

## I. FABLES

*Kalila wa Dimna* is a collection of fables in Arabic dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. The fables were originally written in Sanskrit and trace their origins to India prior to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. After being translated to Pahlavi, they were then translated into Arabic by Abdullah ibn Muqaffa during the Abbasid era and since then have been in circulation around the world in numerous languages including Greek and Latin. In these various translations, the book has not remained in a static form but instead various additions and omissions have accompanied its long history of translation.

The story of *Kalila* and *Dimna* revolves around an ambitious jackal, *Dimna*, who navigates his way in the king's court to win his favor and become his most trusted advisor. In the progression of this story, various sub-stories are recounted couched in elaborate idioms and metaphors that all eventually culminate in a moral lesson for its characters and the reader. The following excerpt is near the beginning of the story in which *Dimna* works himself into a complicated situation after attempting to help the king. The remainder of the story is an account of his efforts to undo his mistake and learn many crucial lessons in the process about friendship, betrayal and power.

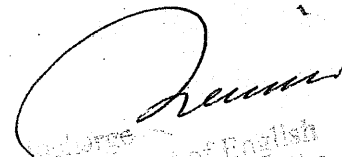
Following chapters from *Kalila wa Dimna* or *The Fables of Bidpai* are included:

Chapter V – The Lion and the Bull, or the emblem of two friends whom a liar contrives to disunite.

Chapter VI – Investigation of the conduct together with the defence of Dimna.

Chapter VII – The Ring-dove, or the emblem of sincere friends.

Chapter VIII – The Owls and the Crows, or the danger of being deceived by an enemy.

  
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## BANG-e-DARA

Bāng-i Darā or The Call of the Marching Bell is the first and perhaps the most famous of Allama Muhammad Iqbal's works of Urdu poetry, published in 1924. It came after his initial three books of poetry which were all in Persian and were considered difficult to read. The lucid and relatively accessible style of Bāng-i Darā coupled with the fact that it was written in Urdu earned it much greater acclaim and acceptance among people than the earlier books.

Bāng-i Darā is divided into three distinct parts based on differences that are chronological and also thematic. The first part comprises his poetry written from the start of his career until 1905. During this time, Iqbal was heavily influenced by nationalism; many of his poems such as Tasvīr -i Dard, Āftāb and Tarāna-i Hindī reflect his nationalist political fervor. The second part was written from 1905 to 1908 during his stay in Europe. Iqbal experienced a major revolution in his thinking during this time as he closely scrutinized the social and political makeup of Western societies and lost much of his earlier fervor for nationalism. His poems from this time period are critical of Western modernity and the materialism and godlessness lying at its heart. The last part was written from 1909 to 1923 after his return to India from Europe. Poems from this part feature a strong philosophical and mystical bent along with a great religious fervor especially at display in his abundant and heartfelt praise of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him.

The following eight poems from Bāng-i Darā have been chosen in accordance with the general theme of this component i.e. fables. They feature various animals, and at times inanimate beings, engaged in discussion about different facets of man's moral existence. They generally begin with an ethical dilemma and, by drawing on various natural and environmental sources of imagery, metaphor and religious idiom, culminate in a resolution of the dilemma leaving the reader with an accessible but profound moral lesson.

The selected poems are:

1. ایک سگڑا اور مکھی
2. ایک پہاڑ اور گلہری
3. ایک گائے اور بکری
4. پرندے کی فریاد
5. دریا موج
6. جگنو
7. ایک پرندہ اور جگنو
8. ہمدردی

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The selected poems are:

1. ایک مکڑا اور مکھی
2. ایک پہاڑ اور گلہری
3. ایک گائے اور بکری
4. پرندے کی فریاد
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7. ایک پرندہ اور جگنو
8. ہمدردی

NOTE:

Full copy of the poem is provided.

<sup>1</sup> Yūṣuf Salīm Chishī, *Sharah-i bāng-i darā* (Lāhaur: Maktaba-i ta'mīr-i insāniyat, 1991), 5.  
2 TL:1 2

*Ramin*

**A SPIDER AND A FLY**  
*(Adopted for Children)*

One day a spider said to a fly  
"Though you pass this way daily  
My hut has never been honoured by you  
By making a chance visit inside by you  
Though depriving strangers of a visit does not matter  
Evading the near and dear ones does not look good  
My house will be honoured by a visit by you  
A ladder is before you if you decide to step in  
Hearing this the fly said to the spider,  
"Sire, you should entice some simpleton thus  
This fly would never be pulled into your net  
Whoever climbed your net could never step down"  
The spider said, "How strange, you consider me a cheat  
I have never seen a simpleton like you in the world  
I only wanted to entertain you  
I had no personal gain in view  
You have come flying from some unknown distant place  
Resting for a while in my house would not harm you  
Many things in this house are worth your seeing  
Though apparently a humble hut you are seeing  
Dainty drapes are hanging from the doors  
And I have decorated the walls with mirrors  
Beddings are available for guests' comforts  
Not to everyone's lot do fall these comforts."  
The fly said, "All this may very well be  
But do not expect me to enter your house  
"May God protect me from these soft beds  
Once asleep in them getting up again is impossible"  
The spider spoke to itself on hearing this talk  
"How to trap it? This wretched fellow is clever  
Many desires are fulfilled with flattery in the world  
All in the world are enslaved with flattery"

Thinking this the spider spoke to the fly thus!  
"Madam, God has bestowed great honours on you!  
Everyone loves your beautiful face  
Even if someone sees you for the first time  
Your eyes look like clusters of glittering diamonds  
God has adorned your beautiful head with a plume  
This beauty, this dress, this elegance, this neatness!  
And all this is very much enhanced by singing in flight".  
The fly was touched by this flattery  
And spoke, "I do not fear you any more  
I hate the habit of declining requests  
Disappointing somebody is bad indeed"  
~~Saying this it flew from its place~~  
When it got close the spider snapped it  
The spider had been starving for many days  
The fly provided a good leisurely meal

**A MOUNTAIN AND A SQUIRREL**  
*(Adopted for Children from Ralph Waldo Emerson)*

A mountain was saying this to a squirrel  
“Commit suicide if you have self-respect  
You are insignificant, still so arrogant, how strange!  
You are neither wise, nor intelligent! not even shrewd!  
It is strange when the insignificant pose as important!  
When the stupid ones like you pose as intelligent!  
You are no match in comparison with my splendour  
Even the earth is low compared with my splendour  
The grandeur of mine does not fall to your lot  
The poor animal cannot equal the great mountain!”  
On hearing this the squirrel said, “Hold your tongue!  
These are immature thoughts, expel them from your heart!  
I do not care if I am not large like you!  
You are not a pretty little thing like me  
Everything shows the Omnipotence of God  
Some large, some small, is the wisdom of God  
He has created you large in the world  
And He has taught me climbing large trees  
You are unable to walk a single step  
Only large size! What other greatness have you?  
If you are large show me some of the skills I have  
Show me how you break this beetle nut as I can  
Nothing is useless in this world  
Nothing is bad in God’s creation



**A COW AND A GOAT**  
*(Adapted for Children)*

There was a verdant pasture somewhere  
Whose land was the very picture of beauty  
How can the beauty of that elegance be described  
Brooks of sparkling water were running on every side  
Many were the pomegranate trees  
And so were the shady pipal trees  
Cool breeze flowed everywhere  
Birds were singing everywhere  
A goat arrived at a brook's bank from somewhere  
It came browsing from somewhere in the nearby land  
As she stopped and looked around  
She noticed a cow standing by  
The goat first presented her compliments to the cow  
Then respectfully started this conversation  
"How are you! Madam Cow?"  
The cow replied, "Not too well  
"My life is a mere existence  
My life is a complete agony  
My life is in danger, what can I say?  
My luck is bad, what can I say?  
I am surprised at the state of affairs  
I am cursing the evil people  
The poor ones like us are powerless  
Misfortunes surround the ones like us  
None should nicely deal with Man  
May God protect us from Man!  
He murmurs if my milk declines  
He sells me if my weight declines  
He subdues us with cleverness!  
Alluring, he always subjugates us!  
I nurse his children with milk  
I give them new life with milk  
My goodness is repaid with evil

My prayer to God is for mercy!"  
Having heard the cow's story like this  
The goat replied, "This complaint is unjust  
Though truth is always bitter  
I shall speak what is fair  
This pasture, and this cool breeze  
This green grass and this shade  
Such comforts, were beyond our lot!  
They were a far cry for us speechless poor!  
We owe these pleasures to Man  
We owe all our happiness to Man  
We derive all our prosperity from him  
What is better for us, freedom or bondage to him?  
Hundreds of dangers lurk in the wilderness  
May God protect us from the wilderness!  
We are heavily indebted to him  
Unjust is our complaint against him  
If you appreciate the life's comforts  
You would never complain against Man!"  
Hearing all this the cow felt embarrassed  
She was sorry for complaining against Man  
She mused over the good and the bad  
And thoughtfully she said this  
"Small though is the body of the goat  
Convincing is the advice of the goat!"

## THE BIRD'S COMPLAINT

*(For Children)*

I am constantly reminded of the bygone times  
Those garden's springs, those chorus of chimes  
Gone are the freedoms of our own nests  
Where we could come and go at our own pleasure  
My heart aches the moment I think  
Of the buds' smile at the dew's tears  
That beautiful figure, that Kamini's form  
Which source of happiness in my nest did form  
I do not hear those lovely sounds in my cage now  
May it happen that my freedom be in my own hands now!  
How unfortunate I am, tantalized for my abode I am  
My companions are in the home-land, in the prison I am  
Spring has arrived, the flower buds are laughing  
On my misfortune in this dark house I am wailing  
O God, To whom should I relate my tale of woe?  
I fear lest I die in this cage with this woe!  
Since separation from the garden the  
condition of my heart is such  
My heart is waxing the grief, my grief is waxing the heart  
O Listeners, considering this music do not be happy  
This call is the wailing of my wounded heart  
O the one who confined me make me free  
A silent prisoner I am, earn my blessings free

## FIREFLY

Is the firefly aglow in the garden's abode?  
Or blazes a lamp in the throng of the flowers?  
Has a star fluttered down that high aloft rode?  
Has a ray of the moon won some life-throbbing powers?  
Has the envoy of day come to realms of the night?  
Come humbly, a gleam to its own land unknown?  
Has there fallen a whorl that moon's cloak once bedight?  
From the robe of the sun has a sequin been shown?  
Here is hidden the sheen of Old Beauty and bright  
That Nature uncovers for men of our day.  
In this little moon are both darkness and light,  
As eclipse may advance, or eclipse pass away.  
The moth and the firefly through air both take wing.  
One seeks for light: one in light's all arrayed:  
On earth nature grants all some soul-gladd'ning thing.  
For the moth was heat, for the firefly light made.  
On birds that were tongueless it dowered melody:  
Gave a tongue to the rose but withheld from it song.  
For sunset it fashioned sheer half-light to see;  
Set fairy a-glitter but her life made not long:  
The morning made brilliant like sweet bird of love:  
Clad down in red robes—with dew's mirror dawn plays.  
It brought the tree shadiness, caused air to move,  
Set motion to water, taught waves' restless ways.  
Yet this is a puzzle that troubles our mind.  
The day of the firefly for us is the night.  
In everything luster of beauty we fine;  
In man there is speech: opening buds smile delight.  
This moon of the sky is as heat of the bard.  
There shines the bright moon: here is anguish of pain.  
There must be some trick in the ways of the word:  
Else the bird would be fragrance, the flower sing refrain.  
The riddle of union's in beauty rich hid.

The glitter of firefly is fragrance of flower.  
Then why comes perversely this discord unbid  
When all things at heart hide this silence of power?

*[Translated by H.T. Sorley]*



## FIREFLY AND BIRD

Early one Evening the sweet voice was heard,  
As it sat on a twig, of a carolling bird.  
When it spied something glittering there on the ground  
It flew to the place and a firefly it found.  
The firefly said: "Bird of the musical charm,  
Take your sharp beak away: do a poor one no harm,  
Allah granted you song and gave the flower scent:  
That same Allah to me did my lustre present.  
My being is hidden in garments of light,  
The zenith of creatures that flutter in flight.  
If your dulcet note has of Heaven the ear,  
The eye of that Heaven sees my gleaming clear.  
While Nature with sparkle did cover my wing  
It gave you the song that charms hearts when you sing.  
It instructed yours beak in all musical grace  
And made me the torch of the garden's space.  
Flashing it gave you: to me it gave voice.  
My portion is radiance: in song you rejoice.  
Radiance and song in this world are not foes;  
They cling to each other in harmony close.  
Creation's firm frame is compact of the two:  
All heights and all depths are to both alike due.  
They mingle together to make everything;  
In this garden from both comes the beauty of spring."

*[Translated by H.T. Sorley]*

## SYMPATHY

*(Adapted for Children from William Cowper)*

Perched on the branch of a tree  
Was a nightingale sad and lonely  
“The night has drawn near”, He was thinking  
“I passed the day in flying around and feeding  
How can I reach up to the nest  
Darkness has enveloped everything”?  
Hearing the nightingale wailing thus  
A glow-worm lurking nearby spoke thus  
“With my heart and soul ready to help I am  
Though only an insignificant insect I am  
Never mind if the night is dark  
I shall shed light if the way is dark  
God has bestowed a torch on me  
He has given a shining lamp to me  
The good in the world only those are  
Ready to be useful to others who are

Ten *hikāyāt* from:

John T. Platts, *The Gulistan; or, Rose Garden of Shaikh Muslihu'd-Dīn Sa'dī of Shīrāz* (London: Wm. II. Allen, 1876).

The selected ten *hikāyāt* are given below:

1. Story (chapter 1): VI, Pg. 83.

"Those who make an effort to display their virtues, do the same to conceal their vices".

A man purposefully eats less and prays more in court to appear pious, requesting more food within the walls of his home. His son asks him to offer his prayers again as the one he performed in front of the sultan were meant to impress a mortal, not God.

3

2. Story (chapter 1): XX, Pg. 44.

"The foundation of injustice in the world began with small unjust deeds."

The Sassanian King Naushirwan and his retinue need salt to roast their hunt. Before his men leave to get it from a nearby village, he tells them to pay for. He explains that the smallest action of appropriations by the rich and powerful of the poor and weak lead to unending trails of confiscations that subsequently plagues the entire society.

3. Story (chapter 1): XXI, Pg. 45.

"Burden bearing oxen and asses are better than oppressors."

A royal revenue collector is unfair to the peasantry to fill the treasury and please the Sultan. Instead of being awarded, he is punished when the Sultan finds out. Misuse of authority as a right to oppress the weak and helpless eventually brings ruin to the oppressor. The humble ass and ox are much better than the mighty lion as they serve humanity and silently bear their burden. Similarly, humility and eagerness to serve others are qualities appreciated by God, not the ruthless lion-like pride that destroys the destitute.

4. Story (chapter 1): XXVII, Pg. 56.

"The pain you give to others eventually finds its way back to you."

A man oppressed the poor by forcibly purchasing cheap firewood from them and would sell it for large profits to the rich. One day his home burnt down from a fire with no apparent reason. A pious man told him that the sighs of helpless people suffering at his hands were the cause of this calamity.

*Contemporary equivalents: "What goes around, comes around" & the concept of "Karma."*

5. Story (chapter 1): XXIX, Pg. 59.

"Power and riches cannot exalt one in status."

A king passes by a faqir and becomes angry when the poor man does not acknowledge him. Upon confrontation, he learns that it is the kings who serve their subjects, rather than subjects submitting to the rich, as power comes with responsibilities towards the masses.

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**6. Story (chapter 1): XXXI, Pg. 62.**

**"The fleeting moment of an angry decision has everlasting consequences."**

A raging king orders an innocent man to be killed. The man cries that his punishment would end in a short while, but the king's guilt would last for as long as he lives.

**7. Story (chapter 1): XXXVII, Pg. 67.**

**"A pair of hands working at one's will are better than those clasped in obedience, waiting for orders"**

A poor laborer tells his rich brother (who serves the sultan) that he prefers poverty as although he is poor, his work and self-sufficiency sets him free from bowing down in front of others. Serving royalty, he says, is a burden as it causes dependency and ingratitude.

*Contemporary equivalent: "Less is more." (Known mostly as associated with Architect Ludwig Mies who used the phrase to encourage simplicity in style.*

**8. Story (chapter 1): XXXVIII, Pg. 68.**

**"It is fruitless to celebrate the death of an enemy as one will never be spared from it either."**

A happy messenger gives the Sassanian King Naushirwan the news of the death of his enemy. He refuses to rejoice because he realizes that death does not favor anyone and that he and his all friends will die one day too.

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh (1830-1907): *dushman mare te khushi nā karye, sajnān vi mar jānā.*

**9. Story (chapter 1): XLII, Pg. 74.**

**"Destruction of the good names of the departed cannot protect your own."**

Alexander the Greek conqueror tells how he won over kingdoms with armies and riches greater than his own by speaking kindly of their former leaders and kings. Fortune and power perish, but one's integrity remains behind if they keep others'.

**10. Story (chapter 2): XXXVIII, Pg. 124.**

**"Do not turn away from knowledge even if one has to get it from the teachings of the ignorant."**

A law professor refuses to listen to religious preachers as he believes they don't practice what they preach. His father tells him to never reject knowledge because of this alone, as it can be gained despite their ignorance if one makes his own effort to listen and think.

### Ten Selected hikāyāt

John T. Platts, *The Gulistan; or, Rose Garden of Shaikh Muslihu'd-Dīn Sa'dī of Shīrāz* (London: Wm. II. Allen, 1876).

1. Story (chapter 2): VI, Pg. 83.

“Those who make an effort to display their virtues, do the same to conceal their vices”.

A man purposefully eats less and prays more in court to appear pious, requesting more food within the walls of his home. His son asks him to offer his prayers again as the one he performed in front of the sultan were meant to impress a mortal, not God.

#### STORY VI.

A devotee was a king's guest. When they sat down to meat, he ate less than he would have liked; and when they stood up to prayer, he said more than was his wont, in order that they might increase the good opinion<sup>1</sup> they entertained of him.

#### COUPLET.

O Arab of the desert! thou wilt not, I fear, reach the Ka'ba;  
For the road thou art going leads<sup>2</sup> to Turkistān.

When he returned home, he requested the cloth<sup>3</sup> to be laid, that he might partake of food. He had a son, a sharp fellow: he said, “Father, thou wert at the Sultan's entertainment, didst thou not eat food?” He replied, “I ate nothing in their sight in order to serve a purpose.” He (the son) rejoined, “Say thy prayers again also, for thou hast not done a thing that will serve thy purpose (hereafter).”

#### STANZA

O thou who hast thy virtues exposed in thy open palm,  
Thy vices concealed within thy sides!\*

What wouldst thou purchase, deluded one,  
In the day of distress, with counterfeit silver?

<sup>1</sup> *Lit.*, "that they might increase the opinion of goodness they entertained of him."

<sup>2</sup> *Lit.*, "is."

<sup>3</sup> *Safra* is "a round cloth," or "a stool with a round tray upon it;" also a round piece of leather, which serves as a table for meals, and which is usually spread on the ground, chiefly used by travellers, whence its name. The word *Magist* would be more correctly rendered "he asked for."

<sup>4</sup> *Lit.*, "under thy arms or arm-pits."

2. Story (chapter 1): XX, Pg. 44. "The foundation of injustice in the world began with small unjust deeds."

The Sassanian King Naushirwan<sup>3</sup> and his retinue need salt to roast their hunt. Before his men leave to get it from a nearby village, he tells them to pay for. He explains that the smallest action of appropriations by the rich and powerful of the poor and weak lead to unending trails of confiscations that subsequently plague the entire society.

## STORY XX.

They relate that they were roasting some game for Nūshīrwān the Just on a certain hunting-ground. There was no salt. They sent a slave to a village to bring salt. Nūshīrwān said, "Take the salt for payment, in order that a bad custom may not spring up, and the village be ruined." They said, "What harm can arise from this trifle?" He replied,

"The foundation of injustice in the world was small at first; every one who came added thereto, till it has attained to the extreme magnitude (you witness)."

### STANZA.

If a king eat but an apple from a subject's garden,  
His slaves will pull up the tree from its root.  
For the half egg which a Sultān deems it right to take by force,  
His followers put a thousand fowls on the spit.

### COUPLET.

The evil-lived tyrant endureth not;  
Curses on him are everlasting.

Story (chapter 1): XXI, Pg. 45. "Burden bearing oxen and asses are better than oppressors."

A royal revenue collector is unfair to the peasantry to fill the treasury and please the Sultan. Instead of being awarded, he is punished when the Sultan finds out. Misuse of authority as a right to oppress the weak and helpless eventually brings ruin to the oppressor. The humble ass and ox are much better than the mighty lion as they serve humanity and silently bear their burden. Similarly, humility and eagerness to serve others are qualities appreciated by God, not the ruthless lion-like pride that destroys the destitute.

## STORY XXI.

I heard of a revenue-collector that he was ruining the peasantry in order to fill the treasury of the Sultān,—unconscious of the dictum of the sages, which they have pronounced, Whoever afflicts the people that he may gain the heart of the Sultān, God Most High will set those very people against him to destroy him utterly.

### COUPLET.

A blazing fire acts not on wild rue<sup>1</sup>  
As the sighs of pained hearts (do on the oppressor).

<sup>1</sup> According to Persian belief, wild rue, employed in fumigation, neutralises the influence of the evil eye.



They say that the chief of all animals is the lion,  
and the meanest the ass; and yet, according to the  
unanimous opinion of the wise, the burden-bearing  
ass is better than the man-rending lion.

DISTICHS.

The poor ass, although it is without sense,  
Is prized, for the reason that it bears burdens.  
Burthen-bearing oxen and asses  
Are better than man-tormenting men.

They say that some part of his mal-practices be-  
came known to the king by certain indications; he  
tortured him on the rack, and put him to death by  
a variety of punishments.

STANZA.

The Sultān's good pleasure will not be won,  
So long as thou seek not to win his people's heart.  
If thou desire that God should pardon thee,  
Deal kindly with the creatures of God.

They tell that one of those oppressed (by him)  
passed by his head (as he was lying), and reflected  
on his miserable plight, and said,—

STANZA.

Not every one who has power of arm and a high office,  
Can, by his authority, consume men's property with impunity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ba guzāf* might, perhaps, be more correctly rendered "with violence or  
extortion," and the second line might then be translated "should not, by  
reason of his authority, consume people's property by force."

It is possible to take a big bone down the throat;  
But it will rend the stomach when one gets it down to the navel.

**Story (chapter 1): XXVII, Pg. 56.**

**“The pain you give to others eventually finds its way back to you.”**

A man oppressed the poor by forcibly purchasing cheap firewood from them and would sell it for large profits to the rich. One day his home burnt down from a fire with no apparent reason. A pious man told him that the sighs of helpless people suffering at his hands were the cause of this calamity.

***Contemporary equivalents:*** “*What goes around, comes around*” & the concept of “*Karma.*”

## STORY XXVII.

They tell of an oppressor that he used to purchase the fire-wood of the poor by force,<sup>1</sup> and give it to the rich at an exorbitant price.<sup>1</sup> A devout man passed by him and said :—

### COUPLET.

“ Art thou a serpent, that bites every one whom it sees ?  
Or an owl, that brings ruin wherever it alights ?

### STANZA.

Thy violence, even if it pass with us,  
Will not succeed with the Lord to whom all secrets are known.  
Do no violence to the dwellers on earth,  
That no imprecation may ascend to heaven.”

The tyrant was vexed at these words, and frowned at his admonition, and heeded him not: “ *Pride dragged him into sin,*”<sup>2</sup> till one night fire from his kitchen fell on his stack of wood, and burnt all his property, and cast him down from a soft bed into hot

ashes. It happened that the same (devout) person passed by him. He perceived him saying to his companions, "I know not whence this fire took place in my house?" He replied, "From the sighs of the hearts of the poor."

STANZA.

Beware of the sighs of wounded hearts;  
 For the wound of the heart makes itself felt in the end.  
 Grieve not, as far as thou canst, a single heart,  
 For a single sigh will convulse a world!

The following delicate sentiment was inscribed on the palace of Kaikhusrāu :—

STANZA.

For many years and long days,  
 (It will be) that men will go to and fro o'er my head on the earth.  
 Just as sovereignty, passing from hand to hand, has descended to  
 me;  
 Even so will it pass to other hands.

<sup>1</sup> That is, he used to make the poor sell him the wood at a low rate, and then sell it to the rich at his own price. This is the explanation of the passage as given by Surūrī. Other commentators take it to mean that *he gave the wood to the rich for nothing*; but this is hardly conceivable.

<sup>2</sup> This is a part of verse 202, Sūra II., *Al Bakra* (The Cow), of the Kor'an. The complete verse is *wa iğā kīla lahu 'līkī 'lāha akhazathu 'lizzatu l'iligmi faharubuhū jahannamu wa la bisa 'lmihādu*, "And when it is said to him, Fear God, pride draggeth him into sin: but Hell is sufficient for him; and indeed it will prove a fearful couch!"—Sale's translation of the quotation in the text is "Pride seizeth him together with wickedness." Rodwell translates it, "The pride of sin seizeth him."

**5. Story (chapter 1): XXIX, Pg. 59. "Power and riches cannot exalt one in status."**

A king passes by a faqir and becomes angry when the poor man does not acknowledge him. Upon confrontation, he learns that it is the kings who serve their subjects, rather than subjects submitting to the rich, as power comes with responsibilities towards the masses.

**STORY XXIX.**

A darwesh vowed to celibacy<sup>2</sup> had fixed himself in a desert nook. A king passed by him. The darwesh, by reason of the high position pertaining to the dominion of content, did not raise his head, or take any notice. The monarch, because of the high dignity pertaining to royalty, was incensed, and said, "This tribe of tatterdemalions resemble brutes; they possess no civility and no humanity." The Vazir approached him and said, "O darwesh! the Sultān of the whole earth passed by thee; why didst thou not pay him homage, and do what respect required?" He replied, "Tell the king to look for homage from one who hopes for favours from him. (Tell him) moreover, that kings are for the purpose of protecting their subjects, not subjects for the sake of serving kings.

**STANZA.**

A king is the guardian of the poor,  
Even though benefits flow from the splendour of his empire.  
The sheep are not for the benefit of the shepherd;  
But rather is the shepherd for the purpose of tending the sheep.

STANZA.

If thou behold one successful,  
Thou wilt see another heart-sick with strenuous (but unavailing)  
effort.

Wait but a few short days, that the dust  
May consume the brain of the schemer.  
The difference between sovereignty and servitude ceases to be,  
When fate's decree presents itself to view.  
Were one to open up the ashes of the dead,  
He could not distinguish the rich man from the poor."

The argument of the darwesh appeared sound to the king. He said, "Ask something of me." He replied, "What I request is this, that another time thou wilt not trouble me." He rejoined, "Give me some advice." He replied :—

COUPLLET.

Know, now that these blessings are in thy hands,  
That this power and dominion passes from hand to hand.

6. Story (chapter 1): XXXI, Pg. 62.

**"The fleeting moment of an angry decision has everlasting consequences."**

A raging king orders an innocent man to be killed. The man cries that his punishment would end in a short while, but the king's guilt would last for as long as he lives.

• STORY XXXI

A king ordered an innocent man to be put to death. He said, "O king! do not, for the sake of the anger thou feelest toward me, seek thine own injury." "How so?" said he (the king.) He replied, "This punishment will be carried out on me in a moment, while the guilt of it will attach to thee for ever.

• QUATRAIN.

The term of life has passed away as the wind of the desert.  
The bitterness and the joy, the uncomely and the comely, have  
passed away.  
The tyrant imagined that he inflicted misery on me;  
It passed over me and fixed itself on his neck."

His admonition availed with the king, and he gave up the idea of shedding his blood.

7. Story (chapter 1): XXXVII, Pg. 67.

**“A pair of hands working at one’s will are better than those clasped in obedience, waiting for orders”**

A poor laborer tells his rich brother (who serves the sultan) that he prefers poverty as although he is poor, his work and self-sufficiency sets him free from bowing down in front of others. Serving royalty, he says, is a burden as it causes dependency and ingratitude.

*Contemporary equivalent: “Less is more.” (Known mostly as associated with Architect Ludwig Mies who used the phrase to encourage simplicity in style.*

• STORY XXXVII.

There were two brothers; one served the Sultān, and the other earned<sup>3</sup> his bread by the labour of his

own hands.<sup>1</sup> Once on a time the rich one said to the poor one, “Why dost thou not take service, so that thou mayst escape the hardship of labouring?” He replied, “Why dost thou not work, that thou mayst find deliverance from the disgrace of serving (a master)? For the sages say,<sup>2</sup> It is better to eat barley bread, and sit on the ground, than to fasten on a golden belt, and stand in waiting.

COUPLETS.

To knead quick-lime with the hands,  
Is better than placing the hands on the breast<sup>3</sup> before a great  
personage.

STANZA.

’Twas in this that precious life was spent, —  
‘What shall I eat in summer? What wear in winter?’  
O insatiate-bellied! content thyself with a single cake of bread,  
In order that thou mayst not bend thy back in servitude.’



8. Story (chapter 1): XXXVIII, Pg. 68.

“It is fruitless to celebrate the death of an enemy as one will never be spared from it either.”

A happy messenger gives the Sassanian King Naushirwan the news of the death of his enemy. He refuses to rejoice because he realizes that death does not favor anyone and that he and his all friends will die one day too.

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh (1830-1907): *dushman mare te khushī nā karye, sajnāñ vī mar jānā.*

• STORY XXXVIII.

Some one brought good news to Nūshīrwān the Just, saying,\* “God the Exalted and Glorious has taken away such and such an enemy of thine.” He replied, “Hast thou heard at all that He will spare me ?

COUPLET.

No room for rejoicing have I in the death of an enemy,  
Since my life also enjoys not perpetuity.”

9. Story (chapter 1): XLII, Pg. 74.

**“Destruction of the good names of the departed cannot protect your own.”**

Alexander the Greek conqueror tells how he won over kingdoms with armies and riches greater than his own by speaking kindly of their former leaders and kings. Fortune and power perish, but one's integrity remains behind if they keep others'.

•STORY XLII.

They asked Alexander (the Great) “How didst thou conquer the countries of the East and the West? for former kings had greater treasures, more years, and larger armies than thou, and (yet) such conquests were not won.” He replied, “By the help of God Most High, every kingdom that I conquered I refrained from oppressing the people thereof; and I never mentioned the names of their kings but with kindness.”

COUPLET.

The wise will not style him great,  
Who mentions the names of the great with disparagement.

STANZA.

All these are of no account, since they pass away,—  
Fortune and throne and authority and conquest.  
Destroy not the good name of those who have departed,  
In order that thy good name may remain untouched.

10. Story (chapter 2): XXXVIII, Pg. 124.

“Do not turn away from knowledge even if one has to get it from the teachings of the ignorant.”

A law professor refuses to listen to religious preachers as he believes they don't practice what they preach. His father tells him to never reject knowledge because of this alone, as it can be gained despite their ignorance if one makes his own effort to listen and think.

STORY XXXVIII.

A law professor said to his father, “None of the fine words of the preachers make any impression on me, for the reason that I do not see them practising one single thing in conformity to their preaching.

DISTICHIS.

They teach people to renounce the world ;  
They themselves hoard up silver and grain.  
The professor of religion<sup>1</sup> who has talk, and nothing else,  
Takes no hold of the heart when he speaks.  
He is a doctor of religion who does no evil ;  
Not he who preaches to people, while he himself does not act up  
to (his preaching).

VERSE FROM THE KOR'AN.

*Do ye bid mankind be pious, and overlook yourselves ? \**

COUPLET.

The learned doctor, who seeks to gratify his appetites and pamper  
his body,  
Is himself astray ; whom can he guide aright ? ”

The father said, “ Son ! merely on account of this foolish fancy it is not right to turn away the face from

<sup>1</sup> The word *'alim* means, literally, “ a learned man ” ; but it is commonly applied to a doctor or professor of law and religion, and is, in this tale, evidently applied to a religious teacher, or expounder of the law. The plural of the word is *'alimā*.

\* *Vide* Sura ii, *Al bakrat* (The Cow), verse 41.

the instruction of monitors, and follow the path of folly,<sup>1</sup> and impute error to the doctors of religion, and be in quest of a spotless<sup>2</sup> doctor, and so remain excluded from the advantages of knowledge. Thou art like unto the blind man who one night fell<sup>3</sup> into mire, and was saying, 'At least, O Musalmāns! place a lamp before my path!' A courtesan heard (him) and said, 'What wilt thou, who canst not see the lamp, see by means of the lamp?' The meeting-house of preachers is even like the warehouse of cloth-merchants; for in the latter place thou canst get nothing until thou payest ready money; and in the former place thou wilt not carry away happiness till thou bring a willing mind."

STANZA.

Listen to the discourse of a learned doctor with the ears of thy  
soul,

Even if his acts be not like his words:

•Vain is that which the adversary says,—

"How can one who is asleep rouse one who sleeps?"

It behoves a man to lend his ear attentively,<sup>4</sup>

Even if counsel be written on a wall.

<sup>1</sup> This may also be rendered "to have recourse to idle talk."

<sup>2</sup> There is a mistake in the text here; the word 'ālam should be 'ālimi, i.e., the vowel mark should be transferred from over the lām (l) to under the mim (m).

<sup>3</sup> The verb in the original is, according to Persian idiom, in the pluperfect tense; the literal translation would therefore be "who had fallen."

<sup>4</sup> This is in accordance with a tradition of the Prophet, *inna 'lāhā ya'idu hāza 'ddīna bi'rajlī 'l'afjiri*, "Verily God strengthens this religion by means of wicked men."

STANZA.

A pious man came from a convent to a school,

Broke the bond of the Sūfī communion.

I said, "What was the difference between a doctor and a devotee,  
That thou hast preferred the former to the latter?"

He replied, "The latter saves his own blanket from the wave,  
While the former exerts himself to save the drowner."

### III. EPIC

#### THE *SHĀHNĀMA* OF FIRDAUSI

The *Shāhnāma* is a Persian poem completed around the year 1010 by the poet Firdausi and later presented to Sultan Mahmud Ghazni, the famous Ghaznavid ruler. It is a kind of poem known as an 'epic,' which means a long poem that tells us stories of the adventures and deeds of heroic or legendary figures from the past of a nation. The *Shāhnāma* is one of the most popular works of poetry in Persian and is considered to be Iran's 'national' epic as well. It consists of a total of 60,000 verses and is divided roughly into two sections. The first section is taken mainly from Iran's ancient mythology, while the second is more historical and tells us about the history of the Sassanians (the last rulers of Iran before the coming of Islam) up to their defeat by the forces of Islam.

The author of the *Shāhnāma* is Abu'l Qasim Firdausi Tusi, who was born in Tus in northeastern Iran in 940 AD. For composing the *Shāhnāma*, he is considered to be one of Iran's greatest poets. But his greatness was recognized only after his death, and it seems that he led a difficult life while he was alive. For various reasons, Sultan Mahmud also seems not to have recognized the greatness of the *Shāhnāma*, and rewarded Firdausi with an amount that the poet thought was humiliating. Unfortunately for Firdausi but fortunately for us, the *Shāhnāma* was later recognized for what it was-- one of the greatest long poems ever composed in Persian, and later to become Iran's nationalepic.

One of the most famous stories of the *Shāhnāma* is the tale of Rostam and Sohrab. Rostam is a legendary warrior from ancient Iranian mythology, famous for his strength and fearlessness in battle. He has a son called Sohrab, who is also a champion warrior. The father and son have never met, and the first time they meet is on the battlefield. But they fight without knowing who the other is. After a long battle, Sohrab receives a fatal wound from his father. As he lies on the battlefield dying, he utters his last words to Rostam, which reveal that he is actually Rostam's son, and Rostam has killed him accidentally. Rostam's horror on hearing this and his inconsolable grief is something that only a poet of Firdausi's ability could capture in verse. Read this tragic story for yourself, and experience what high tragedy looks like in the hands of a master craftsman.

Wheeler Thackston, *A Millennium of Classical Persian Poetry* (Maryland: Ibex Publishers, 2000), 5-8.