

University of Tabriz
Persian Language and Literature
(Former Journal of Faculty of Letters)
Vol. 71, Issue 238, Fall & Winter 2018- 2019

The Mystical Manifestations of Self-control in Attar's Mathnawies

(*Manṭiq-uṭ-Ṭayr, Ilāhī-Nāma, Asrār-Nāma and Muṣībat-Nāma*)

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Abstract

The most important type of *jihad* is the struggle against the soul and its desires, and this is of considerable importance that it is regarded as the *Greater Jihad*. The soul is one of the most fundamental concept in Islamic mysticism *Attar-e-Neishaburi* has visualized his ideas about the soul in the form of anecdotes, stories, narratives and a plentiful supply of allegories in his Mathnawi's. From his point of view, the desires of the soul are regarded to be the worst enemy of man and an intermediary between Satan and the human beings; the soul is the greatest barrier and obstacle to the perfection of the seeker's paths; not only must the seekers strive to struggle against this enemy, but they must also take care of its invasions.

Key words: struggle against the soul, *Attar-e-Neishaburi*, mystical manifestations,

Soul from lexical point of view: From lexical point of view, the word soul has various meanings such as spirit, ego, object truth, blood, flesh, evil eye, intention, disgrace, defect, strength, punishment, magnitude, dominance, venerability (Shad, 1335, vol. 7: 4368-4367) (Ma'alov, 1973: 826), and essence, near, ambition, verdict, punishment, moisture, water, mind, breath of the eternal (Dekhoda, 1342: under soul).

Soul as a mystical term: The mystics and Sufis agree in the fact that the soul is the source of evil, and it is considered to be the cause of the immorality and despicable acts, which is divided into two types: 1) sins 2) immorality like arrogance, envy, stinginess, anger, rancor, and other contemptible meanings in Sharia and wisdom (Hujwīrī, 1992: 246-245).

The struggle against the soul (*Greater Jihad*): Wise men and the mystics believe that self-control is one of the most difficult tasks facing mankind and in order to overcome it, self-improvement and many endeavors are needed; therefore, the uppermost type of *jihad* is the struggle against the soul and is referred to as the *Greater Jihad*.

The struggle against the soul in Mysticism: The soul has been regarded as the greatest enemy of Man by the mystics, so fighting against it is considered as the *greatest jihad*. Frequently and in different forms, the seekers were demanded to struggle against the desires of the soul. In all matters of mysticism, self-improvement of the soul has been taken into account.

The soul from Attar's perspective: *Attar-e-Neishaburi* has visualized his ideas about the soul in the form of anecdotes, stories, narratives and a plentiful supply of allegories; and in his tallest story, *The Conference of the Birds*, he expresses the involvement of Sheikh San'an with the soul and his scandal. In his *Mathnawi's*, Attar depicts various traits of soul in human existence, such as egotism, ambition, wrath, lust, greed, etc. *The inciting nafs* (An-nafs al-'ammārah) is considered by Attar, and the sense of soul in his poems is *the inciting nafs*, not *the self-accusing* (An-nafs al-luwwāmāh) one; hence, he always condemns and denounces it.

According to Attar, the desire of the soul is the worst enemy of mankind which is regarded as an intermediary between Satan and the human beings; it is also the biggest obstacle to the perfection of the seekers. Attar compares the soul to a house full of sensual pleasures and lusts which must be wiped up from the soul desires. In Attar's view, the

soul is placed in front of God that the seeker must abandon it and go through the divine's straight path:

تو را چند از هوا راه خدا گیر
 خدایت گر ازین پرسد مرا گیر
 خدایا نفس سرکش را زبون کن
 فضولی از دماغ ما برون کن
 (عطار، ۱۳۸۶:ب:۱۰۵)

The manifestation of struggle against the soul in Attar's Mathnawies: Attar in his mathnawies, which are considered as major mystical sources, orders the seekers of the right way to throw off the veils of the soul, and makes them more familiar with the inciting nafs and its degrading traits. He draws up the various manifestations of this struggle in front of seekers of the truth in order to make it easy to overcome the obstacles and difficulties of this uphill and arduous way.

In this section, the most important components of the struggle against the soul are expressed in his four-dimensional mathnawies (*Manṭiq-uṭ-Ṭayr*, *Ilāhī-Nāma*, *Asrār-Nāma* and *Muṣībat-Nāma*):

Self-defeating in mysticism does not mean self-immolation or humiliation; but the main purpose is to subjugate the inciting nafs; in this way, the seeker humiliates the inciting nafs whenever it orders to do sinful and evil deeds, and quarrel with its rebellion so as to shame it from re-ordering misconducts, and lay the grounds for self-perfection. In *Asrār-Nāma*, Attar says: The soul is like an unbeliever who will never become a Muslim, and should be beheaded. One of the manifestations of piety is giving up the unstable and disloyal world. The seeker should not demand the world, even if the world is looking for it; he should have no desire for the beauty of the world and be deceived by its adornments and blessings. Attar points out that attachment to the world is one of the obstacles to the way of success. Even the smallest belonging to the world will keep the seeker from continuing the journey:

بسته مردار دنیی آمدی
 لاجرم مهجور معنی آمدی
 هرچه پیشت آید از گرمی بسوز
 ز آفرینش چشم جان کُل بدوز
 چون بسوزی هرچه پیش آید تو را
 نُزل حق هر لحظه بیش آید تو را
 (عطار، ۱۳۸۶:۲۶۲)

Leaving greed and ambition: The love of property and position causes the corruption of religion and faith in mankind, which is a means of

snobbishness, and it's one of the greatest obstacles in the course of journey. Attar states: leave off the wealth and authorities of the world. Do not depend on anything which is a barrier to the path and leads you astray.

Leaving arrogance and pride: Attar believes that pride leads to the disappearance of arrogance and distracts him from knowing the divine. Pride stems from self-control over the soul and sprit of mankind. Proudness leads to self-confidence and makes people ignore the causes of the world:

مقرب آن بود کامروز بی خویش بود آن حضرتش در پیش، بی پیش
همه حق بیند و بی خویش گردد به جوهر از دو گیتی بیش گردد
(عطار، ۱۳۸۶: ب: ۱۳۵)

Poverty: according to Attar, poverty is not meant to be material, but he sees poverty as needing God and not requiring others. From his point of view, poverty means *jihad* and self-control and the passage from existence to reach God. That is why Attar in *Mantiq-ut-Ṭayr* calls poverty as the seventh and last resort:

هفتمین وادی فقر است و فنا بعد ازین روی روش نبود تو را
در کشش افی روش گم گرددت گر بود یک قطره قُلْزُمُ گرددت
(عطار، ۱۳۸۳: ۳۸۰)

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