

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: From the *Masnavi* by Rumi

"The Prince and the Handmaid"

A prince, while engaged on a hunting excursion, espied a fair maiden, and by promises of gold induced her to accompany him. After a time she fell sick, and the prince had her tended by divers physicians. As, however, they all omitted to say, "God willing¹, we will cure her," their treatment was of no avail. So the prince offered prayer, and in answer thereto a physician was sent from heaven. He at once condemned his predecessors' view of the case, and by a very skillful diagnosis, discovered that the real cause of the maiden's illness was her love for a certain goldsmith of Samarcand. In accordance with the physician's advice, the prince sent to Samarcand and fetched the goldsmith, and married him to the lovesick maiden, and for six months the pair lived together in the utmost harmony and happiness. At the end of that period the physician, by divine command, gave the goldsmith a poisonous draught, which caused his strength and beauty to decay, and he then lost favour with the maiden, and she was reunited to the king. This Divine command was precisely similar to God's command to Abraham to slay his son Ishmael, and to the act of the angel in slaying the servant of Moses, and is therefore beyond human criticism.

Description of Love

A true lover is proved such by his pain of heart;
No sickness is there like sickness of heart.
The lover's ailment is different from all ailments;
Love is the astrolabe of God's mysteries.
A lover may hanker after this love or that love,
But at the last he is drawn to the KING of love.
However much we describe and explain love,
When we fall in love we are ashamed of our words.
Explanation by the tongue makes most things clear,
But love unexplained is clearer.
When pen hastened to write,
On reaching the subject of love it split in twain.
When the discourse touched on the matter of love,
Pen was broken and paper torn.
In explaining it Reason sticks fast, as an ass in mire;
Naught but Love itself can explain love and lovers!
None but the sun can display the sun,
If you would see it displayed, turn not away from it.
Shadows, indeed, may indicate the sun's presence,
But only the sun displays the light of life.
Shadows induce slumber, like evening talks,
But when the sun arises the "moon is split asunder."
In the world there is naught so wondrous as the sun,

¹ According to the Qur'an, Muslims must always preface statements about the future with *inshallah* (which means "God willing" or "if God wills it") in order to acknowledge submission to God's plan.

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: From the *Masnavi* by Rumi

But the Sun of the soul sets not and has no yesterday.
Though the material sun is unique and single,
We can conceive similar suns like to it.
But the Sun of the soul, beyond this firmament,
No like thereof is seen in concrete or abstract.
Where is there room in conception for His essence,
So that similitudes of HIM should be conceivable?

Shamsu-'d-Din of Tabriz² importunes Jalalu-'d-Din³ to compose the *Masnavi*

The sun (Shams) of Tabriz is a perfect light,
A sun, yea, one of the beams of God!
When the praise was heard of the "Sun of Tabriz,"
The sun of the fourth heaven bowed its head.
Now that I have mentioned his name, it is but right
To set forth some indications of his beneficence.
That precious Soul caught my skirt,
Smelling the perfume of the garment of Yusuf;
And said, "For the sake of our ancient friendship,
Tell forth a hint of those sweet states of ecstasy,
That earth and heaven may be rejoiced,
And also Reason and Spirit, a hundredfold."
I said, "O thou who art far from 'The Friend,'
Like a sick man who has strayed from his physician,
Importune me not, for I am beside myself;
My understanding is gone, I cannot sing praises.
Whatsoever one says, whose reason is thus astray,
Let him not boast; his efforts are useless.
Whatever he says is not to the point,
And is clearly inapt and wide of the mark.
What can I say when not a nerve of mine is sensible?
Can I explain 'The Friend' to one to whom He is no Friend?
Verily my singing His praise were dispraise,
For 'twould prove me existent, and existence is error.
Can I describe my separation and my bleeding heart?
Nay, put off this matter till another season."
He said, "Feed me, for I am an hungered,
And at once, for 'the time is a sharp sword.'
O comrade, the Sufi is 'the son of time present.'⁶
It is not the rule of his canon to say, 'To-morrow.'

² Shams of Tabriz was a close friend and spiritual guide of Rumi; the name *Shams* means "sun" in Arabic.

³ another name for Rumi

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: From the *Masnavi* by Rumi

Can it be that thou art not a true Sufi?
Ready money is lost by giving credit."
I said, "'Tis best to veil the secrets of 'The Friend.'
So give good heed to the morals of these stories.
That is better than that the secrets of 'The Friend'
Should be noised abroad in the talk of strangers."
He said, "Without veil or covering or deception,
Speak out, and vex me not, O man of many words!
Strip off the veil and speak out, for do not I
Enter under the same coverlet as the Beloved?"
I said, "If the Beloved were exposed to outward view,
Neither wouldst thou endure, nor embrace, nor form.
Press thy suit, yet with moderation;
A blade of grass cannot, pierce a mountain.
If the sun that illumines the world
Were to draw nigher, the world would be consumed.
Close thy mouth and shut the eyes of this matter,
That, the world's life be not made a bleeding heart.
No longer seek this peril, this bloodshed;
Hereafter impose silence on the 'Sun of Tabriz.'"
He said, "Thy words are endless. Now tell forth
All thy story from its beginning."

"The Merchant and His Clever Parrot"

There was a certain merchant who kept a parrot in a cage. Being about to travel to Hindustan on business, he asked the parrot if he had any message to send to his kinsmen in that country, and the parrot desired him to tell them that he was kept confined in a cage. The merchant promised to deliver this message, and on reaching Hindustan, duly delivered it to the first flock of parrots he saw. On hearing it one of them at once fell down dead. The merchant was annoyed with his own parrot for having sent such a fatal message, and on his return home sharply rebuked his parrot for doing so. But the parrot no sooner heard the merchant's tale than he too fell down dead in his cage. The merchant, after lamenting his death, took his corpse out of the cage and threw it away; but, to his surprise, the corpse immediately recovered life, and flew away, explaining that the Hindustani parrot had only feigned death to suggest this way of escaping from confinement in a cage.

Saints Are Preserved From All Harm

As to a "man of heart," he takes no hurt,
Even though he should eat deadly poison.
He who gains health from practicing abstinence is safe;
The poor disciple is safe in the midst of fever.
The prophet said, "O disciple, though you be bold,

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: From the *Masnavi* by Rumi

Yet enter not into conflict with every foe."
Within you is a Nimrod; enter not his fire;
But if you must do so, first become an Abraham.
If you are neither swimmer nor seaman,
Cast not yourself into the sea out of self-conceit.
A swimmer brings pearls from the deep sea;
Yea, he plucks gain from the midst of perils.
If the saint handles earth, it becomes gold;
If a sinner handles gold, it turns to dust.
Whereas the saint is well-pleasing to God,
In his actions his hand is the hand of God.
But the sinner's hand is the hand of Satan and demons,
Because he is ensnared in falsity and fraud.
If folly meets him, he takes it for wisdom;
Yea, the learning gained by the wicked is folly.
Whatever a sick man eats is a source of sickness,
But if a saint imbibe infidelity it becomes faith.
Ah! footman who contendest with horsemen,
Thou wilt not succeed in carrying the day!

The Jealousy of God

The whole world is jealous for this cause,
That God surpasseth the world in jealousy.
God is as a soul and the world as a body,
And bodies derive their good and evil from souls.
He to whom the sanctuary of true prayer is revealed
Deems it shameful to turn back to mere formal religion.
He who is master of the robes of a king
Brings shame on his lord by petty huckstering.
He who is admitted to the king's presence-chamber
Would show disrespect by tarrying at the doorway.
If the king grants him license to kiss his hand,
He would err were he to kiss merely the king's foot.
Though to lay head at the king's feet is due obeisance,
In the case supposed it would be wrong to kiss the feet.
The king's jealousy would be kindled against him
Who, after he had seen his face, preferred his mere perfume.
God's jealousy may be likened to a grain of wheat,
But man's jealousy is but empty chaff.
For know ye that the source of jealousy is in God,
And man's jealousy is only an offshoot from God's.
But, let me now quit this subject, and make complaint

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: From the *Masnavi* by Rumi

Of the severity of That Fickle Fair One.

Complaints of God's Harsh Dealings With His Adoring Slaves.

"Wherefore dost thou abandon thy creed and faith?
What matters it if it be heathen or true?
Why hast thou forsaken thy Beloved?
What matters it if she be fair or ugly?"⁴
Let me then, I say, make complaint
Of the severity of That Fickle Fair One.
I cry, and my cries sound sweet in His ear;
He requires from the two worlds cries and groans.
How shall I not wail under His chastening hand?
How shall I not be in the number of those bewitched by Him?
How shall I be other than night without His day?
Without the vision of His face that illumines the day?
His bitters are very sweets to my soul,
My sad heart is a lively sacrifice to my Beloved.
I am enamoured of my own grief and pain,
For it makes me well-pleasing to my peerless King.
I use the dust of my grief as salve for my eyes,
That my eyes, like seas, may teem with pearls.
The tears which are shed because of His chastening
Are very pearls, though men deem them mere tears.
'Tis "The Soul of souls" of whom I am making complaint;
Yet I do not complain; I merely state my case.
My heart says, "He has injured me,"
But I laugh at these pretended injuries.
Do me justice, O Thou who art the glory of the just,
Who art the throne, and I the lintel of Thy door!
But, in sober truth, where are throne and doorway?
Where are "We" and "I?" There where our Beloved is!
O Thou, who art exempt from "Us" and "Me,"
Who pervadest the spirits of all men and women;
When man and woman become one, Thou art that One!
When their union is dissolved, lo! Thou abidest!
Thou hast made these "Us" and "Me" for this purpose,
To wit, to play chess with them by Thyself.
When Thou shalt become one entity with "Us" and "You."
Then wilt Thou show true affection for these lovers.
When these "We" and "Ye" shall all become one Soul,

⁴ This is a quotation from Hakim Sanai and forms the text of the following discourse.

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: From the *Masnavi* by Rumi

Then they will be lost and absorbed in the "Beloved."
These are plain truths. Come then, O Lord!
Who art exalted above description and explanation!
Is it possible for the bodily eye to behold Thee?
Can mind of man conceive Thy frowns and Thy smiles?
Are hearts, when bewitched by Thy smiles and frowns,
In a fit state to see the vision of Thyself?
When our hearts are bewitched by Thy smiles and frowns,
Can we gain life from these two alternating states?
The fertile garden of love, as it is boundless,
Contains other fruits besides joy and sorrow.
The true lover is exalted above these two states,
He is fresh and green independently of autumn or spring!
Pay tithes on Thy beauty, O Beauteous One!
Tell forth the tale of the Beloved, every whit!
For through coquetry His glances
Are still inflicting fresh wounds on my heart.
I gave Him leave to shed my blood, if He willed it;
I only said, "Is it right?" and He forsook me.
Why dost Thou flee from the cries of us on earth?
Why pourest Thou sorrow on the heart of the sorrowful?
O Thou who, as each new morn dawns from the east,
Art seen uprising anew, like a bright fountain!
What excuse makest Thou for Thy witcheries?
O Thou whose lips are sweeter than sugar,
Thou that ever renewest the life of this old world,
Hear the cry of this lifeless body and heart!
But, for God's sake, leave off telling of the Rose;
Tell of the Bulbul⁵ who is severed from his Rose.
My ardour arises not from joy or grief,
My sense mates not with illusion and fancy.
My condition is different, for it is strange.
Deny it not! God is all-powerful.
Argue not from the condition of common men,
Stumble not at severity and at mercy.
For mercy and severity, joy and sorrow, are transient,
And transient things die; "God is heir of all."
"Tis dawn! O Protector and Asylum of the dawn!
Make excuse for me to my lord Husamu-'d-Din!
Thou makest excuses for Universal Reason and Soul;
Soul of souls and Gem of life art Thou!

⁵ nightingale

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: From the *Masnavi* by Rumi

The light of my dawn is a beam from Thy light,
Shining in the morning draught of Thy protection!
Since Thy gift keeps me, as it were, intoxicated,
What is this spiritual wine that causes me this joy?
Natural wine lacks the ferment in my breast,
The spheres lag behind me in revolutions!
Wine is intoxicated with me, not I with it!
The world takes its being from me, not I from it!
I am like bees, and earthly bodies like wax,
I build up these bodies as with my own wax!