders because they were not completely detached from the world of nature. The old man states to his pupil that many Sufis remained in this abode (*rah zan-e sad-hezār darvish ast*) (209/419-415). At the same time, this abode is not the highest point of the path. The poet describes the owner of this place as the 'absolute ruler (*pādešāh-e bi čūn*) who is the reason of the movement of the planets' ('*ellat-e aqtaran-e gardūn*). Before him, different groups of people had stood in the line. For instance, the blessed were standing in one line, and in another line the monks (*rāhebān-u qeddisān*). They asked the travelers to settle there because everything is prepared for them (211/443-445). They traveled to the next abode where the rational soul was dwelling ('*aql-e kull*). Here, the people who released themselves from their bodily needs dwelled. The old man and his pupil continued their journey through the same place, seeing different blessed groups. They are as follow: The first group was "the servants of God" (*arbāb-e 'ubūdiyyat*), the second group "Sufis of the path" (*sālekān-e tariqat*), the third group and the highest ones in the rank were "the masters of monotheism and servant hood" ('*arbāb-e towhid va 'ubūdiyyat*). When the devotee reached this place, he wanted to settle there, but one of those pure men told him indirectly that he had to move to a higher place where he could purify his soul under the teachings of his guide (217/522-523).

Conclusion

Taken together with the above analyses, Sanā'ī in his Gnostic *mathnavi* portrays the soul's perfection as a journey, and he uses the terms that picture a real journey in his reader's mind. For instance, he constantly uses terms that indicate a place, such as a sea, castle, meadow, way, and mountain. The journey of the soul starts from the moment of his awareness of his highest destination. The reason for the beginning of the journey is the desire for self-understanding, and the first step for such a journey is finding a guide. In *Seyr al-'Ibād*, the guide is the rational soul (*nafs-e nāteqa*) who always advises the animal soul (*nafs-e heyvāni*). The rational soul belongs to the world of universal intellect, and the animal soul belongs to the corporal world; therefore, the rational soul tries to return to its origin. To achieve this goal, he has to keep control over the animal soul.

Sanā'ī skillfully represents the rational and animal soul as two companions although sometimes he reminds the reader that they are only one person (maybe the poet himself). He emphasizes constantly on the dualities of the old man and his pupil to show the different essence of the rational soul and animal soul and their constant struggle in the worldly life. The rational soul is presented as an old man because in the chain of creation Intellect ('*aql*) is created before Matter (*mādeh*).

Concerning his understanding of medieval cosmology, the poet states that if man understands the world and its order, he will know himself because each characteristic in man's soul has a symbol in the corporal world that man must endeavor to understand. Understanding the symbols of the world is likened to a journey because the journey is acquiring knowledge and Gnostic. Sanā'ī in his *mathnavi*, portrays three levels of journey. The first stage of the spiritual journey starts in the self-intending to acquire knowledge over oneself. The second stage controls the character traits that the heavenly bodies (seven stars) impose upon man. This level of the journey is the result of awareness of the higher purpose of man's creation. Thirdly, when a man keeps control over his traits, he understands the reason for other people's behavior. In other words, man will understand the internal reason for people's behavior if his rational soul looks upon them. The last stage of the journey ends in acquiring insight. The vision gives the insight to see the heavens and the blessed souls settled in the spheres.

According to the poet, the journey starts under the guidance of an old man. According to a tradition, "when someone has no sheikh, Satan becomes his Sheikh". Thus, man has to seek a guide before he starts his spiritual journey. It is worth mentioning that the old man represents the perfect man (*insān-e kāmīl*) who acquired the vision of a higher destination of man's life.

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