

The Dervish Lover in the Quatrains of Sulṭān Walad

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The life of Sulṭān Walad was extraordinary in that he received blessings and spiritual teachings from so many great ones, including his grandfather Bahā’uddīn Walad (who died when he was about five years old), Sayyid Burhānuddīn Tirmizī, and his father, Mawlānā Jalāluddīn. He was very devoted to his spiritual guides: Shams-i Tabrīzī, Ṣalāḥuddīn Zarkōb, and Ḥusāmuddīn Chalabī. Even after Ḥusāmuddīn Chalabī died, Sulṭān Walad showed great humility and patience by taking yet another spiritual guide for a period of eight years, Karīmuddīn Bektamor. Only after the latter died did Sulṭān Walad become the full leader of the Mawlawīs at age sixty-six. After that, he composed three masnawīs (*Ibtidā-nāma*, *Robāb-nāma*, and *Intihā-nāma*), in addition to his *Dīwān* and the prose collection of his lectures and sermons (*Ma’ārif*).

Sulṭān Walad was faithful to the example of his father’s devotion to Shams-i Tabrīzī in following the Sufī path of devotion to the spiritual guide or master [murshid, shaykh] as a means to attaining pure devotion to God alone. In Sufism, this is called the path of annihilation of separate selfhood in the spiritual presence of the master [fanā fī ‘sh-shaykh] as a means to annihilation of separate selfhood in the Presence of God [fanā fī ’llāh]. His father, Mawlānā Jalāluddīn, had so effaced himself through love of Shams-i Tabrīzī that he composed thousands of poems in which he saw his spiritual guide everywhere, especially in all things beautiful—poems that often ended, not with his own name, as was the classical tradition for ghazal poems, but with the name of his spiritual master instead.

A good example of this is the story of the man who knocked on the door. In the *Masnawī*, the story begins: “Someone came (and) knocked on the door of a friend” [ān yakê āmad dar-i yārê be-zad (1:3056)]. Sulṭān Walad composed a version of the story in his *Ibtidā-nāma* that gives different details, which suggest that this was a Sufī story already told for some time, and not a story originated by Mawlānā. In his version, Sulṭān Walad explicitly uses the Sufī terms “disciple” [murīd] and “master” [shaykh].

In explanation of the uttering of admonition and mystical insight of (Sulṭān) Walad in regard to [his spiritual master] Shaykh Ṣalāḥuddīn—may God magnify his memory—and his telling (Walad), “I want ‘you’ to no longer remain, so that I may utter admonition and mystical insight on your behalf. For in the world of Unity, two-ness cannot be contained.” And the bringing forth of a parable.

“So that I may know truly that you are mine. You are the lover and you are beyond ‘us’ and ‘me.’

“You are not in the midst: only I am. There are never two in this containment.”

Haven’t you heard of the story of the (spiritual) master? (About) the skill, knowledge, and ability of that master?–

Who, when the (spiritual) disciple came to his door, (and) knocked on the door, he said, “Who is it? Speak!”

(The disciple) said to him, “It is me, (your) slave, O king.” (The master) said, “Go from my door!” He did not offer him the (entrance) way.

(After that) helpless one departed for a time; he left and was wandering (in separation for) a year.

When he had spent a year in travel, the following year he arrived (back) and knocked on the door.

Again (the master) asked him, “Who is it?” He said, “It is me.” (The master) replied, “I am not opening the door to you.”

(For) years he was deprived of (the company of) his shaykh. He became “cooked” (and) the ultimate (action) became known to him.

He came back when he had become bent over from (suffering) separation. He knocked on the door. (The master) said, “Who is it?” (The disciple) said to him, “You!”

(The master) said in reply, “Since it is me, why am I knocking the door-ring from the outside?!”

He opened the door to him and said, “Come in, since (your) you-ness has gone from you, O (clear) seeing one!

“Since ‘you’ are not you, only I am– (so) my home is your possession, O wise one.

“The world of Unity is our dwelling (place)–‘two’ cannot be contained within our heart.

“Therefore, come (in), O you who have become me for me. Since you are a rose, come into this rose garden.

“Among the numbers of roses, where is two-ness? Since you have become a rose, the thorn of you-ness no longer remains.”

[Translated by Ibrahim Gamard from *Ibtidā-nāma*, published as *Walad-Nāma, Māhdokht Bānū Homā’īy* edition, pp. 88-89]

COMMENT: This story may also be interpreted on the level of “annihilation of self” in the Presence of God [fanā fī ’llāh]. The disciple is then the mystic worshipper who knocks on the gate of the Divine Court, the worshipper who answers, “It is You, because only You are, and there is no partner, companion, or any other being in Your Absolute Unity; there is only You! ‘There is nothing divine except You. (All) glory be to You (alone)!’” [lā ’ilāha ’illā ’anta, subHāna-k’—Qur ’ān 21:83].

As the co-translator of the nearly 2,000 quatrains attributed to Mawlānā Rūmī, it was natural for this presenter to take an interest in Sulṭān Walad's quatrains [rubā'īyāt, rubailer, dörtlükler]. There are 455 quatrains in his *Dīwān*, most of which express spiritual love for the human beloved, meaning the dervish disciple's spiritual love for his Sufi guide. Of course, since Persian poetry is often ambiguous in regard to whom is addressed, many of these quatrains may also be read as addressed to God. Nineteen of Sulṭān Walad's best quatrains have been selected.

Praise of the Human Beloved

I am (spiritually) alive, O idol, because you are mine.
I am without pain and sorrow because you are my remedy.
If you become distant from me I will die, without doubt,
Since, in this bodily form, you are my soul. [jān-é man-ī]
(Quatrain no. 443)

COMMENT: The ending rhyme of this quatrain is similar to two well-known verses in a ghazal by Mawlānā Rūmī, verses that are sung during the fourth section of most of the musical compositions for the Mawlawī samā', or "Whirling Prayer Ceremony":

You are my Sultan, you are my Sultan [Sulṭān-é man-ī], and within my heart and soul, you are my faith.

*When you breathe into me, I become alive. What is (the worth of just) one soul? (For) you are a hundred of my soul! [šad jān-é man-ī]
[Dīwān-i Kabīr, Ghazal 3137]*

You are the one who (is) the light of soul, heart, and body:
You are also the Water of (Everlasting) Life, the rose garden, and meadow.
You cast the fire of (love for) the rose into the heart of the nightingale,
So that you make a thousand and one melodies from his voice.
(Quatrain no. 385)

In (suffering) pain, I always see the remedy.
(And) in (suffering) wrath and injustice, I see kindness and faithfulness.
On the surface of the earth (and) below the roof of the heavens,
In everything I view, I see (only) you.
(Quatrain no. 225)

My eyes have not seen a beloved with your beauty,
Nor a heart-possessor like you among heart-seizers.
There is never a rose without a thorn in the world,
(Yet) you are that red rose which doesn't have a thorn.
(Quatrain no. 455)

COMMENT: The second half of this quatrain uses a metaphor similar to that quoted before from Sultān Walad's Ibtidā-nāma: "Since you have become a rose, the thorn of you-ness no longer remains."

You (are) the one who has become the prayer-direction for (my) heart and soul.
(You are) the prayer-direction for the rose garden, like the spring season.
O you (who), in spirit and soul, (are) the shadow of the beneficence of God,
Whatever direction you face, I make it (my) prayer-direction.
(Quatrain no. 381)

Separation from the beloved

O (beautiful) Moon, do not kill me with the sword of separation!
(And) do not destroy the foundation of my heart with your anger!
O (my) Soul, my fear is of your separation, not of death.
Show that face (of yours) out of kindness and (then) take my soul!
(Quatrain no. 315)

I am such that, because of love, I am in the midst of fire;
I burn like incense and I wail like the reed (flute).
By Him, I have a heart and a soul, for this (purpose):
So that I may deliver (them) the next time when I see you.
(Quatrain no. 246)

Sufis and dervishes

The pure Sufi is like the moon in the circling sky;
He is like the Messiah, always above the circling sky.
He flies above earth and heaven,
(And) from his soul and heart (is his) slave and servant—the circling sky.
(Quatrain no. 54)

The men of God are made to run toward God;
Day and night, year and month, they are made to seek Him.
They are upon the earth (and also) on top of the seventh heaven.
(Although) a single drop in appearance, they are (in reality) two hundred oceans.
(Quatrain no. 104)

Although you were prior to existence, (O) great shaykh,
You went to the Ka'ba and you became a great shaykh.
You drank alone (at) the tavern of (divine) Love,
(And) you became drunk and (ecstatically) free from self, (O) great shaykh.
(Quatrain no. 211)

The dervish is passing beyond the body and the soul,
(And) the dervish is superior to the earth and the heavens.
God's intended aim was not concerning the worldly creation—
(Rather), God's intended aim concerning this world is the dervish.
(Quatrain no. 47)

Spiritual states

I wandered in the World of Love, (from one) direction to (another) direction.
(And) I wandered like flowing water, (from) stream to stream.
Without any headache or hardship of the road of separation,
I revolved around Him in the abode of union.
(Quatrain no. 237)

Do not think that my speech (is) from me, since I am non-existent;
(For) it is from God, continual (in) every moment that I am (with) speech.
God is eternal and I am annihilated in Him.
(But) do not reckon me as newly appearing, since I am an ancient light.
(Quatrain no. 266)

Although I am going among the people by (means of) the body,
I am living because of Love; I am not living because of the soul.
Know (that) my body (is) like a mill stone,
Revolving by (means of) the flowing water of God's Love.
(Quatrain no. 356)

My drunkenness is not one that is from (ordinary) wine;
It is (from) a “wine” beyond (any) path and road.
There are amazing (spiritual) states for me in the meeting place of the hearts;
(For) whatever I seek in it is (already) available.
(Quatrain no. 121)

Wine isn't necessary for our drunkenness,
Nor the joy of harp or viol in our gatherings.
Without musician, attractive companion, cup, or wine,
We are fallen drunk and wrecked every night and morning.
(Quatrain no. 26)

COMMENT: The last four quatrains are among seven of Sulṭān Walad's quatrains that somehow were added (with some variants) to the earliest manuscripts of Mawlānā's Dīwān-i Kabīr edited by Forūzānfar (nos. 82, 1393, 1428, and 319).

Know (that) my beloved is hidden from everyone.
(And) know (that) he is beyond the earth and the heavens.
Know (that) he is visible, like the moon, within my chest.
(And) know (that) he is mingled, like the soul, within my body.
(Quatrain no. 353)

COMMENT: This quatrain, interpreted as addressed to the human beloved, expresses annihilation [fanā] of the disciple in regard to the Sufi shaykh, whose spirit is experienced as present within his body. If the quatrain is interpreted as addressed to the Divine Beloved, then it expresses annihilation in the Presence of God, who is “the Apparent and the Hidden” [aẓ-Ẓāhir wa 'l-Bāṭin—Qur'ān 57:3].

The heart is a garden of God, with hidden trees.
It appears in a hundred modes, but (is) itself (always) the same.
It is an ocean, all-encompassing, limitless, and endless,
(With) hundreds of waves from its surging within the heart and soul.
(Quatrain no. 335)

Upon any ground (where) I bow (my) head, the object of (my) prostration is Him.
In any striving that I make, the object of worship is Him.
Mention of the rose and the nightingale, the (mystical) concert and the beloved—
Of all these to me, in this world and the next, the entire object is Him.
(Quatrain no. 50)

COMMENT: This quatrain also occurs in Sulṭān Walad's Ma`ārif (p. 181) soon after his statement that the lover has no preoccupation but the Beloved, that all forms are illustrations of his Beloved, and that for such a one this world and the next world are one, not two. In sum, this means that, despite his apparent involvement in forms, the true lover is centered upon love for God only and cares nothing for "the two worlds."

[All quatrains were translated by Ibrahim Gamard from *Dīwān-i Sulṭān Walad*, F. Nafiz Uzluk edition, 1941]

It seems fitting to end with some inspiring verses from Sulṭān Walad's *Ibtidā-nāma* about becoming a true dervish lover who is annihilated of separate selfhood:

That (world) is illumination, delight, and permanence; and this (world) is darkness, affliction, and transience.

The result of this is: pass away from selfhood, so that you may gaze upon God continually.

Become purified from pride and from (self-) existence, so that (ecstatic) drunkenness comes (to you) without (need of) goblet and wine.

Ascend like Jesus upon the heavens without (needing) the donkey of the body, and pass beyond Moses.

[Translated by Ibrahim Gamard from *Ibtidā-nāma*, published as *Walad-Nāma*, Māhdokht Bānū Homā'īy edition, p. 7. Gratitude is due to Dr. Rawān Farhādi for his corrections and suggestions regarding this paper.]